

Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar



RuneQuest



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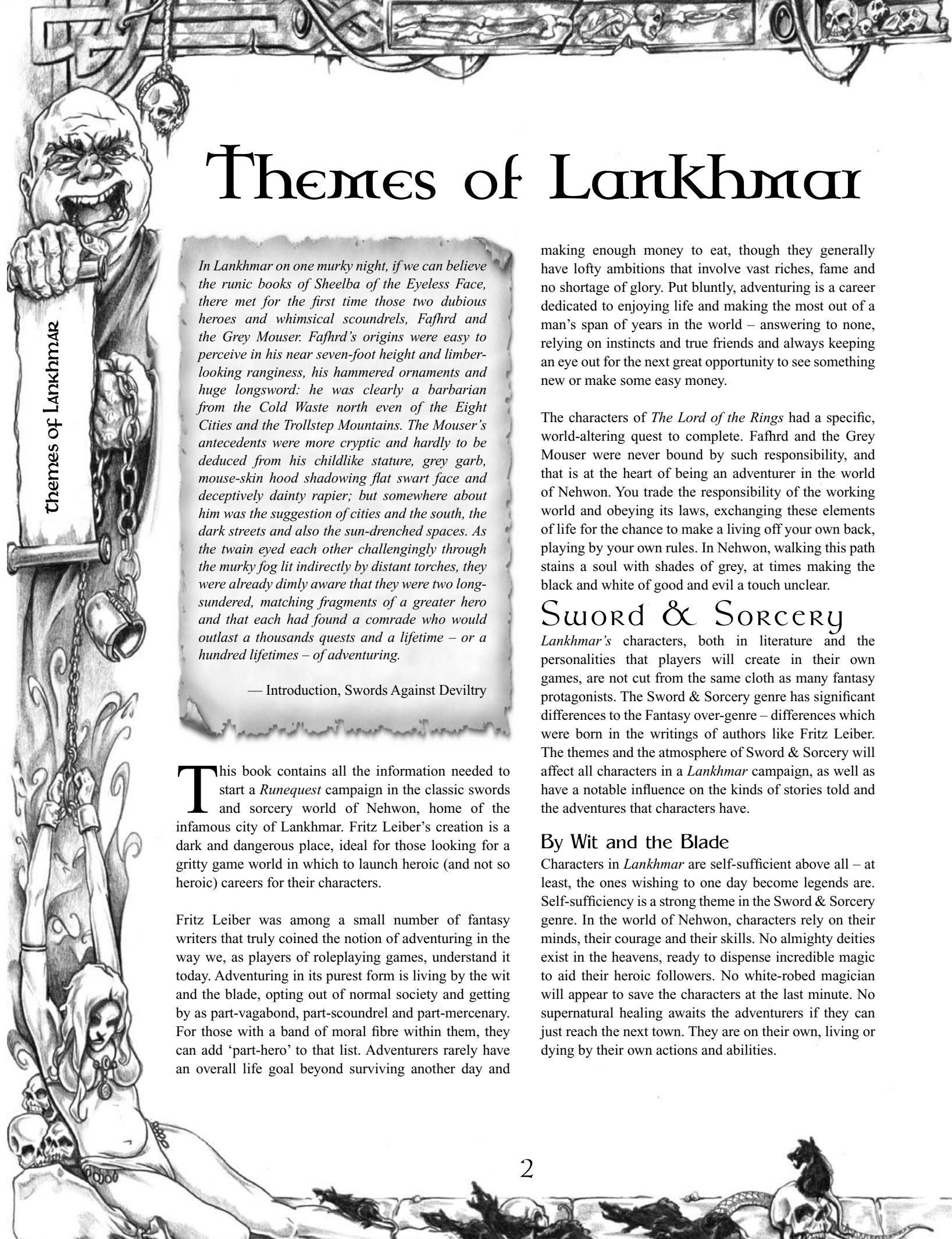
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Themes of Lankhmar

Themes of Lankhmar

In Lankhmar on one murky night, if we can believe the runic books of Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, there met for the first time those two dubious heroes and whimsical scoundrels, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser. Fafhrd's origins were easy to perceive in his near seven-foot height and limber-looking ranginess, his hammered ornaments and huge longsword: he was clearly a barbarian from the Cold Waste north even of the Eight Cities and the Trollstep Mountains. The Mouser's antecedents were more cryptic and hardly to be deduced from his childlike stature, grey garb, mouse-skin hood shadowing flat swart face and deceptively dainty rapier; but somewhere about him was the suggestion of cities and the south, the dark streets and also the sun-drenched spaces. As the twain eyed each other challengingly through the murky fog lit indirectly by distant torches, they were already dimly aware that they were two long-sundered, matching fragments of a greater hero and that each had found a comrade who would outlast a thousands quests and a lifetime – or a hundred lifetimes – of adventuring.

— Introduction, Swords Against Deviltry

This book contains all the information needed to start a *Runequest* campaign in the classic swords and sorcery world of Nehwon, home of the infamous city of Lankhmar. Fritz Leiber's creation is a dark and dangerous place, ideal for those looking for a gritty game world in which to launch heroic (and not so heroic) careers for their characters.

Fritz Leiber was among a small number of fantasy writers that truly coined the notion of adventuring in the way we, as players of roleplaying games, understand it today. Adventuring in its purest form is living by the wit and the blade, opting out of normal society and getting by as part-vagabond, part-scoundrel and part-mercenary. For those with a band of moral fibre within them, they can add 'part-hero' to that list. Adventurers rarely have an overall life goal beyond surviving another day and

making enough money to eat, though they generally have lofty ambitions that involve vast riches, fame and no shortage of glory. Put bluntly, adventuring is a career dedicated to enjoying life and making the most out of a man's span of years in the world – answering to none, relying on instincts and true friends and always keeping an eye out for the next great opportunity to see something new or make some easy money.

The characters of *The Lord of the Rings* had a specific, world-altering quest to complete. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser were never bound by such responsibility, and that is at the heart of being an adventurer in the world of Nehwon. You trade the responsibility of the working world and obeying its laws, exchanging these elements of life for the chance to make a living off your own back, playing by your own rules. In Nehwon, walking this path stains a soul with shades of grey, at times making the black and white of good and evil a touch unclear.

Sword & Sorcery

Lankhmar's characters, both in literature and the personalities that players will create in their own games, are not cut from the same cloth as many fantasy protagonists. The Sword & Sorcery genre has significant differences to the Fantasy over-genre – differences which were born in the writings of authors like Fritz Leiber. The themes and the atmosphere of Sword & Sorcery will affect all characters in a *Lankhmar* campaign, as well as have a notable influence on the kinds of stories told and the adventures that characters have.

By Wit and the Blade

Characters in *Lankhmar* are self-sufficient above all – at least, the ones wishing to one day become legends are. Self-sufficiency is a strong theme in the Sword & Sorcery genre. In the world of Nehwon, characters rely on their minds, their courage and their skills. No almighty deities exist in the heavens, ready to dispense incredible magic to aid their heroic followers. No white-robed magician will appear to save the characters at the last minute. No supernatural healing awaits the adventurers if they can just reach the next town. They are on their own, living or dying by their own actions and abilities.

The characters in a campaign, whether blue-blooded nobles or lowborn barbarians, have turned their backs on the traditional ways of life in their respective societies. Instead, they have chosen the unpredictable path of the adventurer. Their goals are rarely heroism in the name of saving the world, but simple survival in a world with many dangers and unknowable mysteries.

Beyond survival, Sword & Sorcery characters are also looking out for themselves and seeking personal gain through their adventures. This is what drives so many of them to become thieves and robbers of the bodies of the men they slay. There would be little point in risking one's life in a life of adventure if the rewards to be had were not that much greater than those attainable in a more mundane existence. When a barbarian turns into a wandering sell-sword or a townsman becomes a swordsman and a thief, both have done so because they seek the (often financial) rewards of adventure as well as the thrills.

Few Sword & Sorcery characters are reluctant adventurers labouring under a destiny which was forced upon them. They are escaped slaves who wish to see the world and never be confined by the chains of responsibility again. They are wanderers who burn with the desire to see as much of the world as possible before they die. They are fighters who feel flushes of pride at testing their steel against the blades of others. They are the thieves who relish a heist well done and enjoy every penny of the profits. They are the nobles who turn to the street life to flee from the boundaries of their social position. Among almost all *Lankhmar* characters will be a lust for life that drives them into new lands and new experiences, even as their grumbling bellies and empty coinpurses demand that they take the very next job offered to them.

This is not to say such characters are without heroism. Quite the opposite – their wanderings and treasure hunts bring them face to face with sinister and malicious entities, and slaying these beings does serve the nebulous 'cause' of good. Characters are rarely altruistic heroes, out to save others because of a pure-beating heart, but heroism peeks out through the shades of grey.

Heroism in Shades of Grey

The characters of *Lankhmar* are heroes with rather loose ethics by the standards of other fantasy settings, yet their heroism is undoubted. Questioned, perhaps, but never truly doubted. Central to all Sword & Sorcery heroes, with *Lankhmar* characters absolutely part of the equation, is that their morals and ambitions are firmly embedded

in notions of realism. In the grim setting in which they live, the characters are designed with an element of stark humanity – they make the decisions, good, bad, but mostly right, that most people would if they lived in that same world and had to live with the reality of every action's consequence.

Fafhrd is a barbarian with a great love of both violence and women, even to the point where he considers ravaging a defenceless ghoulish woman at one point, and he shows a flair for thievery that is the envy of many cut-throats and criminals in the Thieves' Guild. The Grey Mouser is a skilled duellist and dirksman with a long tally of slain foes, a love of women who are in a few cases more accurately described as girls, and he never regrets once killing a man by the use of hate-driven Black Magic. And yet for all of their faults, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser do great things. Good, noble things. They fight foul monsters and oppose evil when it crosses their paths. In a world as dark as Nehwon, that happens all too often.

Both of these men are adventurers in the classic, truest sense. They are the very archetypes of Lankhmarese characters, trailblazing through their adventures with heart, humour and determination. *Lankhmar's* characters live off their wits and skills, working from job to job under the direction of various employers, travelling hither and thither in search of rumoured treasure, and killing malicious people and creatures that are bent on causing them harm. Only in a world like Nehwon, and more specifically in a city as decadent as Lankhmar, could these men and women be considered heroes. Yet heroes they are.

Living By Your Own Code

A central theme of Sword & Sorcery is that the heroes kill their enemies and feel no great guilt at doing so. Some antagonists might escape, others might prove too much for the protagonists and force the characters to flee, but heroes in the genre – heroes in *Lankhmar* – will usually kill their enemies given the chance.

Much of this attitude comes down to a character's own code of conduct and honour rather than any ingrained bloodlust, but rage-driven murders certainly have their place in the setting as well. A character may avenge a loved one's death or lose control in bouts of strong emotion – but these are exceptions to the tradition. The fact of the matter is that codes of conduct and honour comes down to perceptions of good, evil and cold necessity. When confronted by their enemies, human

or otherwise, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser think nothing of killing these foes. *Lankhmar* characters have grown up in a world of decadence, mystery and immorality – killing in a fair fight might be a crime against the law, but it is not a crime against a man's honour. If you draw blade against another man, you are making it clear that you are ready to end his life or lose yours trying.

To coin a phrase used by Leiber himself, Fafhrd and the Mouser are rogues in a decadent world where you have to be a rogue to survive. Much is made of Lankhmar's corruption, decadence and the evil done in its streets. The thugs, thieves and murderers are organised into guilds to make their trades more efficient. Even the protagonists, Fafhrd and the Mouser, are thieves and killers. In the story *Lean Times in Lankhmar*, when Fafhrd finds religion, he follows a particular priest purely because he was impressed and amazed that the faithful old man patted a blind child on the head when no-one was looking. Even tiny acts of kindness like this are rare in Nehwon, evidenced in the story and by virtue of the fact that this gesture stuck in Fafhrd's mind so clearly. The entire setting, especially the great city of Lankhmar itself, absolutely bleeds with an atmosphere of dark fantasy.

This also enters into the confrontations between Sword & Sorcery heroes and their villain counterparts. Why should a man feel guilt at ridding the world of someone (or something) truly evil? The simple answer is that he should not. Slaying evil is at the very core of adventure heroism, even if it comes as the result of trying to survive.

The Malignancy of the Supernatural

The greatest and most unambiguous evil *Lankhmar* characters will face is that of the supernatural. In the Sword & Sorcery genre and excellently portrayed in Leiber's *Swords* tales, the supernatural is almost always a sinister, dangerous and unwholesome presence.

Magic is the primary tool of dark-hearted and malicious souls, with sorcerers going to great lengths in order to gain power and influence over others. In *Lankhmar*, magic is something foul and evil that the characters encounter and usually must oppose through their own ingenuity. Rarely is sorcery something they command themselves, at least not without risking supernatural corruption.

Monsters and other supernatural enemies are likewise deeply immersed in the darkest shades of grey. They are often mindless, brutish and violent beings, seeking

little more than destruction of life because it is in their nature to do so. They are beings of an uncomplicated evil. Dark cultists and the foul demons they summon will have distinct reasons for their actions, but they remain distinctly evil, with the deaths of innocents being of little concern to them.

Another mark of Sword & Sorcery antagonists is that they frequently possess powers that the characters lack. Most often this will be Black Magic and access to dark rituals, which are the classic genre tropes and can come in ten thousand forms without being repetitive. Whatever form the power takes, it is something the heroes are unfamiliar with and struggle to overcome with their own mere mortal and more realistic abilities. The titles of the *Swords* stories highlight this genre foundation perfectly: *Swords and Deviltry*, *Swords Against Death*, *Swords in the Mist*, *Swords Against Wizardry*, *The Swords of Lankhmar*, *Swords and Ice Magic* and finally, *The Knight and Knave of Swords*.

It is a basic truth in Nehwon that the bearer of blades opposes the wielder of spells, and the latter is usually a blacker-souled being than the former.

The Touch of the Unfamiliar

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser encapsulate another element of classic Sword & Sorcery characters in that they are outsiders coming to terms with living in an unfamiliar land. This need not always be represented by the uncivilised barbarian living amongst the civilised folk, though that is often a satisfying genre trope with a great deal of potential for roleplaying and storytelling. The Mouser is a street-rat and a gutter-thief from another city that comes to the City of the Black Toga for the opportunities it provides a man of his talents. The *Swords* saga details many people who are in similar situations, with escaped slaves and thieving nobles chief among them.

Many *Lankhmar* characters will touch on this aspect of unfamiliarity by deviating from their expected social stations or leaving their homelands in the name of seeking adventure. The farmer who desperately wishes to see the world and turns his back on his rural home is just as valid a character as the wandering barbarian, at least where players are trying to capture this aspect of the genre.

Gallows' Humour

A dark sense of humour permeates through most Sword & Sorcery. In Lankhmar City, the Thieves' Guild is a brotherhood of muggers, burglars, criminal bunglers

and underworld masterminds, all gathered together in a guild which is more organised than most businesses or militaries. Walking from room to room in Thieves' House reveals a legion of thieves being *trained* by journeymen and master robbers in order to steal by various means. This is a perfect example of how nonsensical elements can take a sinister tone in both the genre and the Imperishable City itself.

Fafhrd and the Mouser are directly targeted by Death on more than one occasion, yet they survive by the skin of their teeth and foil the supernatural entity responsible for the eventual deaths of every being in the world. In fact, their triumph is a remarkable one, for at one point they leave Death cursing in his realm as they flee with his favourite mask. This mix of adventure against the supernatural is at the core of the genre's black humour.

Another example of the gallows' humour pervading the work is the presence of Sheelba and Ningauble. The heroes' most important patrons are two wizards with a penchant for telling only half of what the characters need to know and spending much of their time bickering with one another like catty old women. On several occasions, both Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are forced to endure quests for some hard-to-find and ridiculous components for their respective warlocks' sorcerous workings. And yet beneath all of these events are two unknowable alien entities, completely covered in black robes, with enough power to inflict untold harm on the world if they chose to do so.

Time and again, aspects of the ridiculous and the foolish are twisted to create an air of sinister threat or mystery. This black humour characterises Leiber's work and flavours *Lankhmar* campaigns accordingly – the blending of humour and danger can be a powerful storytelling tool if the Games Master gets it exactly right.

Decadence beneath Elegance

Nehwon and Lankhmar City especially appear grand and glorious on the surface, but it takes very little digging to reveal the corruption underneath the grandeur. Nobles and merchants grow fat (and occasionally insane) with self-indulgence while peasants and indentured servants toil in fields, dance in taverns or work in kitchens. In a world where the thieves are as organised as the army and slavery forms a large portion of the workforce, the decadence and immorality of many people is only barely concealed, if it is hidden at all.

The characters of the stories oppose this with their very presence. While they accept the world as it is, they recognise injustice and react accordingly. Few would shed guilty tears at the theft of a rich merchant-wife's jewels. Even fewer would regret freeing an abused or wronged slave if they had the inclination or the opportunity, even if they knew on an instinctive level that slavery was an acceptable punishment for certain heinous crimes.

The notion of decadence beneath elegance can take a more blunt and obvious form as well.

The difference between accepting the world as it is and actively becoming decadent is displayed perfectly in the genre's characters. While it can be fun for Games Masters to run a game full of spiteful assassins and vile aristocrats, the foundation of the genre is for heroes with ethics that are on the lighter shade of grey. There is no right way to play, of course, and this chapter never takes the liberty of insisting on anything. It simply presents ways of playing *thematically*. In the end, the players' enjoyment is all that matters.

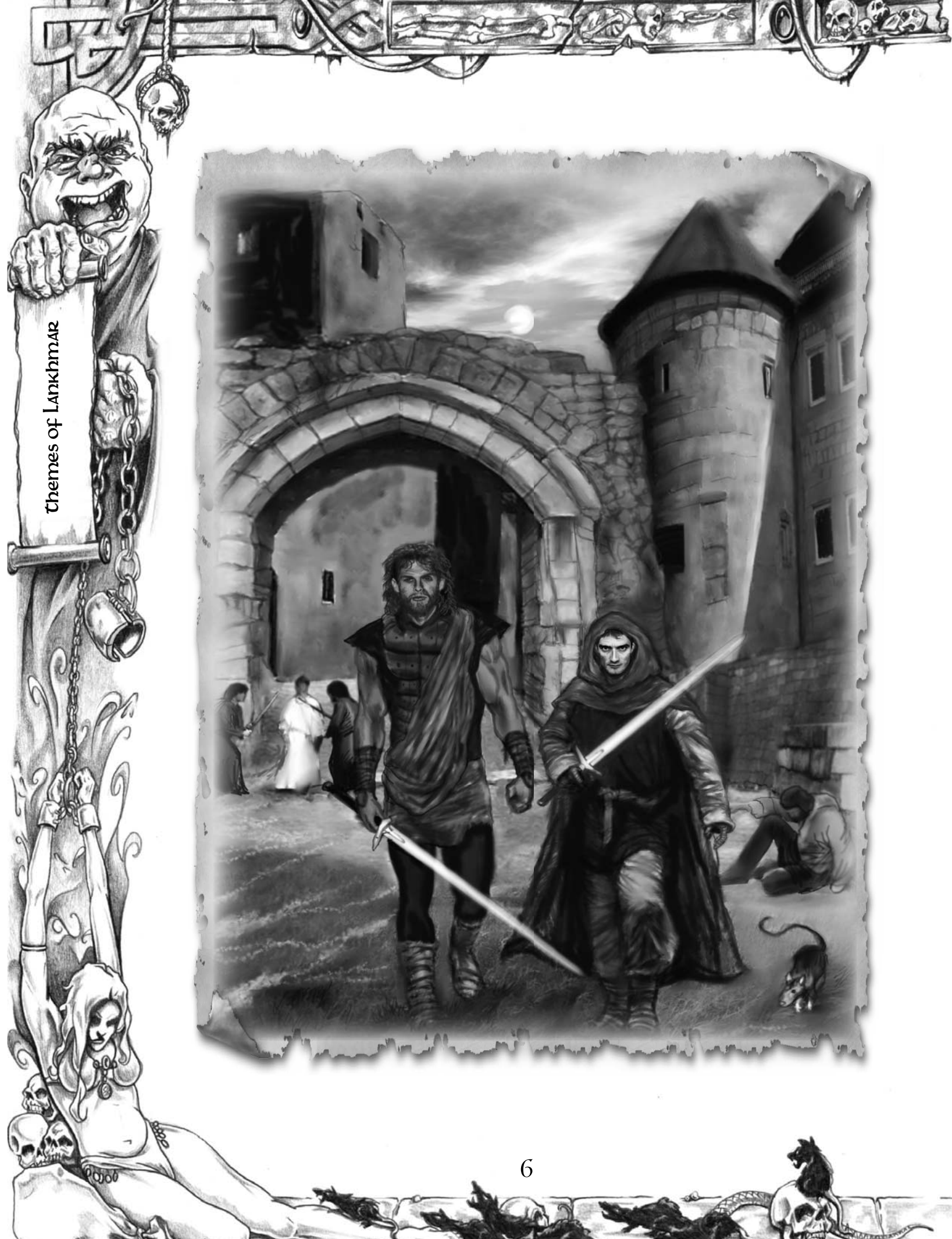
Welcome to Lankhmar...

This is the world in which your characters will live. The characters you create will need their own shades of grey to survive – the right mixture of heroic traits and scoundrel tendencies in order to prosper and weave their own legends.

Over the course of their lives, Fafhrd and the Mouser thwart Death himself, elevate new gods, crush the strength of the Thieves' Guild, save the world from bizarre inhuman market traders, save Lankhmar from an invasion of sentient rats and wander Nehwon in search of wealth, love and new experiences. If Fafhrd and the Mouser are not the cause of a particular trouble (or its solution) then they are almost assuredly at the centre of the chaos, caught between both sides. They are driven to find new things to do, urged ever onward by their own wanderlust, their powerful curiosity and, of course, their enigmatic patrons Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. *'One more roll of the dice with destiny and death'* as Leiber himself put it in the author's note prefacing *The Swords of Lankhmar*.

Now it is time for your characters to not only fill these shoes but to leave their own tracks across the land of Nehwon. The gates of the Imperishable City are always open for the next group of roguish heroes looking to make their names and fortunes.

Enough talk. Welcome, one and all.



Themes of Lankhmar

CHARACTER CREATION

The character creation system for *Lankmar* games is similar to the standard process detailed in *RuneQuest*. The following exceptions and alterations amend the process, however.

At Parts Four and Five of Character Creation – Previous Experience and General Information, characters in the *Lankmar* setting will differ slightly from the basic *RuneQuest* standards, due to Nehwon's regional variations and the differences between Leiber's Sword & Sorcery-style writing compared with modern high fantasy.

Cultural Backgrounds

The regions of Nehwon provide a variety of potential cultural backgrounds for players to consider for their characters. Whether a character comes south to Lankmar from the ice-shrouded Cold Wastes, west from decadent and lawless Ilthmar or north from the tropical jungles of Klesh, players will find the rules here to shape their characters as they see fit.

Barbarian

The nomadic tribes of the Cold Wastes have a rich culture, far removed from the sights and sounds of civilisation. Far to the south, the dense, sweltering jungles of Klesh conceal the enigmatic, dark-skinned folk of Nehwon's southernmost nation. The Barbarian cultural background represents characters from these inhospitable northern and southern climes. Characters who select this trait are likely to be uneducated by civilised standards but possessed of great knowledge regarding their own culture. What barbarians lack in refined education, they more than make up for in their wilderness survival skills and their grasp of the lore of the land.

Cold Wastes barbarians are noted for their nomadic natures and the thick streak of wanderlust that runs through the hearts of many tribal men. Many chafe under the matriarchal culture in which they are raised, leading to no shortage of world-wandering northerners seeking adventure, glory – or simply seeking to stay away from

their families back in the frozen north. Even the Cold Wastes barbarians that are content with their society still travel a great deal, nomadically following the seasons and coming south each midwinter to meet and trade with traders from civilised lands. Males from the Cold Wastes tend to be tall and physically impressive, to say the least. Their lives of hunting, fighting and general physical exertion tends to leave them with large, bunched muscles on otherwise lean frames, and it is not unusual for men to grow between six and seven feet in height. Women are shorter, tending towards stout frames, and their own physical exertions in the arctic wilds give them a strength that can seem intimidating to people of other cultures. Hair colours common to both genders are light blond, jet black or fiery red. Cold Wastes barbarians are usually very pale-skinned.

On the contrary, the barbarians of Klesh are black-skinned, black-haired and secretive in the extreme. Characters from this region will have valid reasons for leaving their



CHARACTER CREATION



jungle homeland, such as seeking adventure, atoning for a wrongdoing or simply leaving their kin. Physically, a demanding life in the jungle leaves Kleshites fit, lean and healthy, with well-defined musculature and little fat on their bodies. Hair is almost always left long, often braided or dreadlocked or otherwise tied back, to keep it from blocking a character's vision.

The barbarian cultural background is represented in the *Swords* novels by Vellix the Venturer, Hringorl, Fafhrd's lieutenants Skor, Mannimark and Skullick and of course the mighty hero Fafhrd himself. It can be used to represent characters from the Kleshite Jungles or the Cold Wastes, and any similar arctic or equatorial rainforest regions.

Slave

Slavery is common in Nehwon, from captives of the Mingol nomads and labourers of underground Quarmall to Lankmarese criminals forced into indentured servitude. Indeed, the latter make up a significant minority of the city's workforce. This character background represents characters that have spent much of their lives in bonded slavery, accumulating skills through hard labour and forced servitude.

Slaves in and around Lankmar City (and other large cities such as Ilthmar) are either foreigners owned by decadent nobility or criminals forced into indentured servitude for years, perhaps even decades, at a time. These slaves serve as labourers in the grain fields, serving staff in inns or noble houses (perhaps even as members of the overlord's vast palace staff), concubines to the aristocracy and dancing girls in taverns. Most will be bought from the overlord by independent masters who will set them to their individual tasks. Such purchases can lead to a rare few slaves even serving on ships as part of a crew.

Male slaves captured by the Mingols will lead lives of forced labour, carrying supplies for the nomadic people of the Great Steppes, helping around the tent camps, and performing similar degrading, menial duties. Women taken by the Mingols will perform the same actions with the grim addition of becoming either willing or unwilling mistresses to Mingol warriors.

Slaves in Quarmall fare the worst of any souls forced into this unfair and punishing life. Many are set to work in the fields around Quarmall, harvesting food for their subterranean masters under threat of death, while others forget the touch of sunlight on the skin as they labour

under the earth for decades, manning the windmills that push air through the lower caverns of the underground realm.

Though Games Masters might wish to run a slave campaign, perhaps with the players escaping over the course of the campaign and living on the run, it is assumed that slave characters have either served their allotted tenure and paid for their crimes, or escaped their overseer masters for a life of freedom. Slaves might adventure for a host of reasons, be it accompanying their owner on his travels, fleeing retribution from a former overseer and needing to stay on the move or even hoping to experience as much of the world as possible to make up for the time lost in slavery.

The slave cultural background is represented in the *Swords* novels by a host of characters, notably the victims of Palace-Mistress Samanda in the Overlord's court, Friska and Ivivis who were rescued from Quarmall and Ourph and his Mingol compatriots who served Fafhrd and the Mouser on several of their nautical journeys.



Freeman

The overwhelming majority of folk in Nehwon are represented by the freeman background. Rather than see this choice as a plain or common selection, Games Masters and players are encouraged to remember that it is common by virtue of the sheer number of skills and careers it covers, rather than because of a lack of anything interesting.

Villages in Nehwon are rarer than might be expected in a fantasy setting, because the lure of grand cities such as Lankhmar and Ilthmar mean that these sprawling settlements are often teeming with life. Rural villages feature only rarely in the *Swords* novels, with practically everything of interest happening either in urban areas or the deep wilderness of forest, desert, arctic mountain ranges or the ocean. This is not to say that there are no villagers in Nehwon, but Games Masters can represent them just as well by this cultural background as they can any urban-dwelling character.

Playing a freeman character offers a lot of opportunity to customise just what a character has mastered over the years of life. It is easily the broadest of the cultural backgrounds because so many people in the setting are born and raised in Nehwon's great cities. A freeman character is assumed to have influence over his own life, whether in owning his own property or simply living within civilisation and not wearing the shackles of slavery. These are the characters that are at one with the streets of dark Lankhmar, filthy Ilthmar, majestic Horborixen and crowded Kvarch Nar.

While few people will ever feel *comfortable* in the labyrinthine roads and alleys within a Nehwon city walls, a freeman character will at least be familiar with the ebb and flow of life in the streets, understanding the power of the guilds, knowing where to find work in the fields or bargains in the trader markets and feeling more at home when protected by city walls than when sleeping rough in the wilderness staring up at distant stars.

A freeman character will adventure for any number of reasons. If his career involves a degree of travel, it might be a life that the character becomes accustomed to and refuses to give up after he moves on. Characters might need to escape the notice of enemies they have made in the city or seek fortune to bring back to their family if they have fallen on hard times, when simple work-life will no longer cut it. Since so many people in Nehwon

can be considered freeman characters, there exist as many reasons for adventuring as there do adventurers themselves. Literally any reason imaginable could set a freeman character's feet on the road of adventure.

In the *Swords* novels, Krovas the master Thief, Eyes of Ogo, Nemias of the Dusk, Slevyas, Ravis Rightby and, of course, the talented rogue known as the Grey Mouser are all represented by the freeman background.

Aristocrat

Nehwon has no shortage of nobles. In Lankhmar they are the decadent ruling caste of the city, bound together in their dozens – even their hundreds – as part of the Overlord's court. Galas, balls, masquerades and celebrations are the surface pastimes of the aristocracy, though there is always an undercurrent of treachery, backstabbing and political machinations that flows beneath the social one-upmanship and dazzling parties.

Aristocrats of Ilthmar are similarly decadent, with the rat- and shark-worshipping nobility clinging to their eerie beast faiths just as the Lankhmarts follow their ever-changing pantheon as dictated by the Street of the



Gods. Political killings, be they poisonings or violent assassinations, are even more common in Ilthmar, as would be expected in such a foul city.

Any aristocrat character can find a reason for adventuring, whether he has a desire to prove himself in the eyes of his family, escape the burdens of responsibility his bloodline bestows, see the world to gain experience for rule or simply 'slum it' for a while and pick up some tricks he would never otherwise acquire.

In other campaign settings, the term 'aristocrat' is generally clearly defined. In the city of Lankhmar it applies not only to blood relatives and peers of the reigning Overlord, but also to those traders with the wealth to elevate themselves into the ranks of the aristocracy. For the Imperishable City itself, these ambitious and shrewd souls are most often members of the Grain Merchants' Cartel – many members of the guild are actually wealthier than most nobles of the city, who rely on hereditary riches rather than amassing fortunes of their own.

Extremely wealthy moneylenders and guild masters are another two groups that are equally well represented by the aristocrat class, for although they work for their riches, they walk in the same circles, attend the same parties and stand as far above the peasantry as any aristocrat with a blood-tie to the Overlord. 'Old money' nobility might sometimes choose to make a big deal out of the newly-elevated blue-bloods among their number, but the aristocrat class applies to any character with the wealth and influence to stand among the noble classes.

In the *Swords* novels, the Aristocrat background is displayed by Overlord Glipkerio, Atya, Muulsh the Moneylender, Elakeria Kistomercer, Hisvin and his daughter Hisvet, among many others.

Mariner

For some characters, such as those in Nehwon's colossal port cities or the islands of the various seas, the mariner background applies. These characters are not simply sailors, but rather people who spend practically their entire lives at sea. Some crews of merchant or pirate vessels spend mere days every few months (or even every few years) in port, living almost their entire lives aboard a ship and calling no nation home.

Mariner characters know little outside life on the sea. They likely have knowledge of the world because they have visited so many ports, but the knowledge they have is broad rather than in-depth. Those with a love of the sea that runs so deep that they avoid spending time on land and prefer rigging under their feet to stone, and those with saltwater in their blood to the point where they have spent almost their entire lives on the waves, are potential mariner characters.

Games Masters unsure as to the distinction of a mariner character and a freeman character with a sailor profession should use the following criteria to decide which is more appropriate: Mariners are relatively rare, found only among those who actively uncomfortable on land because it is almost unfamiliar to them to have solid ground under their feet. An average sailor or fisherman is not a mariner – a man who has sailed since his raw youth and no longer feels at home in any port city certainly is.



A rough rule of thumb to determine whether a character is a mariner is to determine how much time he has spent on the sea. Regular sailing trips that any merchant or military sailor would take are one thing. A pirate whose home is his ship and who spends only a few days on land every year is quite another. This is a rare cultural background but thematically appropriate because Nehwon is so dominated by seas. It is the attachment to the ocean waves over everything else in life that make a mariner character, and Games Masters should be careful about allocating this background to characters simply because they have a love for the sea and a talent for setting sail.

A mariner character already lives a life that could be considered adventuring, depending on the trade and routes of the vessel he sails. Those that leave the sea to walk on dry land usually do so because a curiosity eats at them and they are driven to discover just what life on earth and stone can be like. Others might have a need to seek work and riches away from the waves they love because they are unable to find work on a vessel, whether temporarily or permanently. Still others will promise themselves that this venture on land is their first, last and only journey, perhaps in the name of seeking out rumoured treasure that will make it all worthwhile.

Nomad

Life on the Great Steppes is a far cry from the clustered and crowded civilisation of the south. Here the Mingol hordes rove in their tribes, setting up tent towns month by month and moving on as they see fit, whether by season, by the travels of the wild cattle they hunt or by some other inclination. A nomad character has lived most or all of his life on the endless plains of the Steppes and is at home in the long grasses under the wide open sky. He is also born to the saddle, with horseback riding coming as naturally to him as walking does to city-dwellers.

Nomads are not barbarians, at least not in the sense of cultural backgrounds. A nomad lives in the wilderness of the plains and is uneducated by civilised standards, but life on the Steppes is not the same as dwelling in the southern jungles or the northern Cold Wastes. The life of a barbarian character is a battle against the elements and inhospitable surroundings. Life on the Steppes offers no such challenges, where game is plentiful, the climate is temperate and the nomadic Mingol tribes are lords of their realm.



This background is only really appropriate for Mingol characters that have spent their lives on the Steppes and lived as warriors, hunters or wives among their own people. Captives taken by the Mingols are better represented by the slave background and characters that travel a great deal as wanderers and vagabonds hardly have the same affinity and experience with the comfortable wilderness of the Steppes. As with the mariner background, Games Masters will find that this choice is a rare selection for characters, featuring only among a few characters unless the campaign specifically focuses on the Great Steppes as a location.

That said, Mingols have no shortage of reasons to leave the Steppes. A Mingol enslaved during his youth is better represented by the slave background, but adult warriors and tribe members venturing south or east to seek adventure are common enough.

CHARACTER CREATION

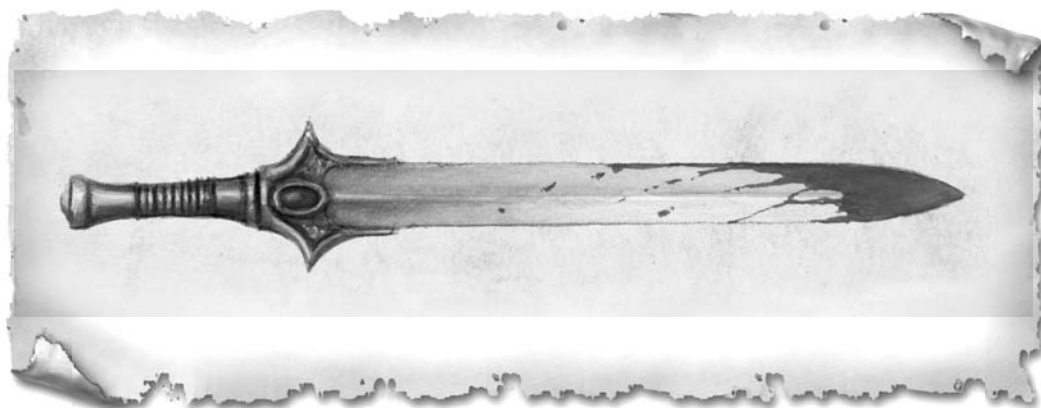


Cultural Background

Background	Basic Skill Bonuses	Advanced Skills	Starting Money
Aristocrat	<p>Influence +10% Lore (World) +10% Persistence +10%</p> <p>Pick Two +5% 2H Sword, Dodge, Perception</p> <p>Pick Two +15% 1H Sword, Dagger, Evaluate, Rapier, Riding, Shield</p>	<p>Language (Native) +50% Lore (Regional)</p> <p>Pick Two Craft Dance Language Lore Play Instrument Shiphandling</p>	<p>4D10x100 Smerduks</p>
Barbarian (Cold Wastes)	<p>Athletics +10% Perception +5% Resilience +10% Stealth +5%</p> <p>Pick Two +5% Boating, Dodge, Influence, Sing</p> <p>Pick Three +10% 1H Axe, 1H Hammer, 2H Axe, 2H Hammer, Bow, Dagger, Shield, Sling, Spear, Staff, Throwing, Unarmed</p>	<p>Language (Low Lankhmarese) +50% Lore (Cold Wastes) Survival</p> <p>Pick One Craft Dance Lore Play Instrument Tracking</p>	<p>4D6x20 Smerduks</p>
Barbarian (Kleshite Jungle)	<p>Athletics +10% Perception +5% Resilience +10% Stealth +5%</p> <p>Pick Two +5% Dodge, Lore (Animal), Lore (Plant), Persistence</p> <p>Pick Three +10% 1H Axe, 1H Hammer, Blowgun, Bow, Dagger, Shield, Sling, Spear, Staff, Throwing, Unarmed</p>	<p>Language (Klesh) +50% Lore (Klesh) Survival</p> <p>Pick One Craft Dance Lore Play Instrument Tracking</p>	<p>4D6x20 Smerduks</p>
Freeman	<p>Evaluate +10% Influence +10% Lore (World) +10%</p> <p>Pick Two +10% Boating, Driving, Lore (Animal), Lore (Plant), Resilience, Stealth</p> <p>Pick Two +10% 1H Hammer, 1H Sword, Crossbow, Dagger, Persistence, Polearm, Sleight, Shield</p>	<p>Language (Native) +50% Lore (Regional) Streetwise</p> <p>Pick One Craft Dance Language Lore Play Instrument Shiphandling</p>	<p>4D6x50 Smerduks</p>

Cultural Background

Background	Basic Skill Bonuses	Advanced Skills	Starting Money
Mariner	Acrobatics +5% Athletics +10% Boating +15% Lore (Animal) +5% Lore (World) +15% Pick One +10% 1H Hammer, 1H Sword, Dagger, Unarmed Pick Two +5% Crossbow, Dodge, Sing, Perception	Language (Native) +50% Lore (Regional) Survival Pick One Craft Language Lore Play Instrument Shiphandling	4D6x25 Smerduks
Nomad	Athletics +10% Lore (Animal) +5% Lore (Plant) +5% Resilience +5% Riding +15% Pick One +10% 1H Axe, 1H Sword, Dagger, Unarmed Pick Two +10% Blowgun, Bow, Dodge, Perception	Language (Mingol) +50% Lore (Steppes) Survival Pick One Craft Language Lore Play Instrument	4D6x20 Smerduks
Slave	Athletics +10% Persistence +10% Resilience +10% Pick Three +10% Boating, Dodge, Driving, First Aid, Lore (Animal), Lore (Plant) Pick One +10% 1H Axe, Dagger, Sling, Spear, Staff, 1H Sword, Unarmed	Language (Native) +50% Lore (Regional) Pick Two Craft Language (Any) Lore Play Instrument Survival	2D6x20 Smerduks



Professions

The standard Profession table from *RuneQuest* has been adjusted slightly to reflect the cultural backgrounds of Nehwon. When creating characters use the following

rules rather than those found in the main *RuneQuest Core Rulebook*. In the section below, a brief and informal description is given of each Profession, highlighting some of the attitudes and common personality traits found in characters that ply these trades.

Professions

Profession	Cultural Background	Basic Skill Bonuses	Advanced Skills
Acrobat	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave	Athletics +10%, Dodge +10%, Throwing +10%, Sleight +10%	Acrobatics
Animal Handler	Barbarian, Freeman, Nomad, Slave	Driving +5%, First Aid +5%, Lore (Animal) +20%, Persistence +10%, Resilience +5%, Riding +5%	
Bard	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave, Nomad, Mariner	Influence +10%, Lore (World) +10%, Perception +5%, Sing +10%, Sleight +5%	Pick One Play Instrument Language, Lore
Blacksmith	Freeman	1H Hammer +10%, Evaluate +5%, Resilience +5%	Craft (Blacksmith), Lore (Mineral) Pick One Engineering, Mechanisms, Craft (Armourer), Craft (Weaponsmith)
Cartographer	Freeman	Perception +10%, Persistence +5%, Lore (World) +15%	Pick Two Language, Lore (Geography), Lore (Regional)
Charlatan	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave, Nomad	Athletics +5%, Dodge +5%, Influence +10%, Sleight +10%	Disguise, Streetwise
Courtesan	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave, Nomad	Athletics +5%, Dagger +5%, Dodge +5%, Influence +5%, Persistence +5%, Resilience +5%	Pick Two Disguise, Lore (Regional), Streetwise
Courtier	Aristocrat	Influence +15%, Lore (World) +5%, Perception +5%, Sleight +5%	Dance Pick One Lore (Art), Lore (Heraldry), Lore (Philosophy), Lore (Regional), Play Instrument
Craftsman	Barbarian, Freeman, Nomad	Evaluate +20%, Influence +5%, Persistence +5%	Craft Pick One Craft (other), Engineering, Mechanisms
Diplomat	Freeman, Aristocrat	Influence +20%, Perception +10%, Lore (World) +10%	Pick One Dance, Language Lore, Play Instrument

Profession	Cultural Background	Basic Skill Bonuses	Advanced Skills
Explorer	Barbarian, Freeman, Aristocrat, Nomad	Lore (World) +20%, Perception +5%, Resilience +5%	Pick Two Language, Lore (Astronomy), Lore (Geography), Shiphandling, Survival
Farmer	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave	Athletics +5%, Driving +5%, Lore (Animal) +15%, Lore (Plant) +10%, Resilience +15%	
Fisherman	Barbarian, Freeman, Mariner	Athletics +5%, Boating +20%, Lore (Animal) +5%, Resilience +10%, Throwing +10%	
Hedge Magician	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave, Nomad	Perception +10%, Persistence +5%, Lore (World) +15%	Divining Pick One Lore (Geography), Lore (Regional)
Herdsman	Freeman, Nomad, Slave	First Aid +5%, Lore (Animal) +15%, Perception +5%, Resilience +5%	Survival
		Pick One Bow +10%, Sling +10%	
Hunter	Barbarian, Freeman, Nomad	Bow +5%, Lore (Animal) +10%, Spear +5%, Stealth +10%	Survival, Tracking
Lord	Aristocrat	1H Sword +10%, Influence +20%, Persistence +10%, Riding +10%	
Mercenary	Barbarian, Freeman, Nomad, Mariner,	Lore (World) +10% Pick Two 1H Axe +15%, 1H Flail +15%, 1H Hammer +15%, 1H Sword +15% 2H Axe +15%, 2H Flail +15%, 2H Hammer +15%, 2H Sword +15%, Bow +15%, Crossbow +15%, Polearm +15%, Shield +15% Pick Two Athletics +5%, Dagger +5%, Dodge +5%, Driving +5%, Evaluate +5%, Resilience +5%, Riding +5%, Unarmed +5%	
Merchant	Freeman, Aristocrat, Mariner	Evaluate +20%, Influence +10%, Lore (World) +10%	Pick One Language, Lore (Logistics), Shiphandling
Miner	Freeman, Slave,	1H Axe +10%, 2H Axe +10%, Athletics +10%, Resilience +10%	Lore (Mineral)
Performer	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave	Athletics +10%, Sing +10%, Influence +10%	Pick Two Acrobatics, Dance, Play Instrument

Background	Cultural Background	Basic Skill Bonuses	Advanced Skills
Physician	Barbarian, Freeman, Aristocrat, Nomad	Evaluate +5%, First Aid +20%, Lore (Plant) +10%, Perception +5%	Healing
Pirate	Barbarian, Freeman, Slave, Nomad, Mariner	1H Sword +5%, Athletics +10%, Boating +10%, Dodge +5%, Lore (World) +10%	Acrobatics, Shiphandling
Priest	Barbarian, Freeman, Aristocrat, Nomad	Influence +15%, Lore (World) +5%, Persistence +10%	Lore (Specific Theology), Lore (other)
Sailor	Barbarian, Freeman, Mariner, Aristocrat, Slave	Athletics +10%, Boating +10%, Lore (World) +5%, Resilience +5%	Acrobatics, Shiphandling
Scholar	Freeman, Aristocrat	Evaluate +5%, Lore (World) +10%, Persistence +5%	Language Pick Two Engineering, Healing, Language, Lore (other), Mechanisms
Thief	Barbarian, Aristocrat, Freeman, Slave, Nomad	Acrobatics +5%, Evaluate +5%, Perception +10%, Sleight +10%, Stealth +10%	Pick One Disguise, Mechanisms, Streetwise
Thug	Freeman, Slave	1H Hammer +10%, Dagger +10%, Evaluate +5%, Resilience +5%, Stealth +10%	Streetwise
Town Guard	Freeman	1H Hammer +5%, Athletics +5%, Crossbow +5%, Perception +5%, Polearm +10%, Shield +10%	Streetwise
Warrior-Soldier	Barbarian, Freeman, Aristocrat, Slave, Mariner	Dodge +5%, Lore (World) +5%, Resilience +5%, Unarmed +5%	Pick Three 1H Axe +10%, 1H Flail +10%, 1H Hammer +10%, 1H Sword +10%, 2H Axe +10%, 2H Flail +10%, 2H Hammer +10%, 2H Sword +10%, Athletics +10%, Bow +10%, Crossbow +10%, Dagger +10%, Driving +10%, Polearm +10%, Riding +10%, Shield +10%, Sling +10%, Spear +10%
Woodsman	Barbarian, Freeman, Nomad	1H Axe +5%, 2H Axe +10%, Athletics +10%, Lore (Plant) +10%, Resilience +5%	Survival

Acrobat

Perhaps a character is a tumbler in a circus that tours Nehwon and sets up temporary residence in the Plaza District, or a street acrobat performing for a few Iron Tikks in the slums on market day or a juggler in the performance troupes that venture north to entertain the barbarians of the Cold Waste in midwinter. No matter where he earns his coin, he is good at what he does and can put his body through acrobatic motions as easily as a scholar reads a book or a mercenary swings a sword.

Animal Handler

Some folk have a knack for dealing with beasts. An animal handler is among them. Some turn this talent to catching rats and killing cadaver birds that come over the walls by the Great Salt Marsh and steal pets. Others make a living out of training horses for nobles or working in Lankhmar's stables where the well-to-do and the military keep their steeds. Among the Mingols, some warriors of the tribes display a skill in breaking the wild Steppes ponies for use as war mounts. Whichever way an animal handler's talents lay, he has a gift for handling animals and the wherewithal to make a living out of it.

Bard

Whether performing in jovial inns, rough dockside taverns or at the classy soirees of the nobility, bards are always in demand. Most end up becoming world-wise to some degree, learning the poems and songs of many cultures over the course of their lives, all in order to add variety and spice to a performance. A bard might end up performing night after night in the Silver Eel, watching for knives in his back as he catches coins in his empty beer mug, or he may strike it lucky and perform at the masquerade galas of the Lankhmarese aristocracy. It's all a matter of talent, charm and luck.

Blacksmith

Blacksmiths tap into a strong work market in Nehwon: people always need metalworking done. If a blacksmith works in the slums of Lankhmar, he's got work for a few Iron Tikks as kitchen maids and housewives bring knives that need re-blading and repairing, but most of his coin will come from working on grain-farmer ploughs and farming scythes and keeping the local thuggish rabble well-tooled in weapons of war. If a blacksmith makes it into respected master status, he is likely to be looking at signing contracts with the military and nobility to provide first-class weapon repair and creation. There is a lot of

work at all levels of society for a skilled blacksmith, which probably means if a blacksmith sticks to the graft he'll end up richer than most other people he knows.

Cartographer

Nehwon has had many brave and adventurous explorer souls over the centuries, but those who take on the role of cartographer want to do more than *see* the world – they want to map and record it, so others can follow in their footsteps and see what they have seen. At least, that is the grand ideal. Maybe a character buys into that and believes it with all his heart. Maybe he just treks to the ends of the earth because there is a fat guild paycheck at the end of the job. Expert cartographers are always in demand by nobles and merchants, who need new regions mapped, enemy territories evaluated, new trade routes plotted out and older, unreliable maps updated.

Charlatan

A charlatan claims to have the gift of future-sight: the power to divine the truth of What Will Be, by performing his own personal rituals. The gullible, the curious, the pious and the desperate folk of Nehwon come to him in the hope of answers. With a theatrical flair and a look into the mists of time, he provides them with the answers they need. In return, they provide him with coin. It can be hard not to laugh sometimes. After all, he is making the whole thing up. In a charlatan's opinion, whoever it was that said 'honesty is the best policy' never had a coin purse that jingled.

Courtesan

The world's oldest trade is a courtesan's area of expertise. Whether she has been doing it for weeks or years, in the candle-lit harem of a depraved Horborixen monarch, in the dockside inns as part of her indentured servitude, or in the dark alleys behind Lankhmar's slum taverns, she knows how to please a man and, usually, make him pay for it. The art of seduction, spiced with a hint of deception, is second nature to her now. In Lankhmar, only the Red Lantern girls are safe from abuse, protected by their guild and the hired hangers-on in the Slayers' Brotherhood. If a character wants to ply the trade in the Imperishable City, she will need to join with the guild or arrange her own protection because the streets of Lankhmar are no place for an undefended lady.

Courtier

Different games are played in the halls of the wealthy elite. Instead of sell-swords battling for pay and survival, duellists cross blades for honour and social one-upmanship. Rather than quaff ale and seek out employment, aristocrats sip bubbly Ilthmarish wine and seek the downfall of political rivals. A courtier know the stakes of the game intimately, for he plays it every day and night. Half of his life is wrapped up in the masquerades and parties of the social elite. The other half is a complicated web of treachery, shifting alliances and toadying to higher-ranked blue-bloods in a civilised game of survival. The peasantry might look up and envy a courtier's lifestyle, but they have never had to actually try it.

Craftsman

Skilled workers can find work anywhere. Maybe a character considers himself an artist, working at painting or sculpting for the upper classes and taking work creating icons for the successful temples on the Street of the Gods. Maybe he ekes out a living in the heart of one of the Eight Cities, working as a carpenter repairing the city's frequent fire damage. His skills make him a useful member of society and give him something he can always fall back on should the tides of Fate turn against him.

Diplomat

War is a regular occurrence in Nehwon. The rare men and women that seek to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict are usually employed by merchant guilds afraid of trade being disrupted in a disputed region, or nobles hoping for a last chance aversion to their lands being engulfed in war. The problem facing most diplomats is that the odds stacked against them are immense right from the outset. This is because wars most often break out between Lankhmar, Ilthmar or the Eight Cities on one side, and the Mingol hordes or the ghouls on the other. An emissary from the civilised lands going to the Mingols or the ghouls is hoping for too much if he expects to leave alive, let alone leave with a peace treaty signed and tucked under his arm. A diplomat is no fool – he knows the odds are not in his favour. Whether he mediates between warring merchant families, warring cities or the marauding armies of the ghouls and Mingols as they lay siege to a civilised city, he will do his best out of idealism (or for a vast fee) and most likely be long gone before the walls fall and the blood starts to flow.



Explorer

If a character manages to land a patron who wanted another region explored, he is one of the lucky ones. Most of the poor souls in his trade do it out of love and curiosity, wandering off into the wilds because they want to know what lies in that direction. In many ways, an explorer's line of work sets him up as the carefree cousin of the cartographer. All he has to do is remember what he saw. He has to note down all the hundreds of ways of getting there. A lot of people get wanderlust and walk the world of Nehwon to see what Fate has in store for them, but that is not the same as being a real explorer. Whether by choice or because he gets paid, an explorer plans to see *all* of Nehwon before he dies, taking ships to see new lands and walking on foot to those close enough to trek to. He has a lot of stories and he knows a lot about the world. Some people might consider him useless, but he is the one who can point out which cacti have drinkable milk in the Parched Mountains, while guesswork would leave others dead in the dry winds and blazing sun.

Farmer

Someone has to work in the fields to provide food for the cities, and that happens to be the farmer. Besides, a life of toil can be good for the soul. Whether a character has endless patience or a hot-blooded temper, there is an enduring strength under his surface born from years of hard labour. His work has made him knowledgeable in areas of certain plants and animals, but his real strength comes from the stamina born in so much time of dawn-to-dusk toil. People can never fake strength like that.

Fisherman

Life on the coasts of the Inner Sea can be hard for some. The catches are good and the fish are plentiful, but the taxes in Ilthmar are savage and the dangers of the docks there and in Lankhmar can scare any honest fisherman off. A fisherman knows how to make a living and sail on Nehwon's seas, and he knows how to handle himself in a rough port as well. He takes well-justified pride in being tougher than people might expect of him.



Hedge Magician

A hedge magician has the gift of future-sight: the power to divine the truth of What Will Be, by performing his own personal rituals. The gullible, the curious, the pious and the desperate folk of Nehwon come to him in the hope of answers. With a theatrical flair and a look into the mists of time, he provides them with the answers they need. In return, they provide him with coin. Some will consider him a charlatan but he does not set out to deceive anyone (well, not usually) and he genuinely feels he earn fairly the money he charges. Perhaps he dreams of more powerful magic or perhaps his minor rituals are enough to sate any curiosity he might have with the occult.

Herdsmen

The life of a shepherd can seem a humble one, standing around watching herds, occasionally doctoring sick animals and deterring wild beasts and infrequent brigands alike with a well-aimed volley of sling stones. A herdsman is used to putting in long days of work and has built up the stamina necessary to stay on his feet for an entire day's worth of hours, keeping a keen eye on the surrounding terrain.

Hunter

Whether a hunter calls the jungles of Klesh or the Cold Waste tundra home, he has the skills to make a living by bringing down wild beasts. While a trained soldier can probably outfight him, he knows the soldier would be lost and helpless in the wilderness he is so familiar with. A hunter's knowledge of the wild, his skill on the hunt and his accuracy at thrusting a spear into a beast's vitals means that he makes a capable provider for his family, a valued member of any community and a worthy addition to any adventuring party.

Lord

Raised above the courtiers, above the aristocracy and into the true nobility, a lord is part of Nehwon's ruling elite, perhaps even blood-related to the overlord of Lankhmar. A lord's life has been a series of preparations for responsibility, weapons training and formal education, though he can put these talents to whatever ends he sees fit. Some who share his exalted social level 'slum it' in the cities, allying with thieves, making enemies and acting with a certain degree of impunity because 'disappearing' would raise too many questions. Others remain among their courtiers and admirers, immersing themselves in the political machinations behind the running of kingdoms.



Mercenary

People always need killing. Other people always need to be kept alive. It is these two truths that keep a mercenary in enough coin to maintain his weapons and move from place to place, taking orders from a succession of nobles, village elders, gang leaders, underworld figures and pot-bellied merchants. Nehwon has no shortage of work for a man who can handle a blade. A mercenary is just such a person.

Merchant

Trade is big business in Nehwon. Luxuries and mundane items alike are brought from port to port on fat-hulled cargo ships, while guilds like the Lankhmar Grain Merchants and the Lumber Merchants of Kvarch Nar grow prosperous on the coins their enterprises rake in. A merchant may never achieve the vast success necessary to put him on the map with the Grain Merchants' Guild of the Imperishable City, but he knows how to handle a trade deal and his experience in the mercantile business is invaluable at times. With a little cunning and a helping of diligence, he could be heading up his own company, or one day sitting in the council chambers of one of Nehwon's biggest merchant guilds, his interests carried out by fleets of ships, convoys of wagons, and making decisions that will affect the industries of entire nations.

Miner

A miner lives a life of backbreaking toil under the earth and down in the sides of mountains, digging out whatever minerals his current employer asked for. The work is boring beyond imagining – he makes no argument otherwise – but it makes for a tough soul with strong bones, as well giving a miner a mean talent with an axe or pick in his hands.

Performer

Whether a performer gets by as an exotic dancer in slum taverns, wearing ankle-bells that chime as he moves, or a poet reading for the wife of a wealthy grain merchant, his skills in performing his chosen art means he has the means to make a decent living. He has a voice that can meet the demands of various cultures' music and may even have talent with instruments. Overall, while a performer lacks the musical focus and world-wisdom of a bard, he has more diverse talents and no shortage of charm.

Pirate

The plunder on Nehwon's Inner Sea is a rich prize indeed. The ships that sail between Ilthmar to the east, Lankhmar to the south and the Eight Cities to the north are laden with goods going to the populace and coin heading to the pockets of dishonest men. There is so much of it; who would ever miss a few ships' worth here and there? Why, in that light, a pirate barely commits crime at all. Maybe he tells himself that and maybe he just likes the thrill of riding the waves and locking blades and belaying pins more than 'honest' sailors. Either way, a pirate is in the right line of work if he wants action at sea and the chance to get rich in the process.

Physician

Medical treatment is not a high art in Nehwon – a fact a physician is all too aware of. The majority of medicine's practitioners learn their trade from apprenticeships to older physicians or from scholarly texts acquired over the years. Surgery takes the form of amputations, cutting out shards of sword blades or applying poultices to clean infections. The least skilled physicians in Nehwon find work in Ilthmarish slums as wound-stitchers. A physician hopes never to be among those poor souls. The competent ones are employed by travelling troupes, mercenary bands or even guilds so as to provide fast treatment for its members.

Priest

The ways of the gods are strange and inhuman, and it takes an enlightened soul to dedicate his life to spreading a holy faith to others. A priest is such a soul, hoping to spread the belief in his chosen deity as he does his utmost to act in his interests. For some followers of the divine, particularly those in service to gods that might be considered evil or malicious, nothing in their position says they must be kind or tolerant in their piety. Nehwon's priests are a dark and conflicted lot on the whole, with gold-lust and the ruthless ambition to live an easy life found in equal measure to sincere faith.

Sailor

A life on land just is not for a sailor. He prefers to work hard and earn his coins by living barefoot on a wooden deck with the sun beating down on him and the deep, blue Inner Sea stretching out in every direction. The joys of ports – the drink, the women and the pay – are fun to look forward to at the end of every journey. A sailor gets to see more of the world than any town-dweller stuck behind his stone walls ever will and he gets to earn an honest wage doing something useful while he is at it.

Scholar

Nehwon and especially Lankhmar have their fair share of musty libraries full of ancient tomes. Historians have been known to make a living when supported by a wealthy patron, and many scholars find employment in teaching the heirs to noble and aristocratic families. In a world where education is rarely prized, scholarly pursuits can often seem an unappreciated line of work and a passion with little use. A scholar might even feel this himself at times. However, Nehwon and its history are full of stories: tales of heroes and insane overlords, tortures and sorcerers and bitter, bloody wars. If these events were not chronicled, there would be no-one to tell of them today.

Soldier-Warrior

Soldier: Maybe a soldier simply fights because there is regular pay at the end of every month and maybe he does it because he finds a touch more nobility in fighting for his nation or local noble than there is in selling his sword to the highest bidder. Whatever the reasons a soldier has for signing up, someone in charge pays him and trains him to kill in battle. He wears the uniform and fight for the cause, though his free time is spent attending to his own interests. Any adventuring group that has a soldier as a member is getting someone toughened by years of training and weapon-work but who does not know too much outside of what he has been trained to do.

Warrior: A warrior is one of his clan's blades, or his tribe's spears, and his battle-howls sound out the loudest when there is killing to be done. His work makes him the uncivilised counterpart of the soldier but whether he is a Cold Waste northerner bearing a two-handed sword or a mounted Mingol using a spear as a lance, he fights for his people and his own honour rather than a liege lord. His payment comes not in coin, but in the form of his family safe and his people protected.

Thief

For some people, a life on the shadier side of the law is a lot more rewarding than playing the straight and narrow. Nehwon's cities are rife with thieves, cut-purses, muggers, burglars and any type of property-stealing criminal the human mind can imagine. Lankhmar is well-known for its organised Thieves' Guild, as well as being called the 'City of Thieves' among its many monikers. A thief is one of the many to take what he wants in life rather than earn it, though he certainly works hard enough on some jobs. Without guild membership or special permission

for freelance activity, thief's days are numbered if he sets foot in Lankhmar. Lucky for him the great guild is always looking for talented recruits...

Town Guard

Whether a town guard mans the wooden walls of leafy Kvarch Nar or the stone battlements of Lankhmar City, he gets to deal with the lawless, the violent and the outright ugliest elements of Nehwonese city life. Lucky him. He might be the kind of person to take a few bribes here and there, which is perfectly acceptable (even expected) in his line of work. Arresting petty criminals, guild-bound thieves and the murderers that glide through Lankhmar's mazy streets is no plum job, and everyone is expected to take a kickback now and again as payment for looking the other way or running slow in a rooftop chase. Then again, maybe a guard got into city watchman duties to set things right. There are always a few would-be heroes in a constable's uniform. They tend not to live long, mind you.

Thug

Just like a thief, a thug walks the crooked path rather than the straight and narrow. The difference is that thieves try to do it in secret, remaining unseen and getting away with everything right under the noses of the authority. While a thug might not advertise his business to the law, he rarely cowers and hides like a thief. His line of work demands confrontation, a lot of bashing and no shortage of threats in order to get things done. Muggings and violent battles in dark alleyways are his forte'. There is a lot of money to be made in Lankhmar by beating up the right people. If a character is the kind of person who fell into this line of work because he saw no other choice (or he is exceptionally careful about the law) then he is careful not to brain or kill his victims to get their money. If a character could care less about those he preys upon, then there is always Bones Alley to hide the remains.

Woodsman

Nehwon's forests cover a vast expanse of the terrain, especially in the Land of the Eight Cities, which is not called the Forest Land for nothing. A woodsman's trade is a mixture of the mundane and the dangerous. Trees need to be cut down and there are a lot of men with the backs and wills to do it. However, the wilderness is never entirely safe, with Mingol and ghoulish raiders picking off frontier villages and lumber outposts with unrelenting frequency. It is fortunate that a woodsman's trade gives him some skill with an axe because the chances are he will have to use it in a fight more than once.

Languages of Nehwon

The tongues spoken across the world of Nehwon are as diverse and different from one another as those on Earth. Lankhmarese has spread across much of Nehwon, spoken as often and as accurately by different cultures as English is spoken in our world. Such is the benefit of Lankhmar being the cradle of civilisation and largest world power. A great many Lankhmarts speak fragments of other languages, since the great city sees so many travellers, tourists and traders that exposure to the tongues of the wider world is almost impossible to avoid.

The following languages are mentioned in the *Swords* novels:

High Lankhmarese: This is language spoken in the land of Lankhmar.

Low Lankhmarese: A stripped-down pidgin tongue based on High Lankhmarese, the so-called 'low language' is used by many foreigners in the city and serves as the general trade language of Nehwon.

The Three Eastern Tongues: The high, low and common Arabic-like tongues of the desert-dwelling easterners.

Forest Tongue: The language spoken by the people of the Land of the Eight Cities.

Ilthmarish: The tongue of the notorious city-state of Ilthmar .

Klesh: The language of the southern tropical jungle land of Klesh .

Kvarchish: A more 'civilised' (read: complex) version of Forest Tongue, primarily spoken by Eight Cities nobility and residents of Kvarch Nar. Many Lankhmarts know a smattering of Kvarchish due to the degree of trade and travel between Kvarch Nar and Lankhmar.

Mingol: The tongue of the Mingol hordes that populate the Great Steppes. Mingol (the language) roughly equates to an Oriental/East Asian tongue.

Old Ghoulish: A dead language once used by the ghouls of north-eastern Lankhmar. It is rumoured to still be used in the flesh-eating rites performed by their religious leaders.

Quarmallian: The tongue of the subterranean nobles of Quarmall, similar in sound to the languages of the native South Americas before European colonisation.

Rimic: The tongue of the near-legendary Rime Isle-dwelling fishermen and traders.

Themed Adventuring Groups

Adventuring groups are often a gathering of disparate souls forming unlikely friendships and going on to work well together despite their differences. Success through diversity is a key aspect in most adventuring groups.

This section presents a different tack, highlighting the potential value, realism and utility of groups united by a similar Cultural Background or Professions. The list is far from exhaustive, designed purely to show what is possible rather than detail every potential band of adventurers. Games Masters and players may be inspired to create similar groups using these examples as guidelines, adding to the overall realism of their characters' places in the *Lankhmar* setting.

Performance Troupe

Theatre troupes and similar performance groups are popular in the civilised regions of Nehwon, presenting a wide range of potential Professions. The likeliest and most obvious examples are: Performer (Poet), Performer (Dancer), Performer (Singer), Performer (Mime), Performer (Actor), Acrobat and Bard. Characters from any of these backgrounds might find themselves banding together either to create a new troupe and seek fame or as a tight-knit band of friends within a larger troupe.

Mercenary characters could be hired on a permanent basis to guard a troupe's less combative members. In places like Cold Corner, where the barbarian women accost and occasionally kill female performers, this can be a difficult and essential duty. Merchant characters might fund and direct the show, while any Animal Handlers take care of the convoy's beasts of burden, and Craftsmen work as skilled tailors or set-makers.

Touring troupes will see a great deal of the world, no doubt becoming involved in brigand road-ambushes, falling victim to criminal guilds and becoming entangled in the societies they perform for. Membership in a performance troupe can be an excellent way to present low-born characters with a chance at entering high society, albeit temporarily. Perhaps the best place for such a group to meet and work is the Grand Theatre in Lankmar. See *City of the Black Toga*, page 67 for details on this nest of treacherous artists and thespians.

Freelance Thieves' Cell

Going against Lankmar's Thieves' Guild is dangerous unless the proper kickbacks are in place. Even then, the Guild thieves are better-informed and better-organised, and are likely to get the richest pickings before any freelancer. A group of freelancers working together and watching out for one another can overcome these drawbacks to some degree. One could take the role of the group's eyes and ears on the street, another could be a master cat burglar and another might be a thug with a knack for mugging and fleeing unseen. Literally any combination of lawless characters from any Cultural Backgrounds are possible in this setup.

A variant would be for all the characters to be members of the infamous Thieves' Guild and work together as partners, mandated by the Guild leaders because of the characters' efficiency as a team. The campaign might be somewhat more 'mission-based' unless the Master

Thief specifically decrees that the characters are allowed to work with little supervision. A long career of bribery, thievery and clashes with the law and rival thieves are ahead of any adventuring group that begins on this path.

The Noble Family

A group of adventurers drawn from the same aristocratic bloodline could make for some intriguing opportunities. In high society games, a group of siblings (or other relatives) would probably be concerned with maintaining their family honour and status in the city, while using misdirection and hidden methods to bring about the downfall of rival houses. Arranged marriages, star-crossed lovers and secret affairs could also be significant factors in such a campaign, especially if characters develop tendencies to operate outside the expected tiers of society and rub shoulders with the peasantry.

Mercenary Band

A classic tradition is the band of mercenaries out for coin, serving a succession of employers and looking to live another day come hell or high water. Any character with some skills in arms will be welcome in a rugged, travelling merc party. Aristocrats hoping to become worldly (or simply avoiding the responsibilities of their bloodline) often find themselves among such groups, as do thieves on the lam from the law and the legitimate criminal guilds. Getting lost in a wandering group of sell-swords is about as good a disguise as can be conceived. Here, Barbarian Hunters can rub shoulders with Freeman Soldiers and Slave Woodsmen, all looking out for one another when the blades start swinging and the blood starts flying.

The dilemma faced by many of these warrior bands is one of employment. Work is usually easy to come by for skilled fighters, be it border skirmishes, escort duty or as part of an army in pitched battle, but the *moral* question of some employers is one that many groups find troublesome. If they are desperate enough (as Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are on many occasions) then working for someone with a shaky ethical code can be a necessary evil, but many of the wealthy people seeking to employ skilled fighting men and women have malicious and vicious reasons for doing so. It can be a grind on the soul to labour and kill for a man one despises, fighting in his black-hearted cause purely because one needs the coins to eat. Games Masters who are fond of this moral uncertainty can highlight this aspect of doubt and guilt in their campaigns and stay firmly in the genre.

They should also note that turning on an evil employer and ramming a length of sword-iron through his belly is also a thematic thing for characters to do. Everyone has limits, after all.

Barbarian Clan-Brothers

A group of barbarians, bound by clan ties and stricken by wanderlust, can make for a fantastic and thematic group of characters. The northerners come south as raiders, explorers, mercenaries or merely opportunists seeking their fortunes by whatever Fate brings their way. The differences between these uncultured Cold Wastelanders and the people of the so-called 'civilised south' can be emphasised for maximum roleplaying potential, with misunderstandings and culture shock becoming major themes in the campaign.

The character possibilities need not be restricted to violent barbarian stereotypes, though there are undeniable elements of fun and realism in doing so. Other possibilities include a more civilised guide tagging on with the barbarians, such as a Bard, Mercenary, Merchant or Performer who seeks to keep the group out of trouble when cultures and customs clash. The varied Professions of the barbarian characters can also make for a diverse and interesting group, such as a party made up of a Bard (Singing Skald), a Hunter, a Warrior and an Explorer. The broad spread of talents in a group such as this prepares them for a wealth of different situations.

Characters and Magic

A character's Magic Points represent the potential magical power that he could muster if he had the ability to channel sorcery. Most characters will simply not use their Magic Point rating at all. This is perfectly acceptable in the setting: true magic is rarer in Nehwon than in many other fantasy settings, with the *Swords* novels especially focusing on the protagonist characters encountering, opposing and foiling magic-wielding enemies. Almost all magic in Leiber's stories has an unearthly, sinister or malicious flavour to it. While sryers and hedge magicians exist in droves, those with the capability to command serious magical power are almost uniformly twisted and evil.

In the *Lankhmar* campaign setting, magic is something the characters encounter rather than wield. Sorcery is more often an evil influence they must escape or overcome,

rather than manipulate themselves. As such, the Magic Point score on most character sheets will simply go unused. Those rare characters that do walk the dark path in sorcery themselves are the exception to this rule, but they have their own problems to worry about.

In Nehwon, White Magic and Black Magic are at opposite ends of sorcery's spectrum. Beneficial, kindly magic is never dealt with in the *Swords* novels, though it is mentioned, barely, in passing. Minor witches, diviners and soothsayers are common enough, though their magic is so weak as to barely compare to magic in traditional fantasy. This is considered Hedge Magic in game terms. The magic of priests, such as miracles granted by the Gods in Lankhmar, is considered Faith Magic. These two magical disciplines are considered to be 'White Magic' when used for good. They can rarely be used for evil because they are so unreliable and weak. It is believed a more potent form of White Magic exists (or once existed), but the discovery of one who could teach such an innocent and pure form of magical manipulation would be the result of many adventures, and characters becoming apprentices still remains unlikely in the extreme. Perhaps White Magic was more common in ages past. Perhaps the people of Nehwon have always been too inwardly tainted – too human – for such a selfless magic.

Last of all is Black Magic, also called sorcery. It is this third path that the overwhelming majority of Nehwon's admittedly few powerful magicians learn to master – or to at least control for a short time. Since sorcery has little to do with character creation and is more often something players will encounter, it is dealt with in detail in *Swords Against Spells* on page 138, rather than here.

Hedge Magic

Hedge Magic covers the art used by witches, witch-doctors, astrologers, wizards, necromancers, fortune tellers and so-called holy men to see the future. For each form of divination, the actual ritual used is a different one. Necromancers might speak to skulls or divine from the intestines of a slain animal (or human), while a witch might stare deeply into her cauldron of boiling water and divine the future from the pattern of herbs on the surface, and an astrologer create complex star charts based on how the heavens influence what is to come. Ultimately, the result is all that matters.

Unfortunately, most people who say they practice divination are charlatans out to score easy coin from gullible and desperate fools. What is arguably worse is that even those with a real talent for Hedge Magic lack any significant power to see the future with any degree of reliable accuracy.

To be able to practice Hedge Magic, a character needs the new Advanced Skill: Divining.

Divining (POW)

This skill allows a character to use his trained ritual method to see dimly into the future. Skulls do not truly talk to necromancers, the stars cannot be proved to relay exactly what will come true and the herbalistic drug-induced visions of witch-doctors will not always show the real future. Instead, use of Divining through whatever ritual means is part-theatrics, part-interpretive guesswork and part magic – albeit in the most minor and unreliable sense. After the ritual is complete, the character sees hazy images in his mind of what *might* be.

Use of Hedge Magic takes 1D4 hours to complete, during which the diviner can do nothing beside his ritual work. Games Masters (and players performing this for Non-



Player Characters) are encouraged to create outlandish rites based on their 'mystical' tradition, playing up the self-important spectacle of the act as much as possible.

After the roll, the diviner reveals 1D6 'facts' about the character's future. If the roll is successful, at least *one* of these facts is true, though they will rarely *all* be true. If the roll fails, none of the facts revealed are true and the Games Master is entitled to make up nonsense that may never happen to the character.

The facts revealed are usually vague, based on images rather than in-depth knowledge. 'You will kill a man with black hair while holding a sword in a dark room' is a good example of something that may or may not come true, but for most adventurers it is a relatively likely prospect anyway. As such, use of the Divining skill can be an interesting way to foreshadow some events that the Games Master has planned out. It is safest if the events hinted at are those which are integral to the plot and are less likely to be missed by players acting outside the Games Master's prepared plot.

Some Hedge Magicians take vagueness to the limit, turning it into a twisted art. These are the diviners who insist that a character should 'never make camp with a one-eyed man while the star Astorian is in the sky,' because they saw an image of the character fighting a man with an eye-patch in a forest at night. Such confusing information can make for some great roleplaying, and it is up to the Games Master to play it through to the end, with the night-fight (if it was even true) eventually revealed as a life or death battle against a mutilated Mingol slaver, or a practice bout against the character's brother who was recently wounded in the eye.

Divination is never an exact art. While it is not recommended that all Hedge Magicians become examples of how best to frustrate the players by misdirection, the fact remains that relying on this weak and unreliable magic is a fool's game at best.

Faith Magic

The magic of divinity is not strong in Nehwon. There is even debate, especially around tables in the taverns of Lankmar's Atheist's Avenue, as to whether the gods even exist or ever influence mortal life.

While the gods (arguably) exist in the world they are entities to be acknowledged, appeased and occasionally asked for luck, rather than beings that are prayed to in exchange for divine power. People pay lip service or homage to a deity in their own way, whether attending occasional nightly sermons on the Street of the Gods or mumbling a prayer to the Shark God as another prisoner is executed by being fed to the sharks of Ilthmar harbour.

Joining a religion is not the formal matter of some other *RuneQuest* settings. All one needs to be a Lay Member in a god's cult is to say he believes in the deity. He need not even be telling the truth. The Mouser was considered a lapsed worshipper of Mog the Spider God purely because he indulged Ivrian for a few months and told her he believed in Mog. The fact of the matter is that the gods hear every time a mortal speaks their name, maybe even *thinks* their name, and they turn their attentions accordingly.

There are two ways for mortals to interact with the gods. The first is to be an established member of the god's cult, receiving the minor bonuses that entails. The second is to offend the god and draw his ire. The former is desirable for the pious. The latter is desirable for no-one but the insane.

Cults

The cults of *Lankhmar* work slightly differently to those of generic *RuneQuest*. Joining a cult as a Lay Member is as simple as believing (or pretending to believe) in the god the cult is based around. As long as the character openly acknowledges out loud that he believes in the god, he is thereafter considered a Lay Member in game terms even if he never gives the deity another thought. However, no matter how many gods the character professes belief in, he may only be considered a Lay Member in three or four cults maximum, depending on the Games Master's discretion. Individual deities or small groups of patron gods are the established traditions in Nehwon. Any more belief is vague, dispersed and does not draw the gods' attention.

Lay Members have no responsibility to their cult unless they choose to make it so. They tithe as much or as little as their conscience and attention spans decree – the average Street of the Gods sermon will earn a cult between a few Tiks and several hundred Smerduks depending on how far to the east or west the religion has come.

The one advantage to the often vague and half-hearted belief in a god is the ability to call on the deity for aid. This does not take the form of priestly magic manifesting after daily prayer, or miraculous healing whenever the adventurer needs to seal his wounds. Instead, this rare call for a god's distant aid is reflected in the rules for Divine Intervention, as found on page 83 of *RuneQuest*.

A successful call for Divine Intervention (which is no easy feat at the best of times) has two key differences in the *Lankhmar* setting. Firstly, it can only be called upon once per year, not once per month. Secondly, the only result possible is a divine effect related to the god's area of influence, rather than the casting of spells or resurrection of companions. The aid offered by a Divinely Intervening deity will always be something that is *probably* the god helping his worshipper, but *might not be*. To wit, it is an ambiguous event that would have a priest nodding sagely and thanking his god, while a faithless man could sneer and jeer at the pious fool for assuming it was the work of the divine rather than purest luck. Examples for god-specific Divine Intervention are listed in the Street of the Gods section in *City of the Black Toga*, page 53.

TRUE PRIESTS

Rising above Lay Member status is dealt with on a cult by cult basis. For some religions, particularly the easternmost faiths on the Street of the Gods, becoming a priest is no more than simply declaring that one is priest. In larger and more organised religions such as the faith of Aarth, structured hierarchies are in place and the cult more resembles a traditional religion with high priests, ministers and lay brothers. The roles and responsibilities of these members are dealt with in the Street of the Gods section in *City of the Black Toga*, page 53.

Hero Points

Finally, *Lankhmar* characters are allotted four Hero Points at character creation, not two as in standard *RuneQuest*. In a world of darkness, decadence and few opportunities for magical healing, luck is a heroes' closest ally. The characters of Nehwon campaigns are made of sterner and more fortunate stuff than many others among the populace, and although Player Characters do not gain Hero Points any faster than other characters, they begin with a slightly larger pool to represent their supply of death-defying luck and ability to scrape out of trouble by the skin of their teeth, much as Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are so fond of doing – usually at the very last possible moment.

LANKHMAR

LEGEND

1. Gods of Lankhmar Temple
2. The Great Library
3. Temple of Tyaa
4. Ogo & Nemia
5. Harbourmaster's Office
6. Beggars Guild
7. Thieves Guild
8. Slayer's Brotherhood
9. Southern Barracks
10. Lankhmar Theatre
11. Bone Market
12. House of Red Lanterns
13. Curio Court
14. The Silver Eel
15. The Golden Lamprey
16. The Rat's Nest

CITADEL
OF THE
OVERLORD

Inner
SEA

GREAT
MARSH

RIVER
HLAL

NORTH
BARRACKS

ROYAL DOCKS

RAINBOW PALACE

NORTH
DOCKS

SOUTH
DOCKS

MARSH GATE

CAUSEY ROAD

GREAT
MARSH





CITY OF THE BLACK TOGA

Dominating the Land of Lankhmar and crouching at the silty mouth of the River Hlal in a secure corner between the grainfields, the Great Salt Marsh and the Inner Sea is the massive-walled and mazy-alleyed metropolis of Lankhmar, thick with thieves and shaven priests, lean-framed magicians and fat-bellied merchants – Lankhmar the Imperishable, the City of the Black Toga.

– Introduction, Swords Against Deviltry

City of Thieves. City of Adventure. City of the Black Bones. City of Seven-Score Thousand Smokes. The Imperishable City.

Lankhmar.

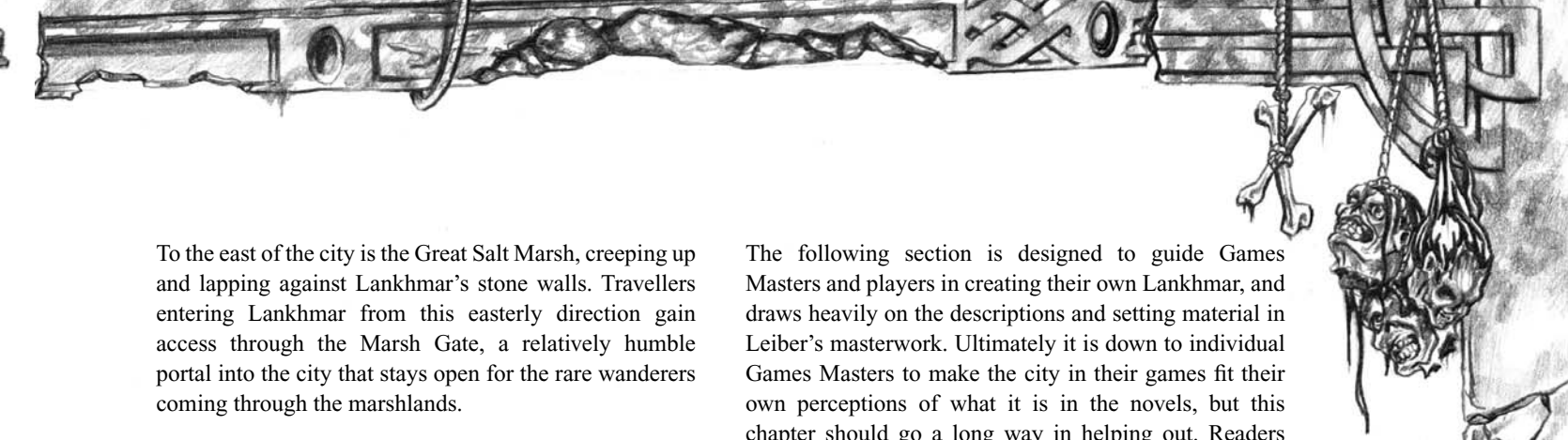
Lankhmar is the oldest, grandest city in the world, a sprawling human hive of tarnished beauty, incredible opulence, abject poverty and moral decadence. It is a bastion of civilisation, if not civility, with its cobwebbed streets home to thousands of merchants, priests and workers and its shadowed back alleys a haven for beggars, thugs and thieves. Lankhmar is a chaotic bastion of life – the perfect place for the type of men and women who live by their wits and blades.

On First Sight

To the north of Lankhmar is the Inner Sea. Those travellers seeking to enter Lankhmar from the sea find themselves repelled by the Sea Wall by Royal Docks in the northernmost section of the city. Sailors and shipboard passengers will see that behind the Sea Wall lays a lush garden district and the towering, many-coloured spires of the overlord's estate – the Rainbow Palace.

To the south of the city are vast grain fields, responsible for feeding the residents of the city as well as forming the tidy bulk of many a merchant's profits. The Grand Gate is the largest of Lankhmar's entryways, capped with beautiful architecture and dozens of statues, welcoming travellers from the south with a display of grandeur. The Grain Gate is the second of the three southern gates, open almost exclusively for the constant traffic of laden wagons returning from the fields in an endless trail. The End Gate is the least of the southern gates, set far from the Grand and Grain Gates, and is used primarily for nefarious dealings and criminal purposes, such as smuggling and entering the city without being noted by the authorities.





To the east of the city is the Great Salt Marsh, creeping up and lapping against Lankhmar's stone walls. Travellers entering Lankhmar from this easterly direction gain access through the Marsh Gate, a relatively humble portal into the city that stays open for the rare wanderers coming through the marshlands.

To Lankhmar's west is a stretch of the Inner Sea that leads into the great River Hlal, as well as the expansive city docks. The docks are loci of activity at all times of day and night, filled with ships coming in to dock, cast off and leave, load grain, unload imported cargoes and hordes of people going about their individual businesses. All of this is punctuated by the constant sound of an argument or a fight breaking out somewhere along the wharf, frequently nearby one of the many taverns that line the docks.

On Second Thought

As with everything in Lankhmar, these grand images of a glorious, bustling city are tainted somewhat. Lankhmar is not known as the City of Seven Score Thousand Smokes for nothing. Whether due to evening fog coming from the coasts or the smog of ten thousand night-fires, past sunset Lankhmar becomes a city wreathed in dark clouds that block out the moon and the stars. It is said that the black toga garb of Lankhmar's social and political elite were once traditionally white, but the filth in the air ruining the material soon made a darker hue the more sensible choice.

In addition to the smoky fog that chokes the air above the city, Lankhmar is known for its smell. This is to be expected in any coastal city with a large population and vigorous industries, but the stench can reach overpowering levels if the smog becomes extremely thick, such as on windless, sweltering summer nights. One might say that the smell is part of the city's character, which would be an unfortunate truth.

A Grand Tour of Lankhmar

The Lankhmar of Fritz Leiber's *Swords* series is never completely defined. At no point in the stories is the city ever laid out and comprehensively mapped for the reader. What is presented are a host of richly-detailed locations around the city, which easily serve as the foundations for readers and Games Masters to envision this chaotic, fantastical metropolis.

The following section is designed to guide Games Masters and players in creating their own Lankhmar, and draws heavily on the descriptions and setting material in Leiber's masterwork. Ultimately it is down to individual Games Masters to make the city in their games fit their own perceptions of what it is in the novels, but this chapter should go a long way in helping out. Readers will find a wealth of information here, beginning with the basic facts of life in the city and moving into a tour through the streets, alleys, taverns and palaces of the City of Thieves.

Matters of Coin

In a city filled with merchants and thieves, the acquisition of money is a subject dear to the hearts of many Lankhmarts. Traders and businesses will take coinage from across the length and breadth of Nehwon, but the land of Lankhmar uses the following currency:

Iron Tik – the smallest coin in both value and size, Iron Tiks are sometimes referred to as 'pennies.' These are thumbnail-sized square shards of iron, usually cheaply minted with the imprint of the Guild of Grain Merchants symbol on one side and the minting date on the other. It is not unusual for even poor characters to have a pocket rattling half-full of Iron Tiks. Tiks are used mainly to buy cheap drinks, to hand over to beggars and to spend on anything else of almost no value. *Five Iron Tiks make up a single Bronze Agol.*

Bronze Agol – the first coin of any real value in Lankhmar's currency, the Bronze Agol is a large round coin with a hole in the centre. The coin is imprinted with a view of the city's walls on one side and the minting date on the other. Agols are used primarily for cheap services such as hiring porters, paying for shoddy equipment or accommodation, average-quality meals and inexpensive drinks. *Ten Bronze Agols make up a single Silver Smerduk.*

Silver Smerduk – The Silver Smerduk is the backbone of Lankhmarese industry, used to buy services and make purchases from across the board. Most tradesmen and workers within the city, as well as hirelings, adventurers and mercenaries who generally work outside the city, are paid in Smerduks. The coins are smallish and round, marked by the previous overlord's face on one side (as a post-mortem honour) and a view of one of the four city walls on the other.

city of the Black toga

The wall on the back of the coins changes every year, from the Grand Gate of the south wall round to the Royal Docks of the north wall. *Twenty Silver Smerduks make a single Gold Rilk.*

Gold Rilk – The standard coin of Lankhmar's prosperous elite (or most adept thieves) is the Gold Rilk. These coins are smaller than Smerduks and Agols and are close to the Tik in size, but are obviously worth a great deal more than either. They are minted with the face of the current overlord on one side and that of his wife on the other. The overlord's face appears on both sides if the ruler is unmarried. *Two hundred Gold Rilks make a single Diamond in Amber Gluditch.*

Diamond in Amber Gluditch – These coins almost never fall into the palms of most Lankhmarts, due to their rarity and value. Diamond is common enough to be used as trade currency in the largest deals and purchases, but the tiny chips of diamond necessary would be easily lost. Centuries ago, a previous overlord had the insight and creativity to demand that a new (relatively) common currency take advantage of Lankhmar's bevy of diamond mines by encasing minute shards of the gemstones in small pellets of amber approximately the size of a fingertip. These coins are stored in vaults and counting houses rather than carried around in pockets like metal coins.

Lankhmarts have a saying, often related to watered-down beer, skinny wenches or cheap bed sheets: *Thin as a hundred-year-old coin.* This is born from the wear that soft metal coins such as Tiks, Smerduks and Rilks tend to show after a few years. Lankhmar coinage is based on weight, which means that as coins start to wear out from years of changing hands and rubbing against each other on the inside of pockets, they can lose value. Every few years the overlord's counting houses recall old coins, which are melted down and re-minted. This is the primary reason Lankmarese coins are dated.

Taxation & Tolls

Taxes and tolls rise and fall depending on the political climate, the state of war in the land of Lankhmar and perhaps most importantly, the whims of the current overlord. Some overlords levels flat tax on the number of residents in any given household (the so-called 'head tax') which has been the subject of more than one revolution by families with many children and little income. A more acceptable variant involves taxation based on the

Currency Converters

Copper is common enough in Lankhmar that it is never used as currency. For the purposes of currency conversion from basic *RuneQuest* to Lankhmar campaigns, use the following rule:

Lead Bit = Iron Tik
Copper Penny = Bronze Agol
Silver Dollar = Silver Smerduk
Gold Ducat = Gold Rilk

Five Iron Tiks = One Bronze Agol
10 Bronze Agols = One Silver Smerduk
20 Silver Smerduks = One Gold Rilk
200 Gold Rilks = One Diamond in Amber Gluditch

number of adults within a household, though this proves difficult each time it is instituted because the various specifications of the different overlords responsible for the law have never agreed on the year a resident is considered taxable. The most recent proponent of this tax is Overlord Radomix Kistomerces, who set the level at 15 years of age, some years later than all previous decrees, which list ages ranging from 11 to 14.

A popular form of taxation takes the form of personal asset evaluation, with tax inspectors cataloguing the net worth of an individual's property and belongings and charging him a percentage based on the result. This leads to chaotic times around tax collection days, with many Lankhmarts hiding valuable personal possessions in order to pay less tax. In the past, intelligent (and greedy) overlords instigated this tax in order to raise a great deal of capital in a short time. Admittedly the lower classes of Lankhmar – especially the slum-dwellers – end up paying very little in tax because of their deceptions, but if tax week is timed just right it can bleed the nobility and aristocracy dry for some time and swell the overlord's coffers. For example, few noble families would hide their valuable jewellery and heirlooms during the summer party season, which is dedicated to showing off and looking one's best. In a very real sense, their pride makes them pay. Obviously, most nobles and grain merchants in Lankhmar can afford to pay steep taxes even several years running, since the wealth of the city's great and good is staggering in many cases.

The main toll that every Lankhmar knows all too well is the gate toll for coming into the city. The guards on duty at the various city gates are often easily bribed, but the tolls still generate significant revenue from travellers and merchants. Each gate has a separate toll, based on the traffic that each portal into the city usually sees.

The Grain Gate at the south wall is barred from admitting travellers, and only admits grain wagons, field workers with leather chits stamped by the Guild of Grain Merchants and indentured criminals set to work as slaves in the fields. Due to the Harvest Tax (see below) the Grain Gate imposes no additional tax upon the merchants or workers that use it.

The Grand Gate, also in the south wall, is the main source of traffic in and out of the city. The guards here are harder to bribe than at the End and Marsh Gates, purely because there are usually many witnesses and some are likely to be city watch officers with their men. A lucky bribe of a Bronze Agol or three will gain a traveller access, but the standard toll of five Agols is non-negotiable. Day and night, this gate tax remains the same.

The End Gate in the south-east is a small entrance, used mainly by pilgrims, travellers and skinflint merchants seeking to avoid the Grand Gate tax. Ostensibly the five Agol charge applies here as well, though bribes can go as low as a small handful of Iron Tikks. The lack of heavy patrolling at this smaller gate means that bribery is much easier to get away with, and accordingly more common. Wagons are banned from entering via the End Gate unless they are proved to be for personal purposes and not trade. A slightly weightier bribe, usually in the region of a couple of Agols, is enough for many of the guards stationed there to overlook that particular law.

The Marsh Gate faces directly into the inhospitable Great Salt Marsh and sees only a trickle of traffic compared to the other gates. The toll for coming into the city via the Marsh Gate is only a single Agol, easily bribed down to a few Iron Tikks. Wagons are also barred from entering the city here, both for personal and trade use, since the Marsh gate leads directly onto the Street of the Gods and no amount of bribery will be able to hide a wagon on the holiest road in Lankhmar.

The Western Docks see the most outside trade coming into the city, conforming Lankhmar's reputation as a flourishing port. Upon docking (and shelling out a one Smerduk docking fee 'formality') a captain must turn over his manifest to the office of the port authority before unloading a single ounce of cargo. The accountants of the port authority calculate the value of the cargo and charge 5% of the total. Bribing the port authority depends on the ethics of the accountant in question, and it should be borne in mind that they are paid well by the government for their service. Spot checks are performed on approximately half of the vessels that come into port, in order to ensure the captains have not missed anything of value from the manifest.

A final tax, the largest and most important of all, is the Harvest Tax – a set payment that applies to the Guild of Grain Merchants and never changes from overlord to overlord. After the harvest profits are reaped, the overlord's tax collectors take a full quarter of the entire Guild's profits. This might seem harsh, but the profits from Lankhmar's grain fields are vast indeed, and this yearly payment counts for a great deal of the overlord's treasury, which in turn pays for repairs to the city, upkeep of the docks and the maintenance of the military. Still, an overly wasteful overlord (and that is a relative term given the decadence of Lankhmar's nobility) can raise the ire of the Guild of Grain Merchants. In such cases, if the merchants are not placated, revolution is rarely far behind. Lankhmar breathes and grows because of her grain merchants and only the most ignorant overlords ever forget that.

Lankhmar Fashion

When it comes to clothes for the lower classes, standard medieval fare is the order of the day. Trousers, hose, long skirts, shirts and jerkins made of cheap but durable cloth tend to be the main garments worn by Lankhmar's poor. Hats to shield a person's eyes from the sun are not common, since the coastal climate is more often stormy than sunny. The grain field workers probably enjoy the most sun of any citizens and it is among these workers that wide-brimmed straw hats are most often found.

The middle classes, such as tradesmen, craftsmen, professionals, business owners and lesser merchants, tend to favour the black toga from which the city takes one of its many names. Jackets, shirts and other items

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A Note on Guilds

This chapter presents several of Lankhmar's guilds, with details provided for player characters to join them if their goals lay in that direction. However, readers will note that by traditional *RuneQuest* standards, these guilds appear very light on special bonuses. They teach no spells, the rules of Runelords and other ranks are largely absent, they offer fewer tangible benefits than the cults in generic *RuneQuest*, their requirements for rising in rank are different to the standard template and they seem to come with more responsibility than most cults do – almost like a job. The entrance requirements are also a matter of roleplaying and character development rather than simple percentage limits on skills.

In truth, a job is exactly what each of these guilds represents. A character in the Beggar's Guild or the Thieves' Guild takes on a certain amount of responsibility in the name of earning more money than he would independently.

The bonuses offered are slight from a game mechanics perspective, but this is never going to be the main reason for joining a guild, nor is it to be the main focus of a guild character's development. Games Masters are spoilt for choice when it comes to characters who take on additional guild duties as well as their adventuring pastimes. The primary reward for joining a guild should always be represented in the twists and turns of the story arc rather than in dice bonuses. A member of the Thieves' Guild will have access to information and of heists no Lankhmarts outside the Guild would ever know about. A member of the House of Red Lanterns will have intimate dealings with merchants and ranking military officers among her clientele. A Beggars' Guild member will overhear secrets most gossipmongers may miss.

The storyline opportunities presented by guild work should always be a motivating factor when Games Masters plan their campaigns. If players are going to spend their time nailing down a career and restricting their wanderings, it behoves Games Masters to make something cool come of the sacrifice.

of clothing are usually tailored to individuals, sitting on their owners with more appeal than the loose-fitting garments of the peasantry. Unsurprisingly, dark colours remain popular with the middle classes, who tend to care more than most slum-dwellers if the night-fogs ruin their outfits.

In high society, fashions change with the turning of the seasons and only one garment retains its class all year-round – the black toga. The balls, galas and parties of Lankhmar's prosperous aristocracy and wealthy pretenders are always competitions in who can make the blacks, greys and dark hues of the city's fashion into a dress to be admired by all others. Tailors with an instinctive eye for creating beautiful, classy outfits with the limited dark colours available to them are in high demand among noble Lankhmarts. A character with excellent tailoring skills has a chance to make quite a name for himself and perhaps even infiltrate high society despite his low-born roots.

Lankhmar's high society is known for its resiliency in times of strife and upheaval, able to adapt to changes as they come. During the Year of Feathered Death when birds tore the jewellery from women's bodies and scarred them horribly, the rich noblewomen and wives of grain merchants took to wearing lightweight silver cages around their heads, both as a curious fashion item and to protect their faces and wealth from avian-inflicted mutilation and feathered thievery.

Festivals & Holidays

Lankhmar is a city with a lot to celebrate: victories in war, the accumulation of endless wealth, the parties and get-togethers of the social elite and the seasonal celebrations of the harvest are among the most notable, but several annual holidays stretch across the year at irregular intervals.

The Overlord's Deathday

A day of mourning is held to honour the death-date of any overlord. The Deathday is an annual event where each year of an overlord's reign sees a celebration of the previous overlord's deathday on the date he died. Officially, this is a day of rest and respect, though in truth most of the peasantry use the day off work to celebrate ('raise a glass to the old overlord!'). The higher classes often throw last-minute galas to mark the occasion and ruminate on the potential changes to come in government and society.

The Seed & Harvest Festivals

The week in which the southern grain fields are seeded for the coming year is technically a holiday week, though most workers are far too busy to really enjoy it. However, most taverns cut their prices by a few Agols or Tiks for the Seed Festival week. The Harvest Festival is a day of raucous celebration on the date the last bushels of grain are brought in from the fields. Taverns usually cut their prices by half for the night and remain open until dawn. Nobody is expected to work the following day, which is a fact most people take full advantage of. Even members of the Thieves' Guild tend to abstain from their trade on this evening, though some may choose to 'work.'

Masquerades

A popular form of celebration, usually among the aristocracy but occasionally emulated on more humble terms by the peasantry, is the notion of a masquerade party. Nobles hold elaborate dances and ballroom parties at their estates, preparing expensive tailored dresses and elaborate masks weeks in advance. The poorer elements of the city usually gather in the Plaza of Dark Delights for carnivals of sorts, wearing simple porcelain or copper masks that hide their faces, and celebrate military victories or a particularly bountiful harvest.

Day of the Dead Rat

After the Rat Plague, the citizens of Lankhmar had a new respect (mixed with the old, ingrained fear) for the Gods of Lankhmar. The general belief among the populace is that the gods walked that day, killing rats with their death-touch and summoning hordes of cats to chase down the rodent invaders. On the annual date that the Rat Plague was finally driven from the city, the Lankhmarts leave offerings of black togas, food, drink and even money on the steps of the black-stone Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar.

'The Overlord's Mercy'

The law of Lankhmar is generally referred to by the catch-all term 'the overlord's mercy,' which is something of a joke to the city's citizens. When they use the word *mercy* they are referring to the fact that crime goes largely unpunished in Lankhmar. In some instances, such as the rule of Kastarck Overtamortes, overlords have not only tolerated the city's vast underworld activities but have actually been immersed in them. Another Lankmart saying describes the attitudes of many of its residents: *'To the pious, it's the City of the Black-Boned Gods. To the rich, it's the City of the Black Toga. To the poor, it's just the City of Thieves.'* Whereas the nobility and wealthy aristocracy of Lankhmar focus on the garment that they habitually wear each day of their lives, the downtrodden dwell on the lawlessness that shapes the parts of the city they live in. Few rich Lankhmarts would ever refer to their city as the City of Thieves (at least not if they were trying to impress someone). Likewise, no slum-dwelling worker or cut-throat thinks of Lankhmar as the cradle of civilisation and will rarely use a name as grand as the City of the Black Toga.

City Watch

Made up of constables that report to barracks commanders within the military, the city watch is the main bastion of law and order on the streets of Lankhmar. To say that it is corrupt is an understatement and might imply that the foundations of the watch have honest, decent roots. The opposite is true. The watch is not a good, hard-working organisation mired in corruption, but rather a thoroughly inefficient, nasty little ragtag army that occasionally does a good job out of necessity to hold its position and keep up appearances.

Not every single watchman is a walking, laughing, bribe-taking dereliction of duty, but most are. A constable need not even be a bad person to fall into corruption – the overwhelming lawlessness and dangers of Lankhmar ensure even the most virtuous man will have all manner of trouble clinging to his morals (and Lankhmar is short of virtuous men at the very best of times).

The dark alleyways and dangerous streets of Lankhmar after dark make for uninviting patrols. Realistically, there is simply no way for the city watch to do their

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job efficiently. To catch a thief, a constable has to go into the slums and hunt the criminal down, and the odds of walking out of that duty with an un-slit throat are not good. Then there's the matter of actual arrests stirring up the local thieves and their influential leaders. Causing trouble for the Thieves' Guild is asking for a world of trouble, as few guilds have the power and reach available to Lankhmar's thieves.

Citizens are never surprised to find a constable on the take. It is simply a part of life in Lankhmar. Bribing constables to look the other way or release a prisoner is nothing new to many Lankhmarts. Part of the reason so many watchmen are so susceptible to bribes is that the city recognises the inherent impossibility of their job and pays them next to nothing. At first glance this might seem unfair, but city officials are well aware that most constables earn significant portions of their money on the side from bribes and kickbacks. It is a vicious circle and no-one knows how it started; did the constables go corrupt because of the rise of the thieves or did the thieves only rise because the constables let it happen?

Whatever the answer, the unscrupulous city watch walk the streets during the day, and half of them are as guilty as those they half-heartedly try to arrest. Come nightfall, constables patrol the city and man the gates, but stay well away from the slums unless they have bribes of their own to pay to the Thieves' Guild.

In regards to equipment, the guardsmen of the watch wear browned iron cuirasses and helms, and they carry pikes and clubs as weapons. Few bear shields, though they are not forbidden to do so.

Games Masters might consider a city watch game for their campaigns, based on characters that are part of (or opposing) the constables of Lankhmar. This could be a very satisfying campaign, though the odds are heavily-stacked against any characters that wish to bring law to the rugged and ragged streets of the City of Thieves. Deciding which bribes to accept and which to reject can be a tricky balance as well. Characters will need to be aware of any of actions which might antagonise the Thieves' Guild beyond their own abilities to counter. Individually, Lankhmar's criminals will be no match for a dedicated, quick-thinking team of constables, and such a campaign might be gritty, intense and rewarding for Games Masters with a taste for such adventures. The biggest danger lies in the myriad lawless elements of the city taking notice of the 'do-gooders' and seeking to put an end to the characters once and for all.

The City Watch

Lankhmar's first and only line of law

Oh, there're always one or two guys who like to play the heroes. They're the ones that forget just for a while how all of us in the city watch spend our rainy days and smoke-filled nights knowing that the thieves and assassins of Lankhmar are much better organised than we'll ever be. They've got a better guild, for a start. What really hurts is that they get paid a lot more than us. That's just insult to the injury, if you ask me.

— Sergeant Ruven, Lankhmart Constable

Requirements: The right attitude and a clean arrest record *or* a penchant for giving beatings and a guiltless, bribe-taking outlook

Skills: 1H Club, 1H Sword, Dodge, Influence, Streetwise

Duties: Eight-hour shifts patrolling or on gate guard duty, four days out of every seven

Special Benefits: A handful of Smerduks a week in pay and a clean conscience *or* a sore neck from looking the other way and whatever kickbacks are taken from criminals

Bribery

It is not just the constables of Lankhmar that can be bribed. Bribery is a part of day-to-day life in the City of the Black Toga, with a few coins of the right metal opening all kinds of opportunities if they find a home in the right palms.

For most Lankhmarts, offering or taking a bribe is basically another form of haggling. Whether the deal is to buy silence, look the other way or get off the hook, the taker always tries to push the bid up by another few Tiks or Agols. The person offering the bribe knows as soon as he tries for the deal that he is entering a bargaining posture and will haggle accordingly. In an ideal world, upstanding citizens would be offended if someone offered them a bribe. Precious few delicate or honourable

souls exist in Lankhmar with those kinds of ethics, and to be offered a bribe is commonplace. Even judges can be bribed, as long as the accused character can find a way to get the money to the head of the court without arousing suspicion.

Punishment

In those rare instances where the so-called overlord's mercy does catch up with a criminal, it is usually because the crime was exceedingly heinous and cannot go unpunished, or the crime was so minor that justice can be done without angering the Thieves' Guild or one of their associated brotherhoods. In the case of the former, a 'heinous crime' usually means someone with a great deal of influence, social status and money has made enough fuss about their grievances that the law takes notice. The actual crime can be something as minor as burglary or as grandiose as multiple murders and poisonings. All that matters is the influence of the victim and how much he cares about justice being done.

The following table lists the crimes and associated punishments in the city of Lankhmar. Games Masters should be well aware that bribing one's way out of each crime or fine depends entirely on whom the victim is and how persuasive the character can be at his own trial. For most crimes, a simple fine and public apology is enough. Judges offer the choice to pay the fine instead of meeting the sentence in almost every case, since the court gets a cut of every fine paid.

Crime	Fine	Sentence
Harassment of a noble	Public apology and 1D12 Rilks	1D3 months of indentured servitude
Theft	Equal value to that which was stolen	1D6 months of indentured servitude
Property damage	Equal value to that which was damaged	1D6 months of indentured servitude
Assault against a noble	25% of character's current wealth	Public flogging and 1D3 years of indentures servitude
Debt / Tax evasion	50% of character's current wealth	Public flogging and 1D4 years of indentured servitude
Mutilation	50% of character's current wealth paid to victim, 25% to the court	Loss of eye or hand, decided by judge
Treason	None	2D6 years of indentured servitude or death by beheading
Murder	None	2D6 years of indentured servitude or death by hanging

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Repeat offenders are usually forced to serve the sentence unless they are convincing in any insinuations of repentance. Any instances of indentured servitude are served as slaves in the Rainbow Palace staff, in the household of one of the overlord's blue-blooded allies or in the grain fields south of the city. If a character is unable to pay the fine within three days and nights of his trial, he is forced to accept the sentence.

Games Masters wishing to judge characters more harshly (perhaps if a character wrongs an important or unusually-powerful noble) should feel free to make the punishment more serious by choosing the fine and sentence in the row below. For example, harassing a noble woman in the street comes with a three Rilk fine or 1D3 months of slavery. Harassing the daughter of a visiting dignitary or the overlord's female relatives might warrant double that, at 1D6 months of indentured servitude.

Slavery

Slavery is a complicated matter in Lankhmar. Some overlords have legalised the slave trade; others have banned it from the city with the exception of indentured servitude from criminals and prisoners of war. No overlord to date has entirely banished the practise, though it is generally considered illegal except as punishment for criminal behaviour.

In some cases, slaves purchased from outside the land of Lankhmar are considered legal, since other lands practice slavery with impunity. Many of these 'outsider' slaves serve in noble households and taverns, rather than in the grain fields, where punished criminals are usually set to work. As a rule of thumb, most overlords enforce an edict that no Lankhmarts can legally be sold as slaves and all indentured servants are the property of the overlord himself. Foreigners tend to be excluded from this otherwise relatively humanitarian law, but so goes the decadence of Lankhmar.

The Military

The nation of Lankhmar has a large standing army, most of which is stationed in garrisons around the land rather than being housed in the Imperishable City. The reasoning for this varies from overlord to overlord, with some rulers not wishing to have a huge military presence stationed locally because the threat of invasion is so infinitesimal, others preferring not to risk a coup from disloyal army commanders and others simply finding

that too much local soldiery offends their mercantile (and generally peaceable) sensibilities. Major garrisons are stationed in the towns of Tovilyis, Kartishla and Earth's End, recallable at the demands of the reigning overlord or the Captain General of Lankhmar's army.

Lankhmar's soldiers are uniformed in black and are armed with swords and spears of browned iron. Most are also armoured in dyed-black leather breastplates with accompanying vambraces, thigh- and shin-guards. Each garrison answers to a commander, who in turn answers to one of several generals, most of whom serve on the overlord's War Council. These generals answer to the Captain General, who directly serves the current overlord. In previous eras, the Captain General has held nearly as much authority as the overlords of various bloodlines, with the authority and the audacity to disobey orders as he sees fit. When revolutions begin, it is often the Captain General that leads the revolt, either to install himself on the throne or in the name of a preferred candidate.

The Lankhmarines

The finest fighting force in Lankhmar (and by extension, the whole of Nehwon) is the Lankhmarines. While Lankhmar's vast navy is manned by sailors that see some degree of battle training, the largest ships in the overlord's fleet carry small regiments of the finest fighting troops in the world. Only a few thousand Lankhmarines exist at any one time, since they are highly-paid and the standards of excellence they adhere to means that many recruits simply do not make it to professional service.

Lankhmarines

Lankhmar's elite naval soldiers

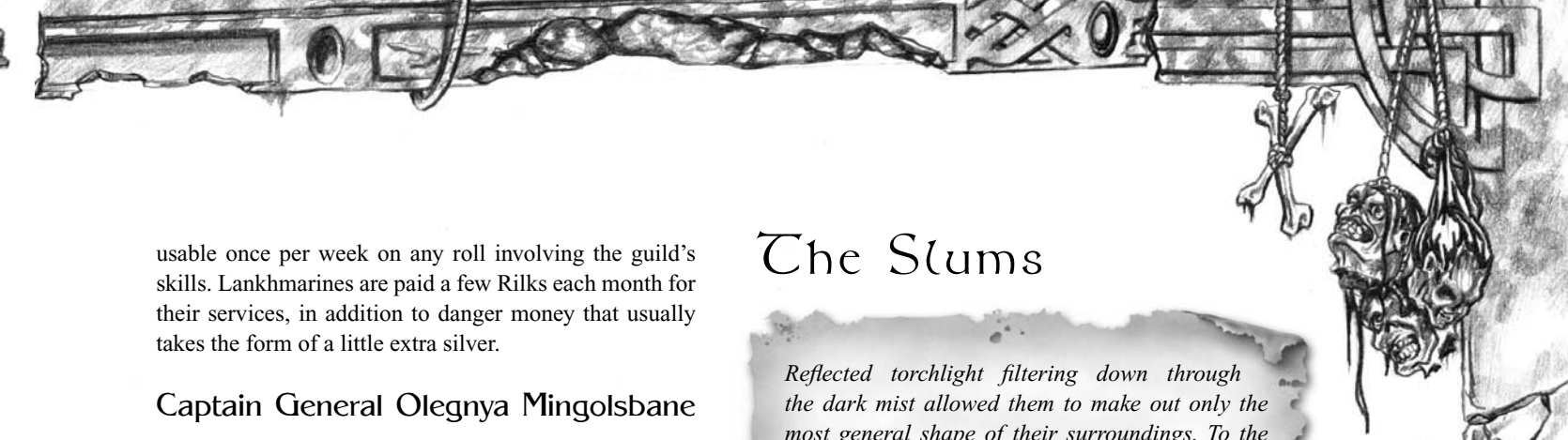
These men are granted additional training compared to common soldiers and are often charged with the most dangerous boarding actions and beachhead landings in times of war.

Requirements: All guild skills at 30% or more

Skills: Boating, 1H Sword, Athletics, Bow, Dagger, Shiphandling, Stealth

Duties: Service in the Lankhmarese Navy for 10 months out of every 12

Special Benefits: Lankhmarines gain +10% to all Influence rolls in Lankhmar's taverns because of their reputation. All Lankhmarines have a Second Chance roll



usable once per week on any roll involving the guild's skills. Lankhmarines are paid a few Rilks each month for their services, in addition to danger money that usually takes the form of a little extra silver.

Captain General Olegnya Mingolsbane

Soldiers and constables, according to their individual characters, grinned with relief or griped at bureaucracy's inanities when they got the news that they were to repair to the Southern Barracks one hour before midnight to be harangued by Olegnya Mingolsbane, who was reputed to make the longest and most tedious spittle-spraying speeches of any Captain General in Nehwon's history, and to stink with the sourness of near-senility besides that.

— Swords of Lankhmar

For the majority of the *Swords* novels, the Captain General of the Lankhmarese military is the ageing hero Olegnya Mingolsbane, renowned for his victories in battle during Lankhmar's most recent conflicts with the Mingol people. Olegnya was well into his eighties at the time of his death during the Rat Plague and was involved in both politics and the military right up until the end of his life. On a less serious note, he was also known for his long-winded and boring speeches, and often found a reason to speak at any social functions he attended.

Games Masters dealing with high society characters or groups tied into the military have an excellent resource in Olegnya Mingolsbane, and one that ties in to the reign of several overlords from before the *Swords* novels right through to Gliplerio. With his active involvement in politics as well as leading the Lankhmar military, Olegnya has his fingers on a lot of pulses, despite his apparent senility. As a patron, he is likely to set tasks for characters who are almost certainly tied into either Lankhmarese high society or the Mingol hordes elsewhere on Nehwon, allowing a near-seamless interchange between two wildly divergent themes. Games Masters dealing with a group that is divided between preferring nobility-based campaigns and those preferring wilderness survival, combat and diplomacy with the enemy could do a lot worse than setting up the Captain General as a mentor, contact or acquaintance of the party.

The Slums

Reflected torchlight filtering down through the dark mist allowed them to make out only the most general shape of their surroundings. To the right was more windowless, high walls. To the left, crowded close to the back of the Silver Eel, rose a dismal, rickety building of darkened brick and blackened, ancient wood. It looked utterly deserted to Fafhrd and Vlana until they had craned back their heads to gaze at the fourth-story attic under the ragged-guttered roof. There faint lines and points of yellow light shone around and through three tightly-latticed windows. Beyond, crossing the T of the space they were in, was a narrow alley.

'Bones Alley', the Mouser told them in somewhat lofty tones. 'I call it Ordure Boulevard'.

'I can smell that,' Vlana said.

— Ill Met In Lankhmar

To begin exploring Lankhmar, it seems fitting to start at the bottom rungs of society's ladder and work up, since this is the point of view most city residents (temporary or permanent) will share. Lankhmar has no shortage of slums. These are the sections of the city where the only law that exists is that which the criminal guilds allow. Though the Thieves' Guild is a significant power behind the Overlord's throne, nowhere is their presence felt more acutely than in the southern ghettos and slums of Lankhmar. Life and death are cheap here, worth a hundred times less than the price of even the lowest slaves bartered among the nobility. Here lives are ended for a few Iron Tiks – the merest shred of a slave maiden's value. Unsurprisingly, the populace often refer to the slums as the *thieves' quarter*.

Architecture & Layout

As a general rule, the buildings of the slums are multi-storied, compact tenements. Most have at least four floors, giving the slums an appearance of hundreds of cheap, old, badly-stacked buildings all leaning slightly to various sides and pressing against each other. These confined buildings are ringed by an extensive and haphazard (some would say random) network of alleyways that lead out onto larger streets.

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The twisting, labyrinthine alleys of Lankhmar's slums are uniformly pitch-dark, receiving neither moonlight nor the fire of torchlight to illuminate them. The fog and the leaning buildings block out any hope of the night sky shedding any light on these alleys, and the lamplighters who are paid a pittance by the city council rarely risk their lives to cast torchlight on whatever back-alley dealings go on in the slums after dark. The broader, straighter streets of these areas are where stalls and lesser businesses spill out onto the cobblestone roads, and are where the major taverns and guilds are located.

The main streets in the slums follow the unimaginative but clear method of thoroughfare monikers in the rest of the city: only the slums get the choicest vile names as befits the architecture and atmosphere. Whore Street and Pimp Street are self-explanatory, populated by those

selling their bodies and the bodies of others, respectively. These oft-visited roads are among the best-lit streets in the slums, laid out as they are on the borders of the merchant district.

Cheap Street is a narrow boulevard, intersected by many other alleys and roads, with a great many stores offering goods at the price and quality one would expect from the street's name, as well as craft shops that lack the skill, resources or prestige to make it on Crafts Street in the richer mercantile district. Several interlocking alleys and small plazas meet in a densely-populated but completely non-commercial area of the slums, going by the name Plague Court. It is here that various plagues in Lankhmar's history have first broken out due to the packed confines and poor quality of life, and here that a previous Overlord ordered many of the victims' bodies burned. Though all marks of this ancient funeral pyre are gone today, when walking through the area of tumbledown buildings and rotting tenements it is easy to see why disease is rife at times.

Bisecting a section of the huge southern slums is Carter Street, the longest, widest stretch of road in the city and one that leads from the Grand Gate to the courtyards of the Rainbow Palace. As businesses and accommodations go, the slum buildings edged onto this street are (relatively speaking) the least shoddy in the area.

Other streets and alleys acquired their names from what goes on after nightfall rather than the intentions of any city planner. Dim Street, home of the notorious Silver Eel watering hole, was named for its darkness in the shadows of other buildings and the ever-present smog. Murder Alley and Death Alley are named for the proximity to a certain building nearby, the Thieves' Guild headquarters, as well as the prevalence of killings that occur in the area. The only souls walking this place after sunset are thieves on legitimate (by guild standards) business and merchants on the way to pay their protection money. Anyone else is either very brave, very foolish, very lost...and soon likely to be very dead.



Abandoned Temples to Forgotten Gods

'That's Lankmar City for you,' the Mouser observed. 'You turn your back and they've put up a new secret temple'.

'Good ventilation, though,' Fafhrd commented on the absence of smoke.

Lankmar's slums have their secrets. Dotted here and there around the poorer and richer areas of the city alike are shrines, monuments and other places of worship that were once temples to the worship of gods now long-ignored or long-forgotten by the people of Nehwon. In some cases these buildings have been converted into small storage warehouses, guild headquarters or even squalid, tenement apartments. They hold little to nothing of the places they once were. The majority, however, still stand as they have for centuries of abandonment and are untouched in the years since. They are all barred from entry and trespass is forbidden by the law of Lankmar, upon pain of death. These slowly-rotting temples are often believed to be cursed and a pox on the fools that trigger such hexes by poking their noses where they should really avoid. Who knows what secrets lay within these crumbling walls and long-forgotten cellars?

Employment & Business

The dregs of the city live here, eking out an existence by backbreaking honest work no-one else will do, or more likely by dishonest work at the expense of others. Anyone in Lankmar's sprawling, stinking slums who has not been the victim of an attempted shakedown in the form of extortion or mugging probably has not been in the city more than a few days. It usually takes less than a day or two for most visitors to encounter the criminal elements that thrive in the ghettos. Such meetings rarely go well for the victim – the Thieves' Guild does not maintain an iron control over the city by being lenient in its heartland.

The stores and stalls located in the slums, even those on the edge of Carter Street or closer to the merchant's district, are at the poorer end of the spectrum in regards to quality and service. Here one finds street-sellers offering charcoal-heated ale on the corners of cobblestone roads, punctuating a host of cobblers, tanners, hide-makers and curers, knackers, curios dealers and tinkers, which all make up a large percentage of the slums honest 'industry.' Fences, muggers, thieves, cut-purses and hired killers make up the majority of the sizeable illegal portion. Begging is a trade deemed to stand somewhere between the two, as panhandlers are well-known for acting up in the name of sympathy, pretending to be blind or maimed ex-soldiers. Additionally, because begging is a guild-controlled activity, the Beggar's Guild has a noted connection to the Thieves' Guild, further blurring the lines between honest and crooked panhandlers.

The taverns in the district are the drinking holes of the slum residents, and they also see trade from those who visit Lankmar and either prefer rough living or lack the funds for any other option. Raucous and seedy ale houses such as the Silver Eel and the Rat's Nest have a 'colourful' clientele, ranging from wandering adventurers and sell-swords stopping off in the city, to more unsavoury patrons such as thugs, thieves and petty murderers who count these places among their regular haunts. Reputable recruiters seeking mercenaries, couriers and similar hirelings do use the slum taverns to seek potential employees, but more often than not the jobs offered over the beer-soaked tables of a dim thieves' quarter tavern have a criminal or immoral element to them. Of course, many unscrupulous souls seek out these ale houses for precisely that kind of work; they want jobs that match their moral flexibility. Whether the recruiter is offering something fair or foul, he is likely to find takers among the crowds of a slum tavern. In Lankmar, as long as the price is right, the offer of coin can alter many a virtuous man's sense of right and wrong.

The Silver Eel

The Silver Eel is a typical slum tavern as well as one of the more popular establishments in the Lankmar. If a traveller needs a place to breathe a spell and quaff some ale, the Silver Eel can provide such for a minimal cost. If a sell-sword is seeking a patron and some steady coin, the Silver Eel boasts more than its fair share of disguised wealthy folk using the tavern as

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The Silver Eel bustled with pleasantly raucous excitement. Fighting men predominated and the clank of swordsmen's harness mingled with the thump of tankards, providing a deep obbligato to the shrill laughter of the women. Swaggering guardsmen elbowed the insolent bravos of the young lords. Grinning slaves bearing open wine jars dodged nimbly between. In one corner a slave girl was dancing, the jingle of her silver anklet bells inaudible in the din. Outside the small, tight-shuttered windows a dry, whistling wind from the south filled the air with dust that eddied between the cobblestones and hazed the stars. But here all was jovial confusion.

— The Bleak Shore

a recruiting ground for skilled hirelings. Beyond this, the Eel also tends to house the expected number of ruffians, drunkards and slum-dwellers that have failed to better their lot through incompetence, bad luck or no desire to do so. On some nights the Eel can be a grim place, but most of the time it is raucous and generally merry.

The landlord, Braggi, is a corpulent middle-aged fellow well into a lifetime of obesity. He is a close-mouthed man, well able to keep secrets (especially if his life rests on being tight-lipped), but not above taking the odd bribe here and there if he is sure he can get away with revealing information without drawing trouble upon himself. Some of the Eel's patrons consider Braggi a fat opportunist who will meet a bad end one night when he lets slip the right secret to the wrong ears.

The entertainments on offer are many and varied. Dancing girls, cheap ale and dicing for coins set the foundation for an enjoyable night at the Eel. It is also the favoured drinking hole of a lively pair of rogues known among the crowds as Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser. When they are present at the Eel, they are often drinking, whoring, gambling or making a great meal out of telling the tale of their latest exploits. It should be noted that not everyone believes these tales, which are often a mixture of dark magic, sinister mystery, beautiful wenches, impossible

monsters and bald declarations of personal heroism that range from merely immodest to approaching godlike in nature. Other patrons can at least get some entertainment out of the tales, if nothing else.

The reason the Silver Eel sees so many nights end in scuffles and all-out brawls is that Braggi employs few bravos to mind the clientele. While he is not shy about whacking heads with his weighted club if the need arises, Braggi is generally content to let lads fight it out amongst themselves. The regular patrons of the Eel are loyal customers on the whole, and will leap to the aid of serving wenches or dancing girls that become involved in any brawl.

The tavern front is located on Dim Street. The building itself is not quite as run down as many of the surrounding tenements, though it is hardly in a condition one would consider 'good repair.' The ground floor features the tavern bar and gambling tables. The first floor is where Braggi lives, and he rents out the second and third floors for private use, cash first and no questions asked. The top floor is gutted from a fire that occurred a few years ago. There is a rumour around Lankhmar's slums that the top floor of the Silver Eel is actually cursed, and that two young women died there through unknown means.

Behind the building, Bones Alley stretches out, which smells exactly like the kind of place it is: an alley in which locals dump their chamber pots, dead pets and the occasional murder victim.

The Rat's Nest

If the Silver Eel is typical of many slum taverns (downtrodden, out of the way and patronised by travellers and lowlifes), the Rat's Nest is several steps further down the scale in terms of quality. The building is a ramshackle three-storied affair, with barred windows set in the stone walls. Once these windows were glass-faced, before an endless number of brawls (and killings) that ended with the losing combatant thrown through a window out into the street. The bars mean that there are no windows to be smashed and replaced, and no chance of any brawler leaving any way other than the door. Regulars speculate, with gap-toothed smiles and knowing winks, that this also means fleeing the tavern is a difficult process. If someone seeks to make a run for it to avoid a gambling debt, blocking the only exit foils their escape plan quite succinctly.

Strands of fog came questing through small high-set street-level windows into the tavern called the Rat's Nest, interlacing curiously with the soot-trail from a failing torch, but unnoticed except by an old harlot who pulled her patchy fur cloak closer to her throat.

All eyes were on the wrist game being played across an ancient oaken table by the famed bravo Gnarlag and a dark-skinned mercenary almost as big-thewed as he. Right elbows firmly planted and right hands bone-squeezingly gripped, each strained to force the back of the other's wrist down against the ringed and scarred and knife-stuck wood.

— The Cloud of Hate

The Rat's Nest is a nasty place, through and through. The entertainments offered run the gamut from poor to obscene. Cheap, ugly and often ageing whores who cannot find work elsewhere (or who simply walk in from the street) are the kinds of harlots that trade their wares here. The main tavern area is a chaotic mess of cheap, old wooden furniture marred by beer- and blood-stains. Arm-wrestling bets are commonplace, as are drinking contests and knife games. The first of the Rat's Nest knife games involves hurling throwing daggers at a painted target on the east wall. The second is a nerve/accuracy contest involving a knife-wielder stabbing his blade on a table between his splayed fingers, one at a time, and increasing his speed as he goes. Bets are taken about how many seconds the game can go on without the player stabbing his own hand.

The real treat for the rough clientele of the Rat's Nest goes on under the floorboards. In the expansive cellar, illuminated by wall torches that fill the basement with a thingy haze of choking smoke, a large section of floor space is used for bare knuckle brawls and knife fighting. Patrons are free to place bets on any fights down in the cellar, most of which end in either maiming or death for one of the combatants. Nonlethal battles are not rare, but they see smaller bets and tend not to attract large crowds. Bodies from the 'real' matches are usually smuggled through the streets in a cart and dumped in Bones Alley.

The Golden Lamprey

Bordering the southern slums and the somewhat more hospitable heart of the city, the Golden Lamprey is noted for its many similarities to the Silver Eel, punctuated by a few minor differences. Firstly, it is generally seen as a positive sign that the establishment has a small number of bouncers armed with billy clubs making themselves known by the door and the bar area. The clientele remains generally as rough as the patrons of the Eel, however. Secondly, it is commonly said that the wenches and whores at the Lamprey are more appealing and indulgent than those at the Silver Eel. Of the three floors above the main bar room, one belongs to the owner, Herkal, and the others are rented out either by the night (for inn patrons) or by the hour (for those paying for a whore's services).

Herkal is an underhanded businessman, stick-thin all over and with a sharp eye for sneaky opportunities. He has been known to hire mercenaries himself, usually to cause trouble in other taverns so that bad reputations spread and drive customers through his doors. He has a less than friendly rivalry with Braggi, landlord of the Silver Eel, and both tavern owners have stooped to hiring ruffians,



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thugs (and in one instance, a poisoner) to threaten, rough up and attempt to kill their rival. Characters patronising one tavern over the other have every chance of getting involved in this petty little feud.

Nattick Nimblefingers, Master Tailor

Nattick is a skilled tailor, though his advancing years mean he must work twice as hard to be as fast as he used to be. A slight age-tremor is noticeable in his hands as he works, which is one of the reasons Nattick works in the small fitting room behind the counter of his shop front. His business sees a brisk trade in workers and travellers alike, who are drawn to his reputation as a quick, cheap mender of clothes. In truth, Nattick can barely remember the last time he made new clothes for someone other than himself, since all of his work these days revolves around repairing the travel-worn garbs of his many regular customers.

On occasion, Nattick has been known to offer a room (or at least a pallet) to travellers he knows well who lack the coin or the desire to stay at one of the taverns nearby. Several of Nattick's friends have used his generosity in the past, usually when on the lam from the law. His own house consists of his business on the ground floor and his quarters on the first floor, which is also where Nattick keeps his collection of cheap Lankhmarese wine.

Gerard's Forge

Off Cheap Street and tucked neatly at the mouth of a side alley is a small business that looks like little more than a market stall at the front of a building. From inside the building, the clang-clang-clang of hammers against metal rings out from dawn until dusk, which does not please residents of the surrounding tenements; especially those that live directly above.

Gerard's Forge, marked by a crudely-scrawled and creaky wooden sign above the street-facing market stall, is one of the major blacksmith shops in the slums. Field workers come to Gerard for scythe and sickle repairs, housewives for kitchen knives and sell-swords for weapons and armour. In the workshop behind the stall, a dozen apprentices work day in and day out. At the stall itself, Gerard lays out weapons and tools every morning, and conducts business without lifting a finger at the forge. Most of his customers know that Gerard could not make a sword if his life depended on it, since the man has had no formal training. What he does have is

the wits to hire several failed apprentice blacksmiths and set them to work in the hopes their skill would improve over time. In some cases, his patience was rewarded; in others, less so.

Gerard's work is unreliable, for the quality depends entirely on which apprentice is on the job. Their skills vary wildly from one to the next and overall it is easy to see why they were released from service by their masters. Despite the poor quality of Gerard's smithy, he still sees a great deal of trade. His low prices have everything to do with this – in the past he has driven other smithies out of business by savagely undercutting them.

It is well known that Gerard seeks the contract to supply the southern army barracks near to the slums, but the quality of his work is a mark against his hopes. In the meantime, he desperately seeks other workers who will raise the standards of his current employees. When deep in his cups, Gerard has been known to admit that his life-long dream is to open a store on Crafts Street, though this generally provokes laughter from anyone that knows Gerard's business practices.

Bone Market

At the end of each week, thousands of Lankhmarts converge on the heart of the slums, taking up almost all available space on Cheap Street and several adjoining roads. Rugs and clothes are laid out on the cobblestone streets, hastily-erected market stalls spring up and wares are hawked at the top of a hundred voices. This messy collection of buyers, sellers and traders is the Bone Market, also known as the Rag Market, the Dirt Market and (even less affectionately by many nobles) the Scum Market.

Any possession, item or object that a person wishes to sell will usually find a buyer or a barterer at the Bone Market. Lankhmarts who need a little extra coin, even just a few Tiks to get by, will come down to sell their home-made wares or any junk laying about their homes that they no longer need. Some Lankhmarts turn a modest profit each week, hiring out as cobblers and tinkers or selling craftwork like embroidery or weaving. Others just come for the opportunity to track down a bargain, maybe even a family heirloom that must be sold because the owner has fallen on hard times. Local legends about heroes finding magic swords for sale even reach the ears of children, enchanted weapons gone to rust and in need of a spot of polish to shine once again.

Headquarters of the Beggars' Guild

Down on Cheap Street is the building run by the Beggars' Guild, used as a headquarters and a hostel for its members. The actions of the Guild are overseen by two co-leaders, the Day Beggarmaster and the Night Beggarmaster, who take command of the Guild during their respective times of day. The building itself is three storeys tall and features a second storey connecting walkway to an adjoining building, which is also used to house the charlatans and flimflammers of the Beggars' Guild.

The responsibilities of the Beggars' Guild are simple enough. Members are expected to walk the streets either from dawn until noon, noon until dusk or nightfall until midnight, and beg for money by putting on any number of acted ailments and feigned injuries. A few walk the cobblestone streets from midnight until dawn, but this is a rare assignment and dangerous even for those allied with the Thieves' Guild. Most, but not all, beggars in the Guild are actors, plain and simple, specialising in one particular form of panhandling, be it blindness, walking with a limp and telling a 'maimed veteran' story or

something equally deceptive. Though most Lankhmarts are aware that the Guild is populated by liars and fakers, many are good enough actors to convey an air of being 'true' beggars and exceptions to the dishonest majority. It is surprising how many marks fall for the act in the space of a single afternoon or evening.

The secondary (some would say primary) pastime for Beggars' Guild members is to gather information. Most of this is gossip and rumours picked up from taverns, overhearing pedestrians and tailing marks through the streets without being seen, as well as hanging out outside certain merchant buildings and various guild houses. Most of this information falls into the categories of gossip, rumour or worthless talk. Other information falls neatly into the realm of interest that pricks up the ears of the Thieves' Guild, and is sold to the thieves for a pittance. Anyone can bribe a beggar, but the thieves get to do it for cheap because of the alliance between the two guilds. The beggars act as additional eyes for the thieves; the thieves split the profits from ventures completed with the beggars' aid.

Games Masters focusing on the underworld elements of Lankhmar, which are so deeply-entrenched in the setting it can be hard *not* to figure them into the campaign, need to pay consideration to the extensive network of criminal activity that sits with the Thieves' Guild. The Beggars' Guild are the eyes and lips of the thieves, tracking people down, overhearing everything spoken above a whisper in Lankhmar and faithfully relaying all to the Master Thief. Characters wishing for any degree of privacy are going to have to play things very carefully in public, for fear that any one of the beggars on the streets or downtrodden souls sipping cheap soup in a slum tavern is a beggar out looking for information to take back to his masters. To operate with impunity in Lankhmar, bribing the Beggars' Guild is the first step. Doing so will effectively close the eyes of the Thieves' Guild to the characters' actions, at least until the thieves' other contacts bring information to them.

The downside to this is that bribing the Beggars' Guild is no easy feat. Bribing individual beggars to remain silent is one

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thing. Silencing a guild is quite another. This is where the Day Beggarmaster and Night Beggarmaster of the beggars' brotherhood come into play.

Both of the leaders oversee and coordinate the Guilds' efforts, and much of the Guild's style is based on their respective personalities and work ethics. In *III Met in Lankhmar*, it is established that Flim is the Night Beggarmaster whilst Krovas is the head of the Thieves' Guild. He is a portly man who carries a gilded staff, and has a noted limp in his stride. Flim is clearly dedicated to the Guild, for he worked the day and night shifts while the Day Beggarmaster, Bannat, was ill abed for over a week. It is also well-known that Flim frequently arranges his own shifts to take place on Whore Street so that he can indulge his appetite for pleasures of the flesh.

Games Masters who design their own Beggarmasters have an excellent opportunity to provide hooks for the characters to deal with the Lankhmar underworld. These figures are generally approachable, though a Games Master might decide that one or both of them require certain hoops to be jumped through before they grant an audience. Overall, it makes sense that getting to see them is not a problem unless their personalities dictate that they prefer to be secretive for a compelling reason, such as a genuine mutilation they prefer to keep hidden.

Dealing with the Beggarmasters is the fun part. Mostly, the alliance with the Thieves' Guild runs deep enough that any insurrection against the other guild is unlikely at best and inconceivable at worst. Bribing a Beggarmaster to remain silent on some topic, or perhaps even to spread disinformation to the Thieves' Guild, is a different flip of the coin. With a weighty bribe, some Beggarmasters who are less than loyal might consider stunting the flow of information, or altering certain aspects of it. Of course, we are talking a Rilk-based bribe, and a great deal of Gold Rilks at that. The price will vary depending on the favour required and the Beggarmaster's attitude, with some perhaps even asking for a task to be performed or some item located before they will put their necks on the line for the sake of the characters.

If an offered bribe is refused, the chances are that the Thieves' Guild will hear about it straight from the Beggarmaster's mouth. This is likely to draw the attention (and the ire) of the Thieves' Guild, who will suddenly want to know why a character wanted to blind the criminal gang to certain actions.

Beggarmasters that take an inordinate amount of interest in a character are also in a position to make life very hard for the Player Characters. Beggars following the characters around day and night will make it hard for the group to keep any of their activities secret, for prying eyes will open in every dark alleyway. Though the Beggars' Guild is rarely a combative antagonist in any *Lankhmar* campaign, it can still feature as a cunning and frustrating enemy. Games Masters should be careful about spotting or foiling every single action undertaken by the Player Characters, however. The Beggars' Guild are not perfect in their trade and the characters deserve the chance to escape notice if they keep their wits about them. Lankhmar is a huge city and hiding places exist around every street corner.

Another option is for a campaign to be based around Beggars' Guild characters. There is a lot to be said for the kind of roleplaying the characters would be in for, having to act their disabilities and stay one step ahead of rival (freelance) beggars who may or may not have legitimate injuries of their own. Missions to tail a certain merchant or spy on a certain noblewoman would have their appeal for some groups who enjoy the urban underworld, though perhaps the best examples of criminal games would come from mixing the Beggars' Guild with the rogues from Thieves' House.

The Beggars' Guild

Brotherhood of charlatans and information-gatherers

Requirements: Pass an entrance interview with either Beggarmaster

Skills: Disguise, Influence, Language, Perception, Stealth, Streetwise

Duties: Eavesdropping and begging

Special Benefits: All Guild members gain a +10% bonus to all Influence rolls with constables to resist arrest or make a successful bribe. Beggars also gain a +10% bonus to all Perception and Streetwise rolls while in Lankhmar, by virtue of always knowing what to look for.

Guild members donate 50% of their take each day and night to the respective Beggarmaster. This donation is the same regardless of rank in the Guild.

Thieves' House

The Thieves' Guild is the undisputed power among Lankmar's guilds. During the reign of some overlords, the Master Thief has even been the power behind the throne, whispering his whims into the ear of the weak overlord and seeing them carried out across the city. Even at its weakest, the Guild is still unrivalled in power among the others, with even the Guild of Grain Merchants investing heavy bribes to keep its warehouses free of burglary and its members' families free of muggings. Overall the sentiment among Lankmarts is that the Thieves' Guild must be tolerated and appeased, though it is often simply feared.

At all times, the Thieves' Guild recognises the presence of promising members and considers them potential Guild leaders one day. When a Master Thief dies, his advisors and the gathered 'stars' of the Guild decide between them who will next take on the role of leadership. Few Master Thieves die of old age or natural causes. Most meet their ends on a job, death at the hands of those they have crossed in the past, or through a network of inter-guild treachery which is never as rare as members' claim.

Thieves' House, the base of the Guild, is a colossal building, easily the largest in the southern slums. It is found on Cheap Street, opposite Death Alley and

In one street rather narrower and more silent than the rest – Cheap Street, its name – a square yellow torchlight shone from a wide doorway in a vast and rambling house of stone. There was something ominous in a single open door in a street where all other doors were barred against the darkness and the damp. People avoided this street at night. And there was reason for their fear. The house had a bad reputation. People said it was the den in which the thieves of Lankmar gathered to plot and palaver and settle their private bickerings, the headquarters from which Krovas, the reputed Master Thief, issued his orders – in short, the home of the formidable Thieves' Guild of Lankmar.

– Thieves' House

backed by Murder Alley. It stands four storeys high, is constructed of dark stone, and has few windows on any side. The front entrance of the Guild headquarters is a low door that remains open at all times. It is guarded by thieves taking shifts, lurking in a hidden alcove above the door on the inner side.

The rooms of Thieves' House are used for training purposes as well as for residential concerns. The following training, activities and pastimes take place on the ground floor, according to *Ill Met in Lankmar*:

Pickpocket Training: *In one room young boys were being trained to pick pouches and slit purses. They'd approach from behind an instructor, and if he heard scuff of bare foot or felt touch of dipping hand – or, worst, heard clunk of dropped leaden mock-coin – that boy would be thwacked. Others seemed to be getting training in group-tactics: the jostle in front, the snatch from behind, the swift passing of lifted items from youthful thief to confederate.*

Lock Picking: *In a second room, from which pushed air heavy with the reeks of metal and oil, older student thieves were doing laboratory work in lock picking. One group was being lectured by a grimy-handed greybeard, who was taking apart a most complex piece by weighty piece. Others appeared to be having their skill, speed, and ability to work soundlessly tested – they were probing with slender picks the keyholes in a half dozen doors set side-by-side in an otherwise purposeless partition, while a supervisor holding a sandglass watched them keenly.*

Dining Hall: *In a third, thieves were eating at long tables. The odours were tempting, even to men full of booze. The Guild did well by its members.*

Evasion: *In a fourth, the floor was padded in part and instruction was going on in slipping, dodging, ducking, tumbling, tripping and otherwise foiling pursuit. These students were older too.*

On the first floor, a long corridor is decorated by rich drapes on the walls and filigreed hanging pots of spicy incense. In the rooms on this much-quieter floor, an array of clothing for costumes and disguises is kept stowed away in dressing rooms. The walls display several mirrors and each room also contains huge supplies of cosmetics, false beards, wigs and perfumes.

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Halfway down the first floor hallway is the main planning and equipment room of the Master Thief and his inner cadre. An entire wall of this marble-floored room is covered in a vast map of Lankhmar. *'Every building and street seemed depicted, down to the meanest hovel and narrowest court. There were signs of recent erasure and redrawing at many spots, and here and there little coloured hieroglyphs of mysterious import.'*

Thieves' tools, from pry-bars and hammers to ratchets and wire-thin hooks, line another wall, along with a staggering collection of knives. On a huge central table, wooden models of dozens of Lankhmar's buildings – the very buildings the thieves plan to hit within the next month or so – are rendered in painstaking detail to the point where a character can take the roof and floors off one by one and peer at the floor plans inside. Dozens of rolled-out and weighted-down maps are also present, highlighting the methods of entry, exit and any secret passageways into a number of targeted buildings. During the reign of Krovas, seven straight-backed but well-padded chairs surround this square ebony table. Other leaders of the Guild have chosen more or fewer contemporaries to elevate to advisor (and potential rival) status.

This room is also used for the so-called Thieves' Jury. When a member has allegedly wronged the Guild by dramatic failure or betraying secrets, he stands before a council of his peers and is judged according to their wishes.

The roof of Thieves' House is guarded by several guild members armed with slings who watch the surrounding rooftops and the streets below. Unbeknownst to most Lankhmarts is the fact that the Guild owns dozens of the nearby buildings, using them as caches, hidey-holes, canteens, hostels and bases of operation. The real secrets of the Thieves' Guild are not found on the roof overlooking the street, however, but under the floorboards of the lowest level.

The basement of Thieves' House is a series of cellars of various sizes, interlocked with the cellars of countless other buildings through a dizzying number of tunnels, under-earth corridors and labyrinthine passageways. Many of these tunnels are disused and long-forgotten by the Guild – such is the extensiveness of the passage


network. The rooms that still see use are used for storage and access to other parts of the city, and although it is unlikely to be considered a positive feature, access to the sewers is also possible through several corridors.

Games Masters have a lot of scope when it comes to detailing just what hides down in the dark cellars and subterranean corridors of Thieves' House. In some campaigns it might even mirror a classic 'dungeon' of sorts, with ancient artefacts forgotten by the people above, and both mundane and supernatural enemies lurking in the abandoned tunnels. Any imaginable kind of squatters (human or otherwise) might have taken up residence in the lightless passageways. Characters entering these tunnels without their own light sources are likely to become lost in a very short span of time, for the corridors are utterly devoid of illumination.

The only established fact, discovered at the time of Krovas's death, is that somewhere in a forgotten section of the cellars, the ancient mummified bones of the Dead Master Thieves rest in motionless undeath. As the tunnels descend further into the earth, the air becomes hotter and drier and it can seem as if the blackness all around somehow becomes even thicker. Dust particles taint the air and hamper all senses of taste and smell.

In these deeper catacombs and passages, old traps remain set and active, ready to be sprung. Rusted blades spring out of the walls on squealing hinges and springs when a certain flagstone is stepped upon, and darts flaked with dried poison slash out of holes, still bearing enough venom to affect a hardy man and render him paralysed. Many such traps exist, designed to ward against intruding upon the Dead Master Thieves or any number of other forgotten relics and treasures.

In the deepest of these hidden cellars, the air takes a sudden, almost imperceptible spiciness to it, a *dead* spiciness reminiscent of the ancient desert tombs of the Eastern Lands. If one calls out he may determine from the echo that he stands in a large chamber that stretches out for some distance. The ground is carpeted in a thick blanket of fine dust. In the silence, soft rattling – the clicking of bone on bone, and bone on stone – and the flapping of either bat's wings or old rags can be heard. In this deepest cellar is the basement-tomb of the Dead Master Thieves.



These mummified corpses are akin to the Gods of Lankmar (detailed below) preserved in honour because of their great achievement in founding the Thieves' Guild. These walking, talking corpses had long been forgotten by even the Guild members in the early *Swords* novels, though in *Thieves' House* the Dead Master Thieves walk to exact their revenge and show their displeasure on the

new Master Thief Slevyas and the Guild above their resting place, for not returning the jewelled skull of one of their number. The Dead Master Thieves only rise up and walk the halls of the guild house when they deem the Guild has degenerated and needs to return to its 'noble' roots, though determining what degeneration actually is in such circumstances is a matter for undead near-deities

The Dead Master Thieves

For campaigns centred around or involving the Thieves' Guild, it can be almost irresistible to use the Dead Master Thieves. They embody the corruption under Lankmar's surface as well as the archaic, eerie nobility of the Imperishable City, and they have just the right touch of the supernatural to make them frightening and unnatural, yet still acceptable on some level by Lankmarts.

Games Masters will probably need to use the Dead Master Thieves sparingly to preserve the macabre element of fantastical horror that they bring to the setting. This can be remedied by remembering just what will stir these undead souls to action. Ultimately, the only thing that matters to these revenants is the Thieves' Guild. This allows Games Masters to use the Dead Master Thieves in some interesting ways. An intruder who finds his way into the network of passageways through either the sewers or an adjoining cellar is in for a serious shock if he stumbles into the tomb-basement. The Dead Master Thieves have no reason to harm any intruder unless the character either threatens the corpses directly or has intentions of destroying the Thieves' Guild. On the contrary, the Dead Master Thieves are likely to either ignore the interloper or to converse with him, albeit in breathy, sinister voices and on macabre subjects that few still-living people would ever want to talk about.

The real promise for the Dead Master Thieves to feature in any thief-orientated campaign is for the ancient founders of the Thieves' Guild to take an active interest in what goes on above their heads. This can take the form of a 'walk' up top to slay any thief that is grievously harming the Guild or has offended the founders in some way. This is more of a one-shot deal, though. A Games Master cannot spring that more than once without there being a risk of such a momentous and fearsome event becoming trite and mundane, at least not in a short space of time.

Something to consider is that perhaps not every thief has forgotten the presence of the undead founders standing restless in the cellar. The Dead Master Thieves might have contact with a select few Guild members, the few thieves that come to offer their respects and maybe even seek the wisdom of these mummified elders. In this case, it would be appropriate for the Dead Master Thieves to speak cryptically of Guild politics and member behaviour, even setting the occasional task for their loyal mortal followers, tasks which are designed to reduce any negative influences or actions within the guild. The undead founders might want certain thieves with dangerous or disloyal tendencies removed or killed, or the guildmaster replaced, or some icon of importance brought to their tomb-cellar.

For the game mechanics of the Dead Master Thieves, see *Adventures of Nehwon*.

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and not the minds of mortals. After the death of Slevyas at the bony hands of the Dead Master Thieves, the Guild began to pay respect to the slumbering founders of their brotherhood by leaving personal offerings and a cut of each month's take in a disused stage room close (but not too close...) to the tomb-cellar.

Intruders finding themselves in the tomb-cellar of the Dead Master Thieves might be killed for their impudence but more likely the dead guild-founders will seek to converse with the intrepid soul that braved the maze of rooms and tunnels to make it so far. When Fafhrd stumbles into their basement in *Thieves' House*, the Dead Master Thieves calmly explain their disgust at the actions of the guildmaster (and frighten the barbarian half to death just by doing so) before embarking on a death-dealing stalk through the guild house to end dozens of thieves' lives. If Games Masters wish to use this moment to argue for either increased guild recruitment rates out of awed piety, they should feel free to do so. Likewise, for Games Masters that envisage the Guild's roster dropping off significantly after the march of the undead ends the lives of so many thieves and scares off many more, the case can be made without any difficulty.



Krovās

The Master Thief is an ophidian-fingered man with squinting, glinting eyes and a sinister grace to his every movement. Ambitious to the last, he raised the Thieves' Guild to the highest positions of authority they had ever enjoyed, even reaching the ultimate goal of exerting no small control over Overlord Karstack and ensuring the Guild remained utterly untroubled by Lankhmar's law enforcement. Within the brotherhood, he is as well-known for his strange ideas as for his elevation of the Guild. It was Krovas who employed a black magician to work for the Thieves' Guild, aiding their endeavours and slaying their enemies with dark sorcery.

His ideas for caution when performing a theft go far beyond the standards of other Master Thieves, going so far as to demand that on almost any engagement, members of the Thieves' Guild should be accompanied by hired members of the Slayers' Brotherhood. Many thieves feel this an unnecessary slight on their abilities to do their job and remain undetected. Others are put off by Krovas's insistence on relying on a hated and malformed black magician, so hold little affection for Krovas outside of their guaranteed loyalty to the chosen Guild leader.

Ivlis

Ivlis is Krovas's manipulative and ambitious lover. With beautiful red hair and looks that every man admires, Ivlis has little trouble in using her feminine charms to get her way. She sometimes even dances for Overlord Karstack; such is her grace and talents at seduction. Despite the fact that females are barred from ever setting foot in Thieves' House, Ivlis's home backs onto the Guild headquarters and has a secret passageway to the guildmaster's room within the massive demesne.

Hristomilio

During Krovas's tenure as guildmaster, another room on the first floor is used for nefarious and mystical purposes. In a smaller room, filled with astrological charts, were cryptically-labelled porcelain jars and vials and glass flasks filled with fluids of various colours. Here worked Hristomilio, Krovas's pet magician, in his laboratory, chanting foul magical incantations to aid thieves on their night's work and ruthlessly slaughter the Guild's enemies from afar. Hristomilio meets his end in *Ill Met in Lankhmar* when Fafhrd kills him with a well-thrown silver dagger.

Behind the left end of the table stood a tall, yet hunchbacked man in a black robe and hood, which shadowed more than hid a face of which the most prominent features were a long, thick pointed nose with out-jutting, almost chinless mouth just below. His complexion was sallow-grey like clay and a short-haired, bristly, grey beard grew high on his wide cheeks. From under a receding forehead and bushy grey brows, wide-set eyes looked intently down at an age-browned scroll, which his disgustingly small clubhands, knuckles big, short backs grey-bristled, ceaselessly unrolled and rolled up again. The only move his eyes ever made, besides the short side-to-side one as he read the lines he was rapidly intoning, was an occasional farther sideways glance at the alembic.

— Ill Met in Lankhmar

Thieves' Guild

Lankhmar's most powerful guild

Third-Class Membership

Requirements: The candidate must be recommended by an existing member, before proving himself in a test heist set by the Master Thief or one of his lieutenants.

Guild Skills: Athletics, Dagger, Disguise, Dodge, Evaluate, Influence, Mechanisms, Perception, Stealth, Streetwise

Duties: Obeying the Master Thief and his lieutenants. Working to keep the Guild in its place of ascendancy.

Lieutenant

Requirements: Must be recognised by the Master Thief for wisdom, skill in training apprentices and talents in Guild business. This is an informal requirement, achieved through character development and roleplaying rather than any specific game mechanic requirements.

Duties: Training apprentices for two days out of every seven. Planning jobs for lesser members. Advising the Master Thief in the council of Thieves' House.

Master Thief

Requirements: Election by the current Lieutenants

Duties: Overall control over the Thieves' Guild

Special Benefits: All members gain a +20% bonus on all Streetwise tests while in Lankhmar, as well as a +10% bonus in other cities.

Master Thieves gain access to the massed wealth of the Guild – a store of money that puts most other guilds and noble houses to shame. Lieutenants can petition the Master Thief for personal loans paid back in either additional service or special operations.

Lieutenants gain one Second Chance roll usable once per session when performing any Guild-associated skill. Master Thieves gain two Second Chance rolls that may be used in the same manner. Second Chance rolls gained through membership may not be 'saved' for later sessions.

All members are expected to donate 50% of their earnings to the Guild, returning their entire takings to Thieves' House and being issued half of it back in various coins. Lieutenants are expected to donate 75% because of their high-earning heists and increased takings.

Third-Class Thieves' Guild members gain a +20% bonus on all Influence rolls made to bribe the city guard or escape arrest. This is raised to +40% for Lieutenants and +80% for the Master Thief.

Freelancing at the Crossroads of Gods and Silver

There are few trades more dangerous in Lankhmar than that of a freelance thief. The Guild takes sincere umbrage at the level of audacity it takes to operate in their city without working under their rules, and most characters involved in this kind of activity have little to look forward to beyond a stab in the back and being left to rot in Bones Alley.

city of the Black Toga

Paying the Fees

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser know all about trouble with the Thieves' Guild, and they know how to get out of it, too. Many characters will likely prefer to walk the same path. This method is essentially a means to purchase the freedom to rob, plunder and steal while not working for the Thieves' Guild. Though all thieves tithe a large amount of their ill-gotten gains to the Guild leaders, freelancers pay extortionate fees for the right to be left alone.

Most freelancers sell out sooner or later because the Guild threatens them with lethal punishment if they do not, and because always looking over one's shoulder for a dagger coming out of the dark is a nasty way to live for any length of time. When push comes to shove and a character decides to remain freelance but start offering kickbacks to the Thieves' Guild, the fees he pays to the Master Thief are somewhere in the region of a quarter of the character's robbery earnings.

Many freelancers try to get out of this by simply not declaring all of their profits. The advantage to this is that the character gets to keep more of his loot. The downside is that the Thieves' Guild has eyes everywhere and that if they find out the character is shirking his payments, they will kill him. If the character can silence the beggars who spread rumours, the fence who he takes the stolen goods to, the moneylender who he exchanges the money with and any other thieves that would betray him to the Guild, then it might be a worthwhile risk. At that point, however, it is probably cheaper to pay the damn fees and save on the insane costs of bribing half the residents of the slums for their silence, which would be an unreliable expenditure at best.

Freelance thieves either need to remain one step ahead of the Thieves' Guild or persuade the Master Thief that they should be allowed to work independently. Neither of these approaches is easy, though the latter is leaps and bounds easier than the former. Certain people will be exempt from the restrictions on freelance thieves – noble-blooded characters immediately earn the tolerance and respect of the Thieves' Guild both because they are stooping to thievery despite their high birth and because staying on good terms with a thief blood-linked to the aristocracy can pay in kind at a later date, whether in the form of information or assistance in plundering the possessions of someone a touch richer than the Guild's usual fare. There is also the minor matter of noble-blood coming with a certain 'resistance' to murder. The Thieves' Guild might be able to murder freelance burglars and muggers with impunity, but when the body of a duke's son or a relative of the overlord is discovered, even cowed overlords are likely to take vengeance upon the Guild.

Freelancers do exist, however, and it is a profitable game if a character can manage to play it. Indeed, it is the only way for women to ply the trade, since they are barred from ever entering Thieves' House.

The first step in getting away clean with freelancing is to be a noble. If that is not in the cards, then a character should preferably be male. Freelance female thieves are notoriously subject to the Guild's animosity, though it is unclear whether this is a traditional bias or one founded in something more reasonable than base sexism. A final way to earn exempt status from the Guild's membership and avoid their ire is to be insane. The Thieves' Guild, for all its flaws, is a reputable and organised bunch of criminals. Unpredictable and unstable souls such as those tainted by madness are not welcome across the threshold of Thieves' House.

And which created a large bare stretch of dark, thick, unpierced wall at the intersection of Silver Street with the Street of the Gods, a crossing-point where there habitually foregathered the junior executives and star operatives of the Thieves' Guild; also meeting there were the few freelance thieves bold and resourceful enough to defy the Guild and the few thieves of aristocratic birth, sometimes most brilliant amateurs, whom the Guild tolerated and even toadied to, on account of their noble ancestry, which dignified a very old but most disreputable profession.

— The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar

With the exception of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, three freelance thieves are mentioned in the *Swords* novels: *Snarve Kistomercus*, the nephew of Overlord Glipekero, who fulfils two of the three initial criteria (noble-blooded and male), *Countess Kronia of the Seventy-Seven Pockets*, who also fulfils two (highborn and insane) and lastly, *Alyx the Picklock*, who breaks all the rules and walks the much harder path reserved for the lowborn, the female or the sane. Simply put, she is just too good for the Thieves' Guild to put her out of business. So goes the rumour, anyway. In truth, she keeps her kickbacks and profit-sharing with the Thieves' Guild a closely-guarded secret.

Games Masters catering for characters who are seeking to stay ahead of the long reach of the Thieves' Guild have a wealth of opportunities in their games. Freelance thievery not only involves the risk of committing the crimes and all their inherent dangers and difficulties, but also the dual risks of attracting the city watch (who will need to be bribed individually) and the Thieves' Guild, who may well have agents working on the same job as the freelance characters. There is no honour amongst thieves when it comes to issues of Guild loyalty – the guild members fight first and put down any resistance to their criminal union without batting an eyelash. If the

characters manage to evade or even kill the guild thieves, their lives will get harder, not easier, as the Master Thief will be even more likely to sic his minions on the Player Characters for their upstart behaviour.

If all else fails, there is another way. Fafhrd and the Mouser, though they are adventurers first and foremost only infrequently resorting to thievery, resort to kickbacks and profit-sharing with the Guild. On the freelance scene, this is termed as 'paying dues' or 'paying the fees.'

Slayers' Brotherhood

For the right price, often no more than a few Smerduks or a couple of Rilks at best, a man can buy the services of thugs who have no qualms about killing. The Slayers' Brotherhood is another of Lankhmar's largest guilds, its chief rival and occasional employer being the Thieves' Guild itself. From top to bottom, the Slayers' Brotherhood is filled with the kind of men and women that kill for money and shed no tears about the fact. After all, everyone has to earn a living.

The Brotherhood has several buildings across Lankhmar which can be used to hire members, but the headquarters are located on Cheap Street, near Plague Court. Membership in the Slayers' Brotherhood does not always mean a member will be well trained. Rather, this is the guild for anyone with a weapon and the desire to earn a wage by murdering people. Some mercenaries join the Brotherhood, assigned to guard caravans, warehouses or couriers. The better trained members frequently hire out as bodyguards to important underworld society figures and receive the plum jobs of merc work. Other members are no more than street thugs, hired to beat money out of deadbeat gamblers, work as bullies in taverns or repossess homes from tenants in debt.

Anyone in Lankhmar that needs a couple of thugs is free to recruit the services of those in the Slayers' Brotherhood. Individuals are paid according to what rates their skills command. A handful of Tiks and Agols buys a thug with a knife and the guiltless attitude necessary to use it. Several Rilks will buy a skilled mercenary, armed and armoured, with a long record of good service. Bonuses from clients for efficient work are gently encouraged by the Brotherhood, while members found to be lacking in their duties are fired without fuss.

city of the Black toga

If a Brotherhood member shows exceptional talent as well as a gift for stealth and subtlety, he will be considered for entrance into the inner order of the Slayers' Brotherhood, known as the Assassins' Order. Assassins are considered to have left the Slayers' Brotherhood and use the game mechanics for the Assassins' Order instead.

SLAYERS' BROTHERHOOD

Guild of mercenary cut-throats and killers

Requirements: Perform well (not necessarily win) in a test combat with an established member

Skills: 1H Club, 1H Sword, Dagger, Dodge, Perception, Streetwise, Unarmed

Duties: Inflicting pain when paid to do so, working four days or nights out of every seven

Special Benefits: Members of the Brotherhood have a +10% bonus to all Influence tests related to bribing the city guard or avoiding arrest. They also gain a Second Chance roll usable once per month on any guild-related skill roll.

The Assassins' Order

The inner circle of the most-skilled Slayers are not picked for the mundane throat-cuttings, beatings and protection jobs that filter through the ranks of the rest of the Brotherhood. The Assassins' Order is a guild within a guild, with its membership is open only to the best-trained and talented killers. These men (women are banned from the Order in typical Lankmarese misogyny) are charged with hunting down single targets and ending a victim's life without witnesses – often even without leaving a trace. In this latter case, poison is the preferred tool. In most other instances, a knife in the back, a dagger through the eye or a crossbow bolt through the neck from a shadowy rooftop will suffice.

As the Brotherhood's elite, assassins are highly paid and receive dedicated training. The Order itself has many contacts within the Grain Merchants' Cartel, the Thieves' Guild and the Overlord's court. The Grain Merchants are notorious for offing each other in the name of economic espionage; the Thieves' Guild sometimes hire elite killers to slay notable aristocrats and constables who threaten Guild affairs, and the murders that occur in the decadent bloodlines of the overlord's court are legendary among

the public, to the point where plays at the street theatres occasionally perform satires of who has been killed by whom among the nobility.

ASSASSINS' ORDER

The elite faction of murderers

Requirements: Candidates must have the blood of 'twoscore and one' victims on their hands, recorded in the books of the Slayers' Brotherhood. These 25 victims need not have been all killed, though most likely were.

Skills: Bow, Crossbow, Dagger, Disguise, Lore (Poison), Perception, Stealth, Streetwise

Duties: Once per week, the character must kill a specially-selected target. The details of the job will vary greatly, with some requiring a blatant murder and others preferring no trace of the deed left for others to find.

Special Benefits: The Assassins's Order has an elaborate web of contacts within the highest echelons of Lankmar citizenry. All members gain +10% on Influence rolls with noblemen and noblewomen aware of the character's guild affiliation, as well as a +20% on all Influence tests to resist arrest or offer a bribe.

Members also gain a Second Chance roll, usable once per week, on any roll involving a Guild-related skill.

The Heart of Lankmar

If the slums are the rotting soul of Lankmar, the joint mercantile and church district is surely the city's heart. Here the colossal warehouse granaries house the ripe pickings of the southern grain fields, storing the economical lifeblood of the city. Here also is the wondrous Street of the Gods, where Lankmarts come to pray to the dozens and dozens of ever-shifting, ever-changing Gods in Lankmar.

Street of the Gods

One of the biggest and busiest streets in the city is the cobblestone boulevard called the Street of the Gods. Here the night-time worship of Lankmar's mutable pantheon of divinities takes place, as well as the standard endurance test to see which of the many gods can make

A new god (his priest or priests, that is) will begin at the Marsh Gate and more or less slowly work his way up the Street of the Gods, renting a temple or pre-empting a few yards of cobbled pavement here and there, until he has found his proper level. A very few win their way to the region adjoining the Citadel and join the aristocracy of the gods in Lankhmar- transients still, though resident for centuries and even millennia (the gods of Lankhmar are as jealous as they are secret). Far more godlets, it can justly be said, play a one-night stand near the Marsh Gate and then abruptly disappear; perhaps to seek cities where the audiences are less critical. The majority work their way about halfway up the Street of the Gods and then slowly work their way down again, resisting bitterly every inch and yard, until they once more reach the Marsh Gate and vanish forever from Lankhmar and the memories of men.

— Lean Times in Lankhmar

it into a more permanent residence in the hearts of the city's residents. Stretching for the Marsh Gate in the east wall all the way to the western docks, and running parallel to the Street of the Thinkers to the south, the Street of the Gods neatly bisects Lankhmar in twain. It is intersected by Nun, Whore, Cheap and Silver Streets, with traffic from each adding to the hustle and bustle of one of Lankhmar's busiest after-dark avenues. Towards the western end of the great street are the largest and most ornate temples, housing the faiths of the most successful gods *in* Lankhmar. Right at the western end of the avenue, nestling uncomfortably close to the granaries and docks, is the squat and black-stoned Temple of the Gods *of* Lankhmar.

The Street of the Gods is tied directly to the unique way in which Lankhmarts view divinity. To the citizens of the city there are two kinds of god; the Gods *in* Lankhmar and the Gods *of* Lankhmar. The former are the deities discovered by men and women, hailed as divine and tested on the Street of the Gods to see if their worship catches on with the populace. The latter are something else entirely – something darker and much more sinister.

The Gods *in* Lankhmar

Lankhmarts worship the Gods *in* Lankhmar in their day-to-day lives. These are the deities that have been discovered or created by mortals, usually born from stories of martyrs, penitents and the occasional hero that captures a scholar's attention. For many of these would-be gods, a single mortal advocate is all they need to begin the rise to true divinity. The stories of these long-dead heroes and martyrs are easily twisted into tales of divine manifestation, with the exaggerated powers and holy behaviour that goes along with such a claim. The devout soul who earnestly believes all of this – even the changes to the legend he has personally made – sets out for the Street of the Gods and camps out at the eastern end, right by the Marsh Gate. Here, amongst the infrequent traffic and uninterrupted stench of the Great Salt Marsh, the god's faith (and the patience of his advocate) is tested.

Each night, Lankhmarts come to the Street of the Gods in the early hours of evening to pay respect and sometimes make offerings to the gods they worship. As in all matters of



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The Gods in Lankhmar (that is, the gods and candidates for divinity who dwell or camp, it may be said, in the Imperishable City, not the gods of Lankhmar – a very different and most secret and dire matter) ... the gods in Lankhmar seem as if they must be as numberless as the grains of sand in the Great Eastern Desert. The vast majority of them began as men, or more strictly the memories of men who led ascetic, vision-haunted lives and died painful, messy deaths. One gets the impression that since the beginning of time an unending horse of their priests and apostles (or even the gods themselves, it makes little difference) have been crippling across that same desert, the Sinking Land, and the Great Salt Marsh to converge on Lankhmar's low, heavy-arched Marsh Gate – meanwhile suffering by the way various inevitable tortures, castrations, blindings and stonings, impalements, crucifixions, quarterings and so forth at the hands eastern brigands and Mingol unbelievers who, one is tempted to think, were created solely for the purpose of seeing to the running of that cruel gauntlet. Among the tormented holy throng are a few warlocks and witches seeking infernal immortality for their dark satanic would-be deities and a very few proto-goddesses – generally maidens reputed to have been enslaved for decades by sadistic magicians and ravished by whole tribes of Mingols.

— Lean Times in Lankhmar

Lankhmar, faith is fickle. A Lankhmar will change the god he worships depending on his situation in life, the god's favour among other worshippers, what other gods in Lankhmar stand for that might suddenly seem more appealing and occasionally just in the spirit of a change.

The Street of the Gods is home to dozens upon dozens of preachers, priests and cultists all hawking the virtues of their deity and the merits of their faith like tradesmen on market day. Preachers in threadbare rags close to the Marsh gate will rant and rave or sibilantly enthuse about their newly-found god in the hopes that the deity's appeal spreads to other followers. Every night, one or more of

the cults based on either side of the Street of the Gods will move around and change places, as worship of some rise and others decrease. Those with increasing popularity move on from their cloth mat on cobblestone beginnings, through the stalls and the small wooden platforms by the Marsh Gate end, and through continued donation, may eventually be able to rent one of the small shrines or larger temples as the Street of the Gods widens and becomes evermore grand with each westward step.

It is easy to see how the Street of the Gods can be such a busy, noisome place. In the larger temples, worshippers will go through ordered religious ceremony as dictated by their priests and cult leaders. Many of these ceremonies spill out onto the steps of the temples, or out into the street from the small shrines, because of either a lack of space or the faith's leaders wishing to show off how many worshippers their god now attracts.

The largest of the temples, situated firmly on the western end of the street, are beautiful and huge in equal measure, seeing hundreds of worshippers each night. Most notably among these are the temples of Aarth and, depending on the time period of the Games Master's campaign, Issek of the Jug. The overlord traditionally worships at the temple of whichever god is farthest to the west, which has been Aarth for many successive overlords.

FROM RAGS TO RICHES

The path of a god in Lankhmar up the street is the path to a literal divinity. Gods created by mortal worship are born into being in the realm known as Godsland, far across the Sea of Stars. Mortal worship sustains these divine entities and grants them the power to assist or hinder their loyal and disloyal followers, respectively. Admittedly, the Gods in Lankhmar (and their Godsland manifestations) are often human-like in their demeanours; meaning they can be as petty and spiteful as any man, woman or child. Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser have endured the ire of three gods they had long-abandoned and have been plagued by all manner of minor, annoying inconveniences as a result of the deity-trio's machinations. In the *Swords* novels, it is clear that the gods are less all-powerful, benevolent or evil, and some degrees snider and pettier than one might initially imagine from a deity in other fantasy settings.

Many ways exist by which a preacher or a priest can promote his god. Compelling oratory is always a point on the plus side. An interesting background evidenced by heroic deeds or great suffering goes down a treat with

Bwadres' Issek had expired quite quickly, though with some kindly parting admonitions, after being disjointed on the rack. Fafhrd's Issek (now the Issek) had broken seven racks before he seriously began to weaken. Even when, supposedly dead, he had been loosed and had got his hands on the chief torturer's throat there had been enough strength remaining in them alone so that he had been able to strangle the wicked man with ease, although the latter was a champion of wrestlers among his people. However, Fafhrd's Issek had not done so – again it would have been quite against his Creed – he had merely broken the torturer's thick brass band of office from around his trembling neck and twisted it into an exquisitely beautiful symbol of the Jug before finally permitting his own ghost to escape from him into the eternal realms of spirit, there to continue its wildly wonderful adventurings.

— Lean Times in Lankhmar

many Lankhmarts. Interesting appearances among the acolytes can be a powerful lure, such as when Fafhrd – the seven-foot tall northern barbarian – drew a staggering amount of attention to the god Issek of the Jug in the first few months of his service purely by standing around, looking intimidating and not speaking a word. Later, he drew further attention by singing the god's praises with his melodious singing voice, which baffled onlookers when it came from such a barrel-chested and violent man.

By far the best way to attract followers is the classic Lankhmar tendency toward deception in all things. Put simply, telling lies pays off just fine. At the very least, exaggeration seems to be the way to go. As almost all of the Gods *in* Lankhmar are based on real heroes and martyrs from the 'Eastern Lands or at least from the kindredly decadent southern country around Quarmall,' the truth behind these would-be gods is often rather mundane by divine standards. With a touch of drama to flavour the story, a god can become almost unrecognisable from the scholar's initial beliefs to the religious figure that a Street of the Gods preacher cries passionately about each night. As long as the general theme of the god's influence remains the same (be he a god of peace, war, love or any other emotion or action) then the god himself remains

alive in the Godsland. This overall area of influence is called the Creed. In the case of Issek of the Jug, for example, his Creed was one of peace and unity among all men. Any lies could be (and are) told about a deity's actions before mortal death and subsequent godhood, as long as they never conflicted with his Creed.

The best example of this deception working perfectly is without a doubt the doddering old priest Bwadres and his recitations of Issek of the Jug, which were altered considerably by his temporary acolyte Fafhrd through the medium of northern skald-style singing that began and ended each evening's ceremony.

The relationship between the faith of mortals and the gods themselves is neither perfectly chronicled nor exactly understood. Belief, real faith, in the gods is enough to have a deity manifest and remain alive in Godsland, even if it is only a single believer. This would make for a very weak god, but a god nonetheless. The more followers a god has, the more powerful he becomes, able to help his worshippers through Divine Intervention and grant them miracles once in a while. At all times, however, the Gods *in* Lankhmar remain relatively distant. No deity bestows mighty magic upon his worshippers or entrusts dozens of spells to a mortal believer. Most of the time, silence and the occasional patch of good luck is the reward for faith, and petty revenge is the punishment for straying.

EXTORTION

Once a faith reaches a certain distance up the Street of the Gods, usually about the time the priest starts to earn more than a few Iron Tikks, the extortionists descend with greedy smiles. Extortion, blackmail and racketeering are everywhere in Lankhmar, and the spiritual heart of the city is no exception. In fact, it's something of a nexus for this kind of activity – skilful extortionists can rake in serious money by shaking down the promising and prosperous faiths that line both sides of the avenue.

Unlike other forms of organised crime in the City of the Black Toga, the extortionists have little loyalty to one another, and many operate outside of their supposed guild. Instead, the Street of the Gods is fought over by a number of competing criminals heading up their own gangs of thugs and money collectors. In *Lean Times in Lankhmar*, this is evidenced perfectly by the feud between Pulg and Basharat. Both men use their hired help to shake down various faiths and extort money from them, with each man seeking the most promising of the new faiths to claim as his 'territory.'

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The Gray Mouser entered the service of one Pulg, a rising racketeer of small religions, a lord of Lankhmar's dark underworld who levied tribute from the priests of all godlets seeking to become gods – on pain of various unpleasant disturbing and revolting things happening at future services of the defaulting godlet. If a priest didn't pay Pulg, his miracles were sure to misfire, his congregation and collection would fall off sharply, and it was quite possible that a bruised skin and broken bones would be his lot.

– Lean Times in Lankhmar

Another aspect to consider is that the Thieves' Guild itself runs thousands of protection rackets across the city, usually with merchants, but would dearly love to break into the difficult underworld scene already playing out on the Street of the Gods. There is no love lost between the Thieves' Guild and the extortionists, as the former wish to muscle in on operations that they believe should be theirs (and once were) while the latter are offended and intimidated by the thieves and their presumption. This dispute is prevented from reaching boiling point by many extortionists having direct alliance with the Slayers' Brotherhood, and a few others providing a minor kickback to the Thieves' Guild. Ironically, even extortionists get extorted in Lankhmar. They do not call it the City of Thieves for nothing.

Games Masters can mire characters in a wealth of trouble when it comes to the riches that change hands among the holy residents of the Street of the Gods. This area might not be home to the urban crime of many traditional fantasy settings, but the acts that do take place could only barely be considered more sophisticated and offer just as much in the way of story hooks and plot lines. Characters with a stake in one particular cult, whether as patrons or as the faith's founders, are likely to take umbrage at having to pay off racketeers. This leads to the extortionists shaking down the rituals and prayers taking place on the Street of the Gods and the characters will need to counter these intrusions any way they can. Of course, once one extortionist has been driven off, it merely opens the way for another to take a crack at ruining the defaulting cult's chances at success. Few worshippers wish to worry about beatings and threats every time they pay respect to

their new god, so characters that defend their cult from racketeers will need to be creative and clever in ensuring they maintain a viable number of worshippers, or their efforts will be for naught when their chosen religion is cast out of the Marsh Gate and replaced by another hopeful priest and his unheard-of god.

Games Masters and players with a passion for Lankhmar's less lawful dealings might find a lot of satisfaction in an extortionist campaign. This is the kind of gritty, street-level roleplaying that some groups love and others loathe, with the added spice of operating almost completely outside the law. Bribes will need to be paid to the local city watch and the Thieves' Guild to keep them off the characters' backs. Elements within both of these agencies might take a more aggressive bent – perhaps the thieves finally decide to make their move and open up their own lines of protection, seeking to kill the characters, clear them off the scene and dump the remains in Bones Alley. A few gold-hearted souls within the city watch might shake off the corruption that plagues Lankhmar's guardsmen and embark on a personal crusade to rid the streets of extortionists, starting with the characters and their operation. Cerebral characters will have the opportunity to exercise their cunning and wit against other extortionists, while more physical characters will be presented with an endless array of foes to face, from the hired muscle in the gangs of their rivals to the constables of the city watch.

A complex but potentially satisfying campaign would involve the Games Master running the game for two (or more) competing groups of players, both of whom head up their own extortionist gangs. The two groups of Player Characters would move against one another, each seeking to outwit and discredit their direct rivals. Perhaps they might even ally temporarily to fend off other, larger extortionist gangs, before degenerating back into rivalry the moment the greater threat has passed.

The Cults

Joining a priesthood, cult or faith is mechanically no different than joining any *RuneQuest* cult; requirements must be met before any benefits can be received. Games Masters should note that the faith-cults of Lankhmar are not the high magic cults of other settings, however. Lankhmarts worship the gods because they know the deities are real and may offer fortune to loyal worshippers. Little in the way of magical aid is bestowed, though Divine Intervention may still be called for in times of direst need.

The following section details a list of some of the Gods in Lankhmar to be found on the Street of the Gods, along with the rules for characters who wish to join their cults. Almost all Lankhmarts, either native to the city or merely visiting, will adopt one or more of the gods currently in vogue as their own. There is no limit to the number of gods a character can profess to worship, though some cults might be angered at such indiscriminate worship – especially the most successful ones. Seeing as the list of gods *in* Lankhmar changes by the day and the names of these would-be gods has no doubt numbered in the tens of thousands since the founding of the Imperishable City, an exhaustive list would be next to impossible to create. Presented here are the main gods described in the *Swords* novels and their associated cult rules.

Games Masters should feel free to create their own gods, whether believable, nonsensical, sinister or benevolent. If there is one thing that guarantees a faith a spot on the Street of the Gods, it is an imaginative background told by a noteworthy preacher. Gods based on vices, mutilations, debaucheries, virtues, good deeds, morals and everything else imaginable all have a place on the ever-changing street.

Since the religious cults of Nehwon barely resemble the magical orders of other *RuneQuest* settings, it is recommended that Games Masters who design their own cults allow each order to teach a single skill and no more. This represents the god's teachings affecting the character's life, rather than any formal training.

Issek of the Jug

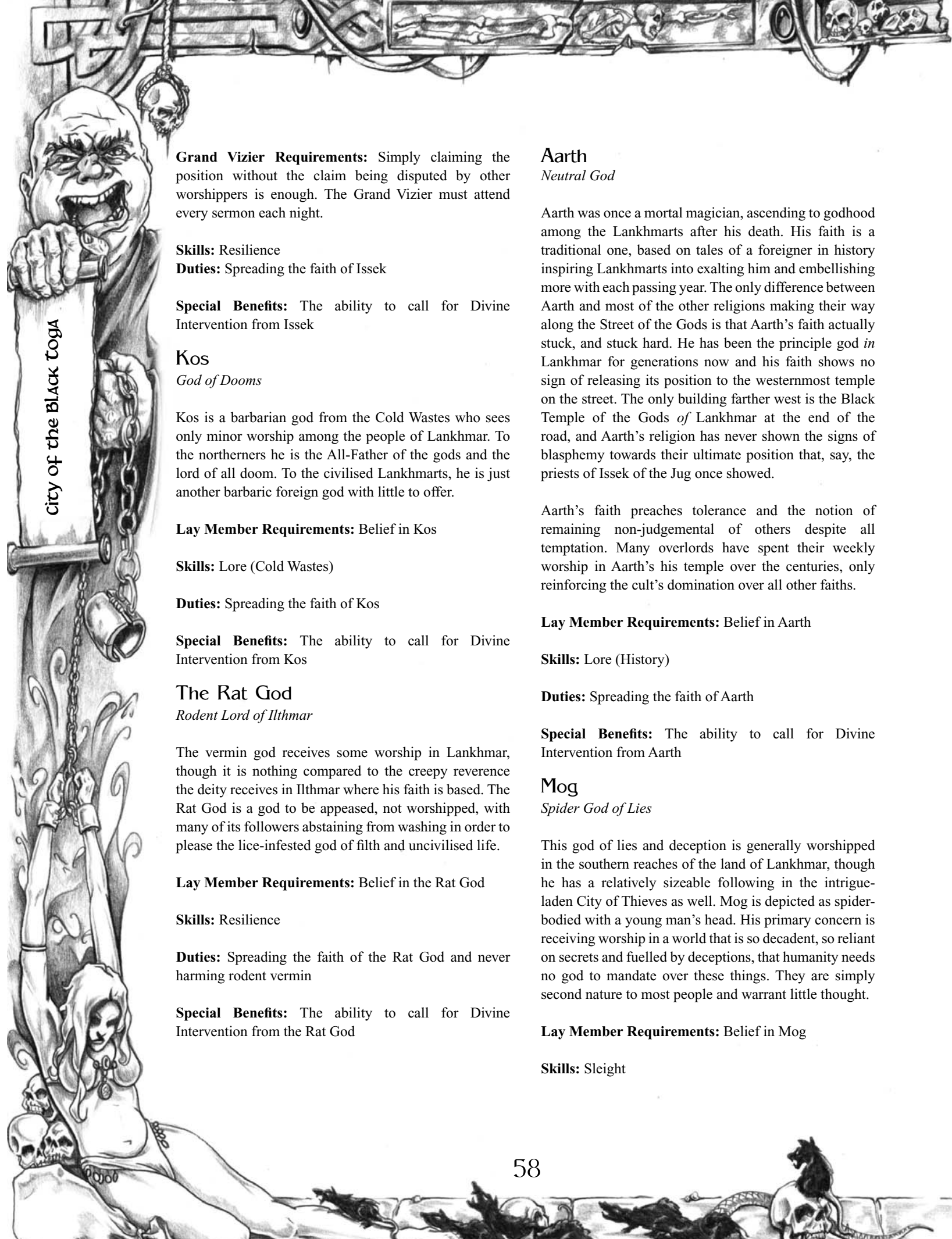
God of Peace and Brotherhood

Issek was a martyred god of peace in the world and brotherhood between all Men. His church teaches a doctrine of turning the other cheek, endurance through all hardship, kindness to those above and below in society and a desire to help others whenever possible. His symbol is a jug full of Waters of Peace from the grandly-named 'Cistern of Cillivat' of an undisclosed location. The popular vision of Issek is that he endured superhuman agony with grace and good cheer, amused himself by non-violently sporting with sea monsters and died only after allowing himself to be tortured in order to teach a lesson about martyrdom and the worth of human life.

The cult enjoyed a colossal surge in popularity when Fafhrd joined as an acolyte and 'spiced up' the god's tales, though the ascension ended only three years after it began. The Gods of Lankhmar, displeased at Issek's Grand Vizier blaspheming against them, walked from their black temple and destroyed the cult's priests, scattered its worshippers and consigned the faith to memory.

Lay Member Requirements: Belief in Issek and attending at least one nighttime sermon to prove faith

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Grand Vizier Requirements: Simply claiming the position without the claim being disputed by other worshippers is enough. The Grand Vizier must attend every sermon each night.

Skills: Resilience

Duties: Spreading the faith of Issek

Special Benefits: The ability to call for Divine Intervention from Issek

Kos

God of Dooms

Kos is a barbarian god from the Cold Wastes who sees only minor worship among the people of Lankhmar. To the northerners he is the All-Father of the gods and the lord of all doom. To the civilised Lankhmarts, he is just another barbaric foreign god with little to offer.

Lay Member Requirements: Belief in Kos

Skills: Lore (Cold Wastes)

Duties: Spreading the faith of Kos

Special Benefits: The ability to call for Divine Intervention from Kos

The Rat God

Rodent Lord of Ilthmar

The vermin god receives some worship in Lankhmar, though it is nothing compared to the creepy reverence the deity receives in Ilthmar where his faith is based. The Rat God is a god to be appeased, not worshipped, with many of its followers abstaining from washing in order to please the lice-infested god of filth and uncivilised life.

Lay Member Requirements: Belief in the Rat God

Skills: Resilience

Duties: Spreading the faith of the Rat God and never harming rodent vermin

Special Benefits: The ability to call for Divine Intervention from the Rat God

Aarth

Neutral God

Aarth was once a mortal magician, ascending to godhood among the Lankhmarts after his death. His faith is a traditional one, based on tales of a foreigner in history inspiring Lankhmarts into exalting him and embellishing more with each passing year. The only difference between Aarth and most of the other religions making their way along the Street of the Gods is that Aarth's faith actually stuck, and stuck hard. He has been the principle god in Lankhmar for generations now and his faith shows no sign of releasing its position to the westernmost temple on the street. The only building farther west is the Black Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar at the end of the road, and Aarth's religion has never shown the signs of blasphemy towards their ultimate position that, say, the priests of Issek of the Jug once showed.

Aarth's faith preaches tolerance and the notion of remaining non-judgemental of others despite all temptation. Many overlords have spent their weekly worship in Aarth's his temple over the centuries, only reinforcing the cult's domination over all other faiths.

Lay Member Requirements: Belief in Aarth

Skills: Lore (History)

Duties: Spreading the faith of Aarth

Special Benefits: The ability to call for Divine Intervention from Aarth

Mog

Spider God of Lies

This god of lies and deception is generally worshipped in the southern reaches of the land of Lankhmar, though he has a relatively sizeable following in the intrigue-laden City of Thieves as well. Mog is depicted as spider-bodied with a young man's head. His primary concern is receiving worship in a world that is so decadent, so reliant on secrets and fuelled by deceptions, that humanity needs no god to mandate over these things. They are simply second nature to most people and warrant little thought.

Lay Member Requirements: Belief in Mog

Skills: Sleight

Duties: Spreading the faith of Mog

Special Benefits: The ability to call for Divine Intervention from Mog

Votishal

Centuries ago, the priests of Votishal (for their own unknown and unknowable reasons) stole the skull of Omphal – one of the Dead Master Thieves. This relic was stored in the subterranean vault of their own temple, located somewhere in Lankhmar away from the Street of the Gods. All that is known of Votishal is that his priests are known for hoarding artefacts in their temple's crypt, guarding it with locks sealed beyond the skill of any thief and some kind of great beast that lairs in the underground darkness.

Games Masters will probably note that this setup has 'story hook' written all over it. Perhaps one of the other guilds in Lankhmar has something valuable they wish returned from the temple? Perhaps the Priests of Votishal have not existed for centuries and their abandoned holy site remains guarded only by these ancient locks and a (presumably) long-dead beast? What other wonders, beyond the jewelled skull of a dead master thief, could lie in the subterranean cellar waiting to be discovered? What curses would be stirred by the booted tread of adventurers finding out the answers to these questions?

The Great God

In the *Swords* saga, a few minor mentions are made of a 'Great God,' but little tangible information is given. It is clear that at some point in history, a god *in* Lankhmar rose to such heights of authority and power that he banished many of the other ancient gods from the city and forbade their worship. This mass-exile is perhaps the cause of many of the abandoned temples and shrines that litter the Lankhmarese skyline and alleys today.

It is possible the Great God was an Overlord of Lankhmar who passed an edict banning the faiths he found distasteful, elevated after his death as are many of the other gods *in* Lankhmar. Whatever the truth of the tale (and scholars would pay dearly to find out) Games Masters can use this historical edict as the touchstone for the rage and hate in the abandoned temples and forgotten cults that have seethed unknown for centuries.

The Gods of Lankhmar

There strode four abreast from the wide-open doorway a company of fearfully thin brown figures, black-togaed too. Each before a black staff. The brown was of three sorts: aged linen mummy-branding, brittle parchment-like skin stretched tight over naught but skeleton and naked old brown bones themselves.

...Then, like so many rapiers, black staffs thrust out. Each rat they touched shrivelled where he stood, nor moved again. Other rats came scurrying in from the crowd and were similarly slain. The brown company advanced at an even pace, like doom on the march.

There were screams then and the human crowd before the temple began to melt, racing down side streets and even dashing back into the temples from which they had fled. Predictably, the folk of Lankhmar were more afraid of their own gods come to their rescue than of their foes.

— Swords of Lankhmar

The founders of Lankhmar, mummified and preserved since time out of mind, lay in restless slumber within the black-walled Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar. These, as might be guessed from the name of their tomb, are the deities that Lankhmarts recognise as the city's gods. The Gods of Lankhmar receive no real worship, only a mixture of fear and awe from the people of the city they founded so many centuries ago. No Lankhmarts offer their love or prayers at the temple at the end of the Street of the Gods. Most prefer to ignore the building completely, if such were ever possible given the palpable aura of discomforting fear surrounding the place.

Atop the dark and silent temple is an eight-windowed belfry with several bells of various sizes, described in the *Swords of Lankhmar* thusly: 'There were eight in all and all large: five of bronze, three of browned-iron, coated with the sea-pale verdigris and the earth-dark rust of eons.' Few Lankhmarts have any reason

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to know of this before the Rat Plague, but ringing the bells awakens the Gods of Lankhmar, summoning them to defend the city in hours of direst need. If the bells are sounded for a reason the dead gods see as false or foolish, the ringer is slain instantly and falls from the tower. If the summons is deemed worthy, such as when intelligent rats swarmed through the streets of Lankhmar and threatened the lives of everyone within the walls, the gods will leave their temple and defend their beloved city.

The founding fathers of Lankhmar resemble browned and blackened skeletons, cloaked in mummification wraps and rotted black togas. Eerily enough, mummification has not been used in Lankhmar as a method of burial in thousands of years. Only Lankhmar's first dead, passing away when the city was still in its infancy, were ever prepared like this after death. It is believed that although the Dead Gods are the true gods of Lankhmar, other mummified remains exist in cellars and catacombs under the city. These are thought to be the bodies of other ancient great ones, preserved in undeath and ready to walk the world of life whenever their interests are threatened. An example of these dark-boned ancients is the small band of Dead Master Thieves hidden and near-forgotten in the cellars of the slums.

The Gods of Lankhmar are fearsome foes in battle as well as being fearful to behold. Though they are not invincible, few mortals could ever hope to stand against them without overwhelming numbers on their side. No Lankhmar is ever likely to commit such a blasphemy as vile as seeking to destroy the gods of the city, either. There is a reason the squat and ugly black tomb-temple has remained un-plundered for so many centuries. That reason is reverence, dosed with a generous helping of fear.

Games Masters wishing to call forth the Gods of Lankhmar into their campaigns can find the mechanics for these brown-boned ancestor-deities in the Creatures of Nehwon chapter.

Other Sites of Interest

The heart of the city is home to a curious mixture of the spiritual, the corrupt and the mundane. Here the so-called Atheists' Avenue and the temple-strewn Street of the Gods are in the same area as the sprawling houses of merchant-princes rich off their grain-selling empires. Close to the poorer end of the Street of the Gods, around the Marsh Gate itself, tumbledown tenements are slowly

falling apart, home to the destitute and the deranged that live their lives breathing in the stench of the Great Salt Marsh beyond Lankhmar's high eastern wall.

The Great Library

At the end of the Street of the Thinkers (a smaller street running parallel to the Street of the Gods) is the Great Library of Lankhmar. As the cradle of civilisation in the world of Nehwon, Lankhmar is where the concepts of philosophy, astrology, democracy and other 'advanced' notions were first envisioned. The Great Library is a monument and an archive of all the achievements that Man has made so far.

For a building with such an honourable purpose, it is surprisingly ugly. The Great Library has been consistently extended over and over again through the reigns of countless overlords, as more and more space is required to house the archives. Some parts of the building are on two or three storeys where additional attics and other rooms were installed in later expansions; other rooms remain on the ground floor with nothing above their ceilings; and several large hallways and storage areas exist in cellars and cavernous basements underneath the city streets. In short, the sprawling library is a mess. No matter how well it is maintained (and most overlords fund the library-masters very well) little can be done to amend its patchwork appearance. The architecture is the product of necessary alterations, not eye-pleasing design, and it shows all too clearly.

Within the Great Library, a thousand shelves and bookcases hold the collected scrolls, parchments and tomes of scholars, histories and generals over millennia of civilisation. There have been some attempts made to organise the archives by date order but this meets with little success because of the monumental demands of the task and the constant discovery and induction of new works into the vaults. Copies and originals of almost any imaginable work by scholars, playwrights, poets and academics can be found within the dozens and dozens of haphazardly-placed rooms, but there is a two Smerduk fee for taking any book from the building.

Many of the works stored in the library are simply barred from ever being removed from the premises on account of being too valuable to risk losing, though a five Agol fee is payable in order to study the text at a private desk in the library's study hall. A small army of scribes and servants



move around the rooms, through doorways, up stairs, down ladders, available to answer questions or locate works for a few Iron Tikks. Any defacement or destruction of library property is reported to the city watch with very few exceptions. Unsurprisingly, these exceptions usually arise as a result of a weighty bribe to the scribe or servant who witnesses the crime. Even Lankhmar's intellectual elite have to eat.

Of particular note is the fact that every single record of property and law since the city's founding is meticulously stored in well-ordered and organised vaults, spread across the numerous cellars under the Great Library and the surrounding streets. The stench of these archive rooms can be quite overpowering since they run dangerously close to the sewers in some cases. To gain access to these sealed areas usually takes a careful bribe of no less than a few Rilks, for any scribe granting unauthorised permission to patrons is liable to be dismissed by the library-masters. Some scribes who value their job enough not to take the risk will flatly refuse the bribe, though they will often allow their silence to be bought instead, lest they report the attempted intrusion to their superiors.

Characters with a particularly long streak of cunning might seek to alter legal records or track down the trial records of other Lankhmarts. Any discovery of alterations or thefts of these records will result in a difficult situation to bribe or threaten oneself out of.

Games Masters setting their campaigns after the infamous Rat Plague should bear in mind that the sentient rats stole all of the maps, plans and property deeds pertaining to the sewers. On one hand, this makes venturing down into Lankhmar's sewers an even more dangerous and unpleasant proposition than ever before, since no maps means a group has no idea where it is going. On the other hand, Games Masters are presented with a classic fantasy trope of adventurers wading through the brackish, fouled

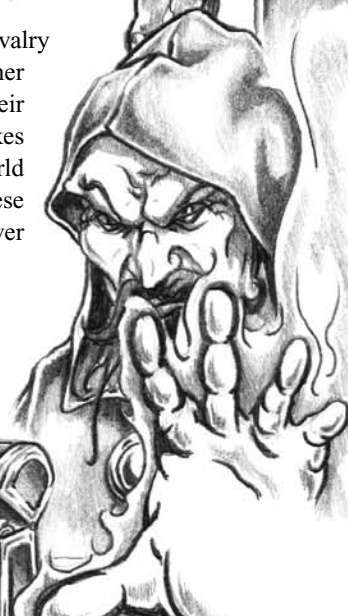
waters of a great city's sewers, and never has it been more appropriate than in Lankhmar. Characters are likely to be well-paid by local scholars or government officials who wish to have the sewers re-mapped as soon as possible for maintenance (and completion) purposes.

Ogo the Blind and Nemia of the Dusk

On Silver Street, not far from where the cobbles of this road meet the Street of the Gods, two adjacent homes each house one of the two most renowned fences in Lankhmar. Ogo the Blind and Nemia of the Dusk are well-known for their talents in assessing the worth of jewels, telling trinket from treasure and selling both at a profit to unknown collectors within and without the city walls.

It is said that the two jewel-fences have a bitter rivalry flowing between them, which could not be further from the truth. Indeed, much of these two and their dealings are shrouded in a layer of lies, which makes them fit perfectly with all of Lankhmar's underworld notables. A hidden passageway in the cellars of these two buildings links them in a way outsiders will never see.

city of the Black Toga



Ogo's shop is a front that sells religious artefacts and tools, mostly as historical knickknacks that might appeal to collectors of cheap antiquities and those that wish to record the passing of Lankhmar's failed would-be gods. Very little has been sold in the store for many years, in the main because it is rarely staffed. When the store is open, it is run by Ogo's young female assistant. Ogo's real customers come to do business in the pitch-dark back room, dealing in rare and generally stolen gems. It is said that because Ogo is blind, he does his business in darkness to put his customers on equal footing with himself. Obviously part of this is pure intimidation tactics, but the truth of the matter is that Ogo is not an aged man sitting in the black back room, skilled enough in his trade to be able to determine a jewel's value by touch alone. In truth, Ogo does not even exist and his serving girl, known variously as Eyes or the Eyes of Ogo, is the mastermind behind the whole operation.

Eyes is a talented ventriloquist, using her mimicry to impersonate a male voice. This charade is not only to protect her identity from the law but also against any reprisals from the customers that she fleeces. 'Ogo the Blind' never cheats the Thieves' Guild in their dealings with 'him,' but any freelancers (such as adventurers) are fair game to be robbed, with their jewels replaced by fakes in the middle of the deal before 'Ogo' rejects the gems and the character's offer. Eyes only does this on a few deals each year, for she does not wish Ogo to have a reputation for being dishonest or unreliable. The Eyes of Ogo is described in *The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar* as having 'pale straight hair, somewhat darker skin, and over-large eyes staring entrancedly from a child's tiny-chinned pouty-lipped face.' Though she looks young, perhaps even in her early teens, she is actually some years older.

The shop next to Ogo the Blind's store is that of Nemia. Nemia sells incense cakes and candles for the various religious ceremonies taking place on the Street of the Gods only a short walk distant.

Nemia is more forthright in admitting her identity and her dealings. She is called Nemia of the Dusk because she prefers to conduct her business after nightfall in candlelit rooms and comfortable surroundings. Her modus operandi is similar to Eyes' in results if not in execution. Nemia, like Eyes, does not fleece the Thieves' Guild because to do so would be unwise beyond reckoning and

rob her of her most frequent clients. However, freelancers are also fair game to Nemia. In sensuous surroundings, before the deal is conducted, Nemia likes to seduce her clients (whether male or female) and rob them in the exhausted and distracted aftermath, replacing the real gems or jewellery for fakes. She then rejects the offer and sends her clients on their way.

As with Eyes, Nemia is reluctant to fleece more than a few marks every year, in case her deceptions are revealed and she harms her reputation. It is well-known that Nemia is protected by several Kleshite stranglers serving as bodyguards.

In the *Swords* novels, The Gray Mouser describes her as 'overripe' in regards to age and appearance. Fafhrd, who was reluctantly seduced by Nemia and later deceived in his dealings with her, says: 'her charms were neither overblown, nor even ample...merely sufficient.'

As regards the aforementioned secret passageway between the two buildings' cellars, the truth is that Eyes and Nemia are lovers – partners in both crime and the bedchamber. Not even the members of the Thieves' Guild are aware of this, nor are they enlightened as to Ogo's true identity.

The Marsh Gate Tenements

Part of the slums that has bled over into the central heart of the city, albeit at the eastern end by the Marsh Gate, is the small block of dwellings and tenements around the so-called 'Beggars' Alley.' Here Lankhmar's most crazed, diseased or destitute beggars (not the guild-sponsored charlatans and underworld informants of the slums) congregate for protection in numbers and the shelter of various squatted accommodation. Many of the residents here were once part of the Beggars' Guild but were cast out for double-crossing the guild or some other crime. Here in the cheap wooden buildings closest to the Marsh Gate – the wood of which is saturated by the stink of the marshlands – the detritus of the city eke out a living, out of sight and out of mind.

The rumours say that the tumbledown tenements were once a desirable part of Lankhmar's real estate, but the stink of the marsh drove away any 'quality' tenants centuries ago. Only the beggars and the stone-broke remain, and even then, hardly by choice.

Jengao the Gem Merchant

Jengao's jewellery store is both a legal business and a front for his fencing on the side. The Thieves' Guild periodically hit the man's shop because he refuses to pay protection money. To combat this, Jengao – an ageing Mingol who gave up the Steppes life long ago – hires mercenaries and members of the Slayers' Brotherhood to guard his wares. Unfortunately for him, many of these employees are bribed into laxity by the thieves.

It is said that Jengao is the most knowledgeable trader in the city when it comes to expertise with gem stones, and his prices are fair. Many aristocrats go to Jengao's store when they wish to purchase fashionable jewellery, as he stays abreast of all recent developments in that area.

The Guild Houses

To the south of Atheists' Avenue, Guild Street is the aptly-named location for several towering guildhouses. Little actual trade goes on here, but the important dealings of the guild leaders take place in these three- and four-storey buildings. The Blacksmiths' Guild, the Carpenters' Guild, the Jewellers' Guild, Moneylenders' Guild, the Scribes' Guild, Physicians' Guild, Apothecaries' Guild and the Couriers and Messengers' Guild all stand on the same street, open for members and clients to make business arrangements. The Labourers' Guild (including the Porters' Guild) and the Architects' Guild both lay claim to the two largest buildings at either end of the street, with the former in the east and the latter in the west.

The Western Waterfront

Lankmar's waterfront is a long, noisy and busy district that stretches along the western edge of the city, overlapping into the River Hlal. These docks, which see upwards of forty or fifty ships in dock each night and hundreds of vessels coming in and going out every day, make Lankmar the busiest port in the world.

Rows of giant warehouses stretch south along the riverbank, still ensconced within the city walls but accessible from the open docks via walkways, a wide boardwalk and dozens of piers. Using these warehouses for storage costs a minimal fee at

the harbourmaster's office, though stationing city watch constables outside the doors of a rented warehouse costs a few Rilks extra. Ensuring that the Thieves' Guild does not break into the building (by killing or bribing the constables) will almost always require a trip to the slums and separate, equally weighty bribe.

The waterfront is usually crowded with sailors, porters, cargo loaders and government inspection agents from the harbourmaster's office, but Lankmarts willing to risk the rowdy and dangerous dockside taverns are occasionally in evidence. Few of these establishments bother with bullies and bravos to maintain order. The frequent fights that take place are allowed to play themselves out with the losers usually being dragged into a corner or an adjacent alley to sleep off their beating.



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Set farther back from the docks is a sprawl of dome-shaped granaries that store the main source of Lankhmar's wealth, ready for local sales or export to other parts of Nehwon and the land of Lankhmar. These are mostly privately-owned by the Guild of Grain Merchants, though many are considered the property of the overlord, used to house the grain that feeds the city. Both types of granary are safe from plundering at the greedy hands of the Thieves' Guild due to a succession of heavy bribes over the centuries.

Dotted around the granaries and set even farther back into the city, approaching the heart of Lankhmar and the Street of the Gods, many members of the Guild of Grain Merchants have large estate houses. These buildings rival the grandeur of the noble houses in the north of the city, with several even possessing their own walled garden grounds.

In this area are also a number of high quality coffeehouses, serving imported coffee and various teas at prices which would make a slum-dweller choke on his ale. These coffee houses serve as meeting places for the members of the Guild, who sit and discuss business matters in comfortable surroundings.

The Shipwrights' Guild is based on the waterfront, with construction of new vessels taking place at the southernmost piers. Sabotage is common in this area if the ships are unguarded, whether from rival merchants in other cities seeking to disadvantage their Lankhmar counterparts or some local influence gaining something unknown from such disruptions. The Shipwrights' Guild often hires sell-swords to guard the southern docks at night, paying a pittance for a duty that involves nothing but standing around ninety-nine times out of every hundred. On the rare occasions that a guarded ship is attacked and set afire, the guards are paid danger money (a few Rilks each) in order to kill or apprehend the criminals.

The Lankhmar Starsmen and Navigators' Guild is also based here, with its employees earning some of the highest wages of any dockworkers. Both the Shipwrights' Guild and the Starsmen and Navigators' Guild are based in four-storey buildings on Dock Street, which runs parallel to Nun Street.

The Harbourmaster's Office is a single-storey building that takes up a large amount of space in its own plaza. Inside the flat-topped building are dozens of individual

offices, each staffed by accountants and inspectors responsible for overseeing the fair taxation of cargo. Here is where the smuggler captains come to pay their bribes.

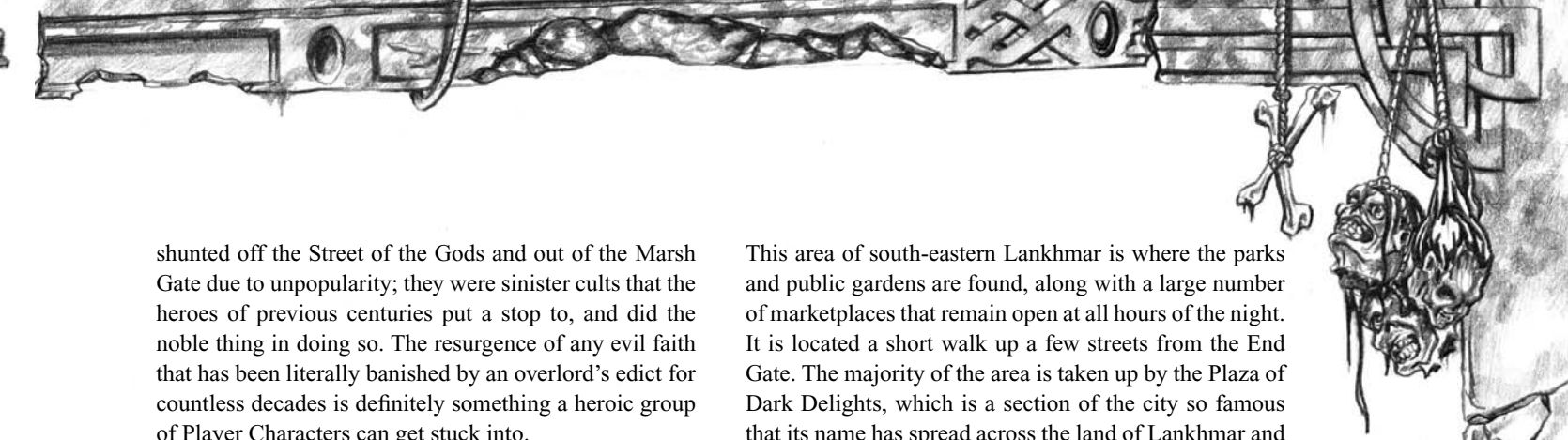
Abandoned Temple of Tyaa

In amongst the grain silos and warehouses on the banks of the River Hlal is a crumbling temple of broken spires, breached walls and a courtyard that has been overgrowing for centuries. Though Lankhmarts see this structure as an ill-omened place, it is generally ignored as yet another of the slowly collapsing temples to a long-dead god or goddess that feature in every district of the Imperishable City. This is actually the temple of the goddess Tyaa, mistress of dark-hearted birds. Centuries ago, the altar in the top room of the tower was the place where Lankhmarts brought shining jewels and metals to honour and placate Tyaa and her swarms of birds, so that they would not scar or mutilate the beautiful women of Lankhmar as revenge for being ignored.

The cult was matriarchal, always led by a high priestess who was believed to be an avatar of Tyaa herself and possessed the magical ability to change into a giant raven. This is a perfect example of the kind of ancient faiths that occasionally see resurgences in modern Lankhmar, before they are either crushed again by adventurers, the city watch or some other faction that knowingly or unknowingly saves the city by ending the rebirth of the faith.

Games Masters might want to present agents of these forgotten cults in their own games because they make fantastic antagonists for the players to face. Opposing dark cults and malicious magic-wielding priestesses are pure Leiber and very thematic to Lankhmar as classic sword & sorcery settings. These pursuits are also perfect examples of how Lankhmar characters encounter and struggle against magic rather than mastering it themselves. Magic is a dark and unwholesome path in Nehwon. These cults show that darkness in a sinister light.

Almost all of these resurged cults have been twisted by time and the death of their god, and they are frequently evil (at the very least harmful) to the people of Lankhmar. Tyaa's cult did not wish peaceful acknowledgement and appeasement – the new high priestess wished for mass-worship through fear and used dark magic that reaped a lot of suffering in her bid to attain it. Frankly, it is often easy to see why these old faiths were put down and forgotten in the first place. These are not simply religions that were



shunted off the Street of the Gods and out of the Marsh Gate due to unpopularity; they were sinister cults that the heroes of previous centuries put a stop to, and did the noble thing in doing so. The resurgence of any evil faith that has been literally banished by an overlord's edict for countless decades is definitely something a heroic group of Player Characters can get stuck into.

For more information on Tyaa, see Adventures of Nehwon, page 120.

The Plaza District

In the Plaza of Dark Delights, which lies seven blocks south of the Marsh Gate and extends from the Fountain of Dark Abundance to the Shrine of the Black Virgin, the shop-lights glinted upward no more brightly than the stars glinted down. For there the vendors of drugs and the peddlers of curios and the hawkers of assignations light their stalls and crouching places with foxfire, glowworms and firepots with tiny single windows, and they conduct their business almost as silently as the stars conduct theirs.

There are plenty of raucous spots a-glare with torches in nocturnal Lankhmar, but by immemorial tradition soft whispers and pleasant dimness are the rule in the Plaza of Dark Delights. Philosophers often go there solely to meditate, students to dream, and fanatic-eyed theologians to spin like spiders abstruse new theories of the Devil and of the other dark forces ruling the universe. And if any of these find a little illicit fun by the way, their theories and dreams and theologies and demonologies are undoubtedly the better for it.

— Bazaar of the Bizarre

This area of south-eastern Lankhmar is where the parks and public gardens are found, along with a large number of marketplaces that remain open at all hours of the night. It is located a short walk up a few streets from the End Gate. The majority of the area is taken up by the Plaza of Dark Delights, which is a section of the city so famous that its name has spread across the land of Lankhmar and across the face of Nehwon. Accordingly, the Plaza sees a great deal of foreign visitors as well as heaving crowds of Lankhmarts out to enjoy the temperate evenings in a relatively smokeless part of their city.

The Plaza District is well known as a gathering place for philosophers and magicians, who cluster around the fountains and the monuments to notable Lankhmartism discussing whatever matters concern philosophers and wizards in such a city.

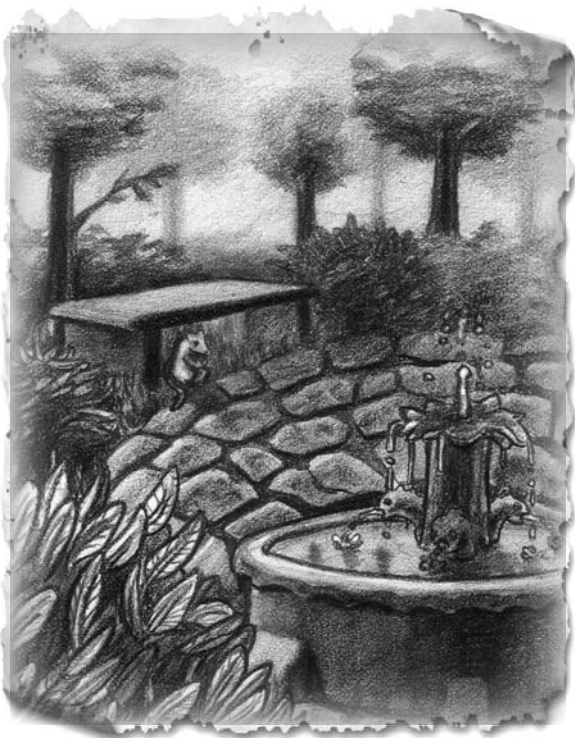
Lankhmar has no shortage of marketplaces but by far the largest is the night-time Plaza of Dark Delights. Practically anything that can be imagined can be bought here, though the prices can be steep and unusual. Haggling is always an option, but for every perfectly natural-seeming trader there is a vendor that carts his wares and hawks them in teasing whispers, asking for payment in favours owed and tasks performed. Some of the things on sale here are undoubtedly magical in origin, such as artefacts stolen from magicians or brought to Lankhmar from adventures outside the city. Furthermore, no small number of these items are cursed to some degree, such as those plundered from Eastern desert-tombs or taken from cults in other cities.

This area is also the heart of Lankhmar's profitable and thriving black market. Any intoxicants, weapons, poisons or banned scrolls are on sale here for the right price. The problem with this degree of illegal activity in one place is that it attracts even more illegal activity. Cutpurses and muggers prey upon the dizzied and delighted patrons of the Plaza after dark, and it is easy to pass unnoticed even in the hissing, whispering crowds, because so much quiet revelry and distraction is going on. The officers of the city watch know better than to ever try bringing law to the Plaza of Dark Delights: to make the attempt would be as futile as trying to clean out the slums.

city of the Black toga

Plaza of Dark Delights

Fountain of Dark Abundance



This fountain is at the north end of the Plaza, and features a wide black-watered pool and a black-stone central pillar that drips out the dark water several times every minute. It is frequently used as a place to meet Red Lantern whores, who gather here each night and float their crimson paper candle-lamps on the gentle waters at the base of the trickling fountain. On nights of certain astrological significance, it is said that some onlookers see visions in the fountain's waters. Lankhmarts throw Tiks and Agols into the water for good fortune and to make wishes. Taking any of the sparkling coins from under the water is supposed to invite bad luck into one's life for a year and a day. Periodically, however, the fountain seems to be swept clean of coinage and no-one knows who takes them.

Shrine of the Black Virgin

This shrine stands at the south end of the Plaza, not far from the End and Grand Gates. It is a sculpture of black stone, shaped as a life-sized naked, reclining young woman in her mid-to-late teens. In an unwholesome reflection of

this artistic representation of purity, the shrine is a noted meeting place for drug dealers. Local legends conflict on whether the Black Virgin is a forgotten goddess who perhaps has an abandoned temple elsewhere in the city, or a simple and beautiful piece of history that has stood here for centuries.

Spire of Rhan

This slender tower is a monument to one of Lankhmar's founders. It was apparently once capped by a statue of the man, Rhan, though according to local tales it was either toppled in a storm or fell centuries ago when the Gods of Lankhmar walked the streets to punish a long-forgotten overlord. Rhan himself (what remains of him, that is) resides in the Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar. Now it is topped by an ornate spike reaching above the roofs all around, forming part of the Lankhmar skyline.

CURIO COURT

A small courtyard marketplace set to the north of the main plaza market is known by the locals as Curio Court. Here traders, antiquarians, collectors, scholars and adventurers all meet in the exchange of oddments, oddities, curiosities and curios. If magic items can be found anywhere in the city, it is most likely in Curio Court, though their utility is hardly guaranteed. Unfortunately for anyone seeking anything useful, if useless junk, trinkets and antiques completely irrelevant to adventuring or urban life can be found anywhere in the city, it is also in Curio Court.

The prices here vary wildly on the *perceived* value of an item in question rather than the actual value. An enchanted wooden earring from Horborixen that is proof against pregnancy will go for Tiks if the trader remains unaware of its power. A mundane sword completely useless in battle because of its ornate design will sell for hundreds of Agols, even if the filigree and beauty of the thing is a false rendition of a true Quarmallian antique. There are many traders here that deal on the basis of what they assume an object is worth. This makes for some unruly and annoying deals. Contrary to these stall owners are the true experts in their trade, selling their curios for insightfully accurate prices. No matter how hard a character tries, it will always be hard to haggle these keen-minded folk down from the prices they know are fair.

House of Red Lanterns

To the east of the Plaza of Dark Delights is the headquarters of Lankhmar's infamous prostitute guild. The House of Red Lanterns is run by a small 'council' of madams that oversee the accounts and actions of the whores' guild. The order is named on account of courtesans walking the streets with candle-lamps of red paper or lanterns with red glass, identifying their trade.

The House of Red Lanterns has strong ties to the Slayers' Brotherhood. The murder of courtesans is punished in kind, and almost all Red Lantern girls are protected by nearby Slayers or guild-employed pimps chosen by the madams. Unlike the Thieves' Guild, the Red Lantern members do not frown on freelance competition, since the guild's courtesans are generally a cut above the average streetwalker and receive the lion's share of the attention and business on the cobblestone streets of sinful, decadent Lankhmar.

House of Red Lanterns

The courtesans' guild

Requirements: Characters must be female with a CHA of 10 or above

Skills: Athletics, Dagger, Influence, Persistence, Streetwise

Duties: Courtesans must work a minimum of four nights a week

Special Benefits: Guild members tithe 50% of their earnings to the guild, keeping the rest. They are appointed a member of the Slayers' Brotherhood stationed nearby while they work.

Lankhmar Theatre

Taking up the space of eight buildings on Carter Street, the Lankhmar Playhouse is home to several performance troupes, with acts running the gamut from serious plays and orchestras to political satires and entertainment for the plebs in the form of comedies painting the city's prosperous social elite in a humorous light. Tickets range from a few Tiks to a few Rilks, depending on who is performing, what is being performed and whether the purchaser wishes to sit on the prestigious balcony or in side-box seats.

The Lankhmar Theatre is busy day and night, with matinee performances and evening shows being managed practically non-stop. The politics 'behind the curtain' are the stuff of thespian legend, with actors, directors, singers, writers and musicians all seeking to become the next big thing and perhaps even enjoy patronage from a noble. To this end, beatings and even assassinations have been known to happen with alarming regularity at times. Understudies getting big breaks at the expense of a 'missing' lead star, or the director of a play 'falling ill' and needing to surrender his spot on the bill to a rival are among the classics. The fickle and desperate creative crowd would be treacherous enough anyway, but in Lankhmar they have access to some particularly nasty underworld guilds in order to hinder their rivals.

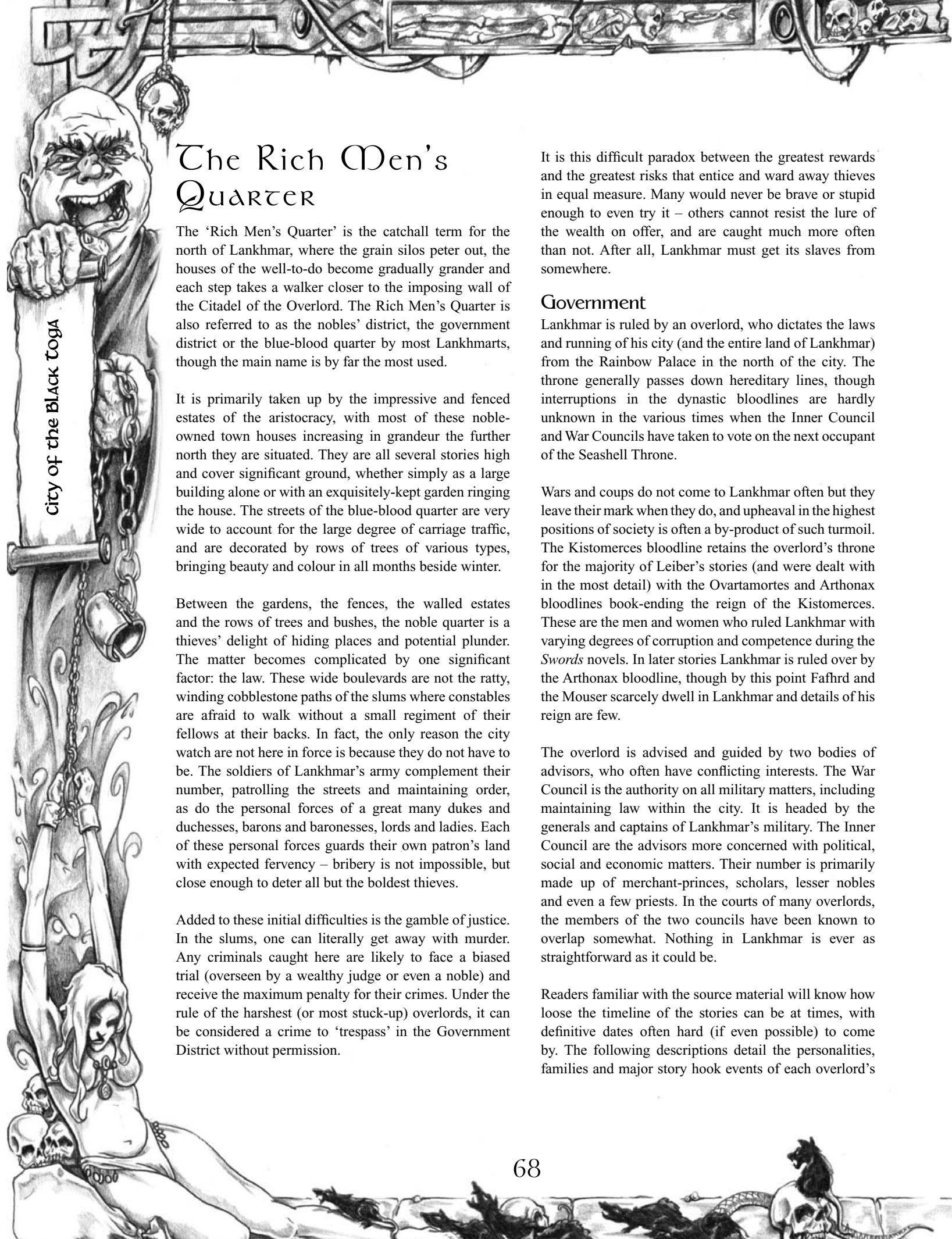
Games Masters wishing to create a more social campaign with undertones of treachery and secret violence could not ask for a better setting. The Lankhmar Theatre is also notable as a place where performers of any stripe can meet the city's nobility, either to beg patronage, attempt to murder or just simply perform for them. Almost anything is possible in this den of desperate souls, who are in their own way just as prone to corruption and immoral behaviour as the thieves. More than one assassin has hidden in the after-show crowds in order to strike at an aristocratic target.

Rightby's Blades

The swordsmith Rivis Rightby is a skilled weaponmaker, specialising in the forging of sword blades. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are known to use his services, though they are also known for their occasional failure to pay him for the expert work he does. This is a slight on their memories (or their characters) rather than a criticism of the swordsmith's craft.

It might also be a statement on the foolishness of doing work on credit and the promise of future payment in a city like Lankhmar, but Rivis is skilled enough that he earns a tidy profit above most other metalworkers in the city. Nobles and wealthy adventurers alike come to Rightby for their blades, though slightly less pricey weapons made by his apprentices can be purchased, which are still of very high quality, especially when compared side by side with slum-bought swords.

city of the Black toga



The Rich Men's Quarter

The 'Rich Men's Quarter' is the catchall term for the north of Lankhmar, where the grain silos peter out, the houses of the well-to-do become gradually grander and each step takes a walker closer to the imposing wall of the Citadel of the Overlord. The Rich Men's Quarter is also referred to as the nobles' district, the government district or the blue-blood quarter by most Lankhmarts, though the main name is by far the most used.

It is primarily taken up by the impressive and fenced estates of the aristocracy, with most of these noble-owned town houses increasing in grandeur the further north they are situated. They are all several stories high and cover significant ground, whether simply as a large building alone or with an exquisitely-kept garden ringing the house. The streets of the blue-blood quarter are very wide to account for the large degree of carriage traffic, and are decorated by rows of trees of various types, bringing beauty and colour in all months beside winter.

Between the gardens, the fences, the walled estates and the rows of trees and bushes, the noble quarter is a thieves' delight of hiding places and potential plunder. The matter becomes complicated by one significant factor: the law. These wide boulevards are not the ratty, winding cobblestone paths of the slums where constables are afraid to walk without a small regiment of their fellows at their backs. In fact, the only reason the city watch are not here in force is because they do not have to be. The soldiers of Lankhmar's army complement their number, patrolling the streets and maintaining order, as do the personal forces of a great many dukes and duchesses, barons and baronesses, lords and ladies. Each of these personal forces guards their own patron's land with expected fervency – bribery is not impossible, but close enough to deter all but the boldest thieves.

Added to these initial difficulties is the gamble of justice. In the slums, one can literally get away with murder. Any criminals caught here are likely to face a biased trial (overseen by a wealthy judge or even a noble) and receive the maximum penalty for their crimes. Under the rule of the harshest (or most stuck-up) overlords, it can be considered a crime to 'trespass' in the Government District without permission.

It is this difficult paradox between the greatest rewards and the greatest risks that entice and ward away thieves in equal measure. Many would never be brave or stupid enough to even try it – others cannot resist the lure of the wealth on offer, and are caught much more often than not. After all, Lankhmar must get its slaves from somewhere.


Government

Lankhmar is ruled by an overlord, who dictates the laws and running of his city (and the entire land of Lankhmar) from the Rainbow Palace in the north of the city. The throne generally passes down hereditary lines, though interruptions in the dynastic bloodlines are hardly unknown in the various times when the Inner Council and War Councils have taken to vote on the next occupant of the Seashell Throne.

Wars and coups do not come to Lankhmar often but they leave their mark when they do, and upheaval in the highest positions of society is often a by-product of such turmoil. The Kistomerces bloodline retains the overlord's throne for the majority of Leiber's stories (and were dealt with in the most detail) with the Overtamortes and Arthonax bloodlines book-ending the reign of the Kistomerces. These are the men and women who ruled Lankhmar with varying degrees of corruption and competence during the *Swords* novels. In later stories Lankhmar is ruled over by the Arthonax bloodline, though by this point Fafhrd and the Mouser scarcely dwell in Lankhmar and details of his reign are few.

The overlord is advised and guided by two bodies of advisors, who often have conflicting interests. The War Council is the authority on all military matters, including maintaining law within the city. It is headed by the generals and captains of Lankhmar's military. The Inner Council are the advisors more concerned with political, social and economic matters. Their number is primarily made up of merchant-princes, scholars, lesser nobles and even a few priests. In the courts of many overlords, the members of the two councils have been known to overlap somewhat. Nothing in Lankhmar is ever as straightforward as it could be.

Readers familiar with the source material will know how loose the timeline of the stories can be at times, with definitive dates often hard (if even possible) to come by. The following descriptions detail the personalities, families and major story hook events of each overlord's



rule, allowing Games Masters to decide which imperial scion oversees the running of Lankhmar during their campaigns.

Use of the term 'Demoiselle' in the following sections is a general term for unmarried women of Lankhmar's high society. Few peasants could use the term or apply it to themselves without looking foolish.

Overlord Karstack Overtamortes

Karstack was overlord during the first *Swords* stories, at a time when Lankhmar was neither truly threatened by great conflict nor enjoying noteworthy prosperity. Karstack's reign could almost be considered a boring one, with the exception of the Thieves' Guild at the time and the actions of his niece, Ivmiss. The former matter, when the Guild was controlled by the insidious Krovas, was something of a golden age for the organised thieves of Lankhmar. It is said that Karstack himself answered to Krovas, though whether it was because the guildmaster had influence over the Inner Council or the direct ear of the overlord is unknown.

Characters with ties to either the criminal underworld or the lofty War and Inner Councils can easily find themselves immersed in the secret events that lay under the corrupt reign of Overlord Overtamortes. Thieves' Guild characters might be pressed into acting as go-betweens for Karstack and Krovas, relaying messages and carrying out certain deeds that benefit the ruling elite as well as their criminal backers – killing rivals, stealing trade documents or evidence for court trials, blackmail, threats, extortion and similar activities.

An entire campaign could be developed around the shadowed balance between the overlord's throne and the influence of his underworld advisors. Characters acting as agents of the Inner and War Councils might seek to free Karstack of the Guild's pressures, acting against Krovas and his thieves in order to lessen the corruption in Lankhmar. Other characters might work as double-crossers in the two councils, working to ensure that the Thieves' Guild maintain their hidden grip on the throne. Some councillors (and their agents) will do this in the name of a fat kickback from Krovas, while others might be bound to act because of blackmail or some leverage the Thieves' Guild has against them. Krovas would hardly be above kidnapping family members in order to get his way.

Demoiselle Ivmiss Overtamortes

In fact, within a few days the Mouser began the hottest sort of love affair with a slightly underage and most winsome niece of Karstack Overtamortes...

– The Price of Pain-Ease

Ivmiss, the niece in question, was the second exception to Karstack's seemingly dull rule. Even in youth as she neared womanhood, she was exceptionally beautiful and bright-eyed, with a charming and addictive naivety that attracted no shortage of admirers in and out of the overlord's court.

In a decadent city such as Lankhmar, it should come as little surprise that a beautiful girl in a powerful family took her fair share of scandalous lovers. Though the *Swords* novels reveal only her relationship with the Mouser and precious little else about Ivmiss, it stands to reason that she was a nexus for trouble and scandal in her uncle's court. Ivmiss clearly had a penchant for slumming, getting a thrill from sexual relationships with men below her station. The Mouser at the time was less a hero and more an unknown vagabond and occasional sell-sword, so what if he was not Ivmiss's only lover among the lower classes?

Games Masters wishing to use aspects of high society in their campaigns can use Ivmiss as a perfect bridge between the class divide. As her lover, a character will have access to the Rainbow Palace and many of her peers as contacts. Rivalries will certainly build between any of her lovers and her more 'legitimate' suitors in the halls of power, who likely seek her hand in marriage because of her beauty and connection to the Lankhmar throne. Any character getting involved with Ivmiss can expect duels over her honour and attention, whether the character was in it for the pleasure, using her as a stepping stone to real power, or even seeking out ways to infiltrate the courts on behalf of the Thieves' Guild. Ivmiss herself might be a willing instrument and ally in the manipulation of her uncle, or she could loyally oppose any attempts to pervert the position of her family.

city of the Black toga

Overlord Gliplerio Kistomerces

At the far end of the sea-blue room, near the circular stair leading up into the palace's tallest minaret, Gliplerio had risen to his feet in excitement from his golden audience couch shaped like a seashell. The fantastic overlord stood a head higher than Fafhrd, but was as thin as a starved Mingol. His black toga made him look like a funeral cypress. Perhaps to offset this dismal effect, he wore a wreath of small, violet flowers around his blond head, the hair of which clustered in golden ringlets.

—Swords of Lankmar

Gliplerio features far more prominently in the *Swords* novels than any other overlord, most notably in *The Swords of Lankmar* when the Gray Mouser had business in the overlord's court. If there is a default overlord to use in Lankmar campaigns, Gliplerio is likely the one to consider. He reigns for several years (incidentally during Fafhrd and the Mouser's respective primes) and has a lively, busy court full of intrigue, disorder and occasionally disaster, until he finally commits suicide in the outbreak of the strange war known to Lankmar's residents as the Rat Plague.

The back of the Thieves' Guild had been broken with the deaths of a few prominent guild leaders before his ascension, so Gliplerio is never beholden to powerful underworld elements to the degree his predecessor was. That is not to say he has no dealings with the most powerful guild in Lankmar, because he most assuredly does. Those dealings are simply never on the scale of the corruption that plagued and shaped Karstack's rule. Instead, like those of so many overlords before him, Gliplerio's reign is defined by his decadence. For instance, he is well-known for keeping slave girls and indentured servants at the palace, many of whom he orders shaved bald because of his phobia about hair in his soup. His sadistic bent is also well-known to the palace staff and the members of his court, many of whom are forced to either watch Gliplerio ordering his slaves whipped and beaten, or in the case of the slaves themselves, having to endure the overlord's palace mistress Samanda whipping them while Gliplerio giggles as he watches from behind a thin curtain.

Gliplerio may not have the Thieves' Guild breathing down his back and whispering in his ear, but he does have a spineless streak noticeable by almost all who stand before him. Gossip across the city ridicules the so-called 'beanpole monarch' for his effeminate ways and his utter deference to his palace mistress. Many are the times he will order one of his slaves or subjects to report to Samanda for punishment as well as to seek her out for a decision that should rightfully be made by the overlord himself. In short, Gliplerio is a weak and indecisive man, easily influenced by others. This makes his court that much more interesting, for the power Overlord Kistomerces fails to wield is up for grabs among his courtiers and family. The Guild of Grain Merchants – who have long had ties and often members within every successive overlord's court – have the opportunity to twist Gliplerio around their fingers, as long as they stay in Samanda's good books. Her lips are ever the closest to the overlord's ears. It is well-established that they are lovers.

Noble characters entering Gliplerio's court (perhaps as members of the War or Inner Council) will find themselves walking a fine balance through the halls of power. The overlord is weak and easily led by the supposed wisdom of others, allowing clever characters to further their agendas with the right honeyed words in Gliplerio's ear. This means that those who gain the ruler's trust are in exalted positions indeed, while those who have enemies deep in Gliplerio's friendship are in for a world of trouble. Lives and fortunes are lost and squandered in the courtly battles for the overlord's favour – all without the distracted, sadistic fool ever noticing.

Despite his well-noted ignorance, Gliplerio is generous with his rewards, often bestowing titles and smaller rewards upon those who serve him loyally. Of course, Gliplerio has little idea who serves him loyally and who feigns loyalty for personal gain, so he distributes rewards to many of those that care nothing for him and simply see his position as a means to an end. He is markedly fickle, however, often withdrawing his favour at the bat of an unnaturally long eyelash and shifting it to another, apparently more worthy, ally.

In the decadent, corrupt echelons of Lankmar's great and noble classes, the court of Overlord Kistomerces makes for an ideal political campaign, as well as for casting the rich-poor divide into stark relief if characters from the lower classes have any business within Gliplerio's court.

More than one husband, wife or lover has sought to steal their loved ones back from Glipekrio's slave barracks and harem, and some (usually with contacts on the inside or within the Thieves' Guild) have actually been successful. Working off such a massive debt to the Thieves' Guild would hardly be joyful, to say the least.

Palace Mistress Samantha

Behind her, a monstrously fat woman in a dress of thick black wool that went to her redoubled chins and plump knuckles and hid her surely monstrous feet and ankles. Her black hair was dressed in a great round beehive stuck through and through with long black-headed pins, so that it was as if she bore a prickly planet on her head. This appeared to be the case, for her puffed face was weighted with a world of sullenness and hate. Her black eyes peered stern and all-distrustful from between folds of fat, while a sparse back moustache, like the ghost of black centipede, crossed her upper lip. Around her vast belly she wore a broad leather belt from which hung at intervals keys, thongs, chains, and whips. The kitchen boys believed she had deliberately grown mountain fat to keep them from clinking together and so warn them when she came a-spying.

— The Swords of Lankmar

Samantha is a sadistic and bitter woman, grown obese on the rich foods and opulent sloth her station has brought her. In the overlord's court she is a sneering fat shape of a woman, lording in her role as kitchen mistress and lover of the overlord. She regards everyone around her as either property or an enemy. It is this cruel, hateful creature that is the real power over Lankmar. Any members of the court that wish to wield any true power must by necessity do so behind Samantha's back or by winning her favour. Both methods are dangerous and difficult.

Samantha is not stupid, despite her slovenly image. She is undoubtedly part of (perhaps even the hub of) Glipekrio's network of loyal agents, informants and allies throughout the palace as well as in the city's guilds, allowing the overlord access to unrivalled influence. At one point even

the Gray Mouser flirts with her because he recognises her position of influence within the palace. Characters in her good graces could go far in this network, provided they keep the supply of information and successful operations coming. To cement the overlord's position (and therefore her own) Samantha has never been shy of using assassination, torture and blackmail as tools in ending the lives and ambitions of potential political rivals. All of this manipulation is concealed behind the fat face of the overlord's chamberlain.

Characters in her favour might even be wooed in the hopes of an affair, for Samantha is only loyal to her husband when his eyes are upon her. Characters who thwart her operations (intentionally or otherwise) or who have ever shown extreme kindness to palace slaves in her presence are likely to earn her eternal ire. As an enemy, Samantha has many contacts at her disposal, from guild leaders and commissioned military officers to city watchmen and street-level murderers. She can make life very hard for the people she hates within high society, even going as far to poison the food of political rivals that dine with the overlord.



city of the Black Toga



Demoiselle Innesgay Kistomerces

Innesgay, Glipkerio's beautiful daughter, is rarely described in the *Swords* novels. It is known that she is betrothed to the Prince of Ilthmar as a matter of political alliance in the years before the Rat Plague, but the wedding is called off in the aftermath of her father's suicide, most likely since such a marriage offers little to Lankhmar or Ilthmar when Radomix takes the overlord's throne.

Games Masters have a unique opportunity where Innesgay is concerned. In her father's court she can be every inch the spoiled princess, either lamenting her betrothal and seeking a way out, or relishing the thought of a powerful husband. An opposite choice would be for her to be a shrewd political ally, wielding a measure of power in a court almost rendered useless by her father's decadence. Perhaps if she was a master manipulator, Games Masters might prefer to present her as alternating between these two roles, acting the spoiled princess one moment and a cunning political animal the next.

Demoiselle Elakeria Kistomerces

Elakeria is a plump young woman, fat from overindulgence rather than mere laziness. Some rumours have painted Elakeria as Samanda's daughter because of her corpulence, though the resemblance ends there. The overlord's niece looks like her real mother, the overlord's sister, only much fatter. Whether because of her station or skills in bed (her admirers firmly insist it is the latter) Elakeria enjoys many lovers. Notably, these affairs occur without even a hint of scandal, almost as if Elakeria's indiscretions do not matter to the overlord of his court. This is true to some degree since it is the beautiful Innesgay that presents the most attractive and likely option to be married off in the name of political gain. Her uncle's lax attitude to her dealings has allowed Elakeria to grow up in a court that largely overlooks her in politics, which places her in an interesting position. Games Masters can choose to present her as largely dismissive of politics, focused on her own pleasure and indulging in any number of admirers over time. She is certainly presented as such in the *Swords* novels, described several times as 'lusty' and a 'devourer of lovers.'

On the flip side of the coin, any political campaign centred around Glipkerio's court could feature his niece as a wild card. Elakeria could easily hide political ambitions beneath her actions, using her skills between the sheets in order to make allies and build support for her own agenda.

It should be noted that after the events of the Rat Plague, Elakeria's weight is shed through magical means and she is considered a beautiful young woman almost the physical equal to her cousin Innesgay. At that point, no matter what her previous intentions were, Elakeria might switch from pleasure-driven princess to power-hungry politician or vice versa as she comes to terms with her new body.

LORD SNARVE KISTOMERCES

'Who comes so dramatically a-slither? – by the Black Bones, it's Snarve, our overlord Glipkerio's nephew! Who's that he speaks to? – oh, only Tork the Cutpurse'.

—The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar

Snarve is a perfect example of a blue-blood getting in with the Thieves' Guild without needing to pay much in the way of dues. As the overlord's nephew, killing him would cause a world of trouble for the Thieves' Guild. Couple this with the potential for contacts in the aristocracy as well as the possibility of getting information on the house plans of Lankhmar's great and good, and it becomes easy to see why noble-blood freelancers are tolerated by most men that hold the position of Master Thief.

Games Masters can use Snarve as a character capable of bridging the cultural gap between Lankhmar's rich and poor, serving as a contact for the characters wishing to deal on the other side of the social structure. Alternately, players might find Snarve's particular clashing of nobility and thievery provides an excellent inspiration for their own character backgrounds. Snarve is not the only wealthy nobleman's son involved in the underworld – just the most well-known.

Radomix Kistomerces-Null

This overlord was a gentle and tenderhearted scholar, who truly loved only his seventeen cats, yet wished no other being in Nehwon ill, and who was forever making things difficult for Death by pardoning felons, reconciling battling brothers and feuding families, hurrying barges or wains of grain to regions of starvation, rescuing distressed small animals, feeding pigeons, fostering the study of medicine and kindred arts and most simply of all by always having about him, like finest fountain spray on hottest day, an atmosphere of sweet and wise calm which kept swords in scabbards, brows unknotted, and teeth unclenched.

— The Swords of Lankmar

In the long, violent, complicated and often madness-touched history of Lankmar's overlords, the man who found himself placed upon the throne after the suicide of Glipkerio was perhaps the most beloved and easily the most kind-hearted. Radomix Kistomerces-Null was intensely disliked by his predecessor, mostly because Glipkerio knew his cousin was widely-admired for his scholarly intelligence and humility.

Perhaps the greatest difference between Radomix and most other overlords, even taking into account wits and a good heart, was the fact that he did not even seem to desire Lankmar's throne at all. Glipkerio's paranoia never allowed him to believe that, and he ordered Radomix slain while Lankmar laboured under an invasion of sentient rats. The scholarly cousin fled into hiding in the slums, taking his seventeen cats with him and hiding out among friends. In the joyous aftermath of the Rat Plague's end, Radomix was seized by several nobles and members of the general populace, and carried to the Rainbow Palace (along with his cats) to be hailed as the new overlord.

Radomix also stands out among the list of Lankmar's overlords because he is actually competent. The *Swords* tales detail four overlords in varying detail, with only one – Radomix – ever earning any praise in his description.

After an overlord utterly weak in the face of the Thieves' Guild (Karstack) and another ruled by genuinely sadistic urges and delusions of grandeur (Glipkerio), Radomix is known to be a decent, caring and *competent* ruler. He sued for peace among his nobles and he wins it. He takes great pains to educate the populace through the construction of a university dedicated to the sciences. He sends shipments of aid to any regions nearby that have suffered under bad harvests and are threatened by starvation.

In the known history of Nehwon, no ruler – let alone an overlord of Lankmar – has ever behaved so selflessly.

This is all the more tragic since not only was his short few-years' reign ended abruptly by assassination, but Radomix was succeeded by a petty and conniving man with no qualms about dealing with the Assassins' Order.

Pulgh Arthonax

...Pulgh Arthonax, penurious and perverse overlord of Lankmar, who hated heroes of all description – but especially fair-complected big ones like Fafhrd...

— The Curse of the Smalls and Stars

Pulgh, also known as Arth-Pulgh in a strange twist of his formal title, is the final overlord detailed in the *Swords* saga, ruling after the assassination of Radomix Kistomerces-Null. Pulgh is monumentally bitter and petty, as well as tight-fisted when it comes to spending and hoarding money, which is ironic considering that his title makes him one of the wealthiest men in the known world.

Pulgh is also known to have contacts among the less-lawful (but just as reputable) guild of Lankmar, such as the Slayers' Brotherhood and the Assassins' Order. He is clearly a man unafraid to stoop to any level in order to achieve his ends.

city of the Black toga

The Citadel of Lankhmar

At the very north edge of the city is the Citadel of Lankhmar, also called the Citadel of the Overlord. Here the reigning overlord dwells in the Rainbow Palace, situated amongst sprawling botanical gardens. The North Barracks of the army are housed within the high stone walls that mark the citadel's outer boundary. This gives the palace unmatched protection, with several thousand black-clad Lankhmar soldiers deployable from inside the citadel's walls.

The Rainbow Palace

The Grey Mouser, standing on Squid's gently-dripping prow, sighted the soaring Citadel of Lankhmar through the dispersing fog. Beyond it to the east there soon came into view the square-topped minarets of the Overlord's palace, each furnished in stone of different hue, and to the south the dun granaries like vast smokestacks.

— The Swords of Lankhmar

The Rainbow Palace is one of Nehwon's architectural wonders, known for its strange beauty rather than for any attempts at classic design in its construction. It is comprised of a series of minarets; each made from stone of a different colour, rising from the central building which is itself made from multi-hued stones. It features several stories in some places, a single storey in others, and is capped in several places by domes of stained glass. At night, torches and candles that line the walls and windows illuminate the coloured stone, creating an eye-drawing, marvellous effect viewable from almost anywhere in the city.

The rooms of the colossal palace are each themed to reflect the nature of the room or its occupiers' tastes. Overlord Glipkerio's Blue Audience Chamber was themed as an undersea kingdom, with various blues and greens filling the eyes, decorated in places with beautiful and rare seashells. As evidenced, much of the decoration is tasteless in the extreme, befitting the whims of a succession of overlords all with clashing preferences, several of whom were at least partly mad.

The palace staff runs into the hundreds, with every imaginable service provided for the overlord and his guests. As postings go, it is considered a dicey position for an indentured slave because so much of the role depends on the reigning overlord. Slaves serving under Radomix's brief rule were spared beatings and treated well for their service. Those under Glipkerio were beaten for only minor failings, and whipped into unconsciousness (or even an early grave) by Palace Mistress Samantha and her glass-studded whip.

Underneath the palace and its hundreds of rooms is an equally extensive labyrinth of dungeons, storage rooms, granaries, wine cellars and basements of varying dimensions. It is said that enslaved servants have managed to escape their servitude by blindly navigating the under-chambers of the Rainbow Palace, though to do so is surely no easy feat.

The Royal Docks are at the very tip of the city, guarded by a sea wall. Here the Lankhmarines are stationed, along with a fully-functioning dock for the overlord's personal cruises, visiting dignitaries or the ruler's returning agents seeking to report to him directly.

Lankhmar Below

The next level had shown no rats in sight and been redolent of grain. He had noted bins of wheat, barley, millet, kombo and wild rice from the River Tilt. A good place to hide – perhaps. But what could he gain from hiding?

The next level – the third down – had been full of military clatter and rank with rat-stink. He had noted rat pikemen drilling in bronze cuirasses and helmets and another squad being instructed in the crossbow, while others crowded around a table where routes on a great map were being pointed out. He had lingered even a shorter time there.

— The Swords of Lankhmar

From a thousand rat holes across Lankhmar, tiny rodent-sized passageways lead down into a complex undercity of little caverns, boltholes, corridors and tunnels. The population of this expansive yet miniature nether-realm are almost all rats, with a few enslaved mice, no doubt to add variety and provide some of the manual labour. This strange subterranean kingdom is the city of Lankhmar Below. In many ways it is an imitation of Lankhmar Above, with the exceptions of size and the human-to-rodent population.

Lankhmarts (the real Lankhmarts) spent thousands of years in total ignorance of Lankhmar Below, until an invasion was launched on the surface by the inhabitants of the under-kingdom. It is believed that the rats had plotted for centuries down there in the darkness, hoping one day to rule the surface city and reign over the men and women that called Lankhmar home. Common tales state that the Gods of Lankhmar brought this invasion to an end through various means. This is not exactly true, as *The Swords of Lankhmar* describes in detail. However, Fafhrd and the Mouser could never claim responsibility for their actions, no matter how huge and well-told their legends were by this point.

Lankhmar Below remains an ignored mystery by most Lankhmarts even after the Rat Plague. Some assume the problem is taken care of for good, while most simply do not believe the under-kingdom is real or are not aware such a thing could even exist. For the most part, Games Masters should feel absolutely free to ignore Lankhmar Below in their campaigns if they desire. It is an acquired taste, ill-suited to the tones of some games.

For all intents and purposes, Lankhmar Below mirrors Lankhmar Above in many ways. There are markets for trading and purchasing goods, there are social strata defining a resident's role and lifestyle in society and there are political factions pursuing their own agendas. Caverns and tunnels are illuminated by caged firebeetles, night-bees and glow-wasps, which are eagle-sized to the rats. The everyday toil and strife

of any busy city occurs in Lankhmar Below; the main difference is that every being there is a rat or a wererat. For details of these creatures, see *Creatures of Nehwon*.

The Inner Circle of Thirteen

In squeaking Lankhmarese, the rulers of Lankhmar Below issue commands and govern their citizens much like a human government would. These are the rats of the Inner Council of Thirteen, intelligent as humans (more so, according to themselves) and living embodiments of an old Nehwonese legend that states every breed of animal is ruled over by 13 representatives that are considered the peak of their race. The 13 ruling-rats just so happen to make their homes underneath Lankhmar. They are known among their people as the Supreme Thirteen.

These rulers wear elaborate, jewelled masks and carry staves of office as they go about their business. The correct form of address for one of the Thirteen is 'Nobility,' as in 'many thanks, Nobility.' The Inner Circle is served in turn by the Lieutenant Wardens who oversee each level of the under-city.



city of the Black toga



COUNCILLOR GRIG

Never without his sapphire-topped white staff of office, Councillor Grig is an ageing white rat with a severe lisp. He is slain in the build-up to the invasion of Lankmar Above when the Grey Mouser slit his throat, bled him out down a privy and stole his clothes in order to impersonate him. Before meeting his rather undignified end, Grig was known as a calm and sedate member of the Supreme Thirteen.

COUNCILLOR SKWEE

Skwee serves on the Inner Council during the Rat Plague, though he sometimes prefers to go without a mask and other indications of office when in public. He is closely allied to Lord Null and Hisvet, and is a remarkable shot with his tiny crossbow.

LORD NULL

One of the rare 'breeding evolutions' successfully created by the rats over the generations is the birth of half-humans and true humans from cross-breeded rodent and human parents. Details on the creation process are scarce in the *Swords* saga, though it appears that with magic potions of growth and size reduction, rats were enlarged and humans shrunk accordingly.

Lord Null, as he is known to the rats of Lankmar Below, is actually the wealthy merchant Hisvin, a respected member of the Guild of Grain Merchants. He is fully human, though is believed to possess the unnatural power to become a rat when he chooses. As of *The Swords of Lankmar* he is in his 60s, serving as one of the Supreme Thirteen in Lankmar Below and plotting the overthrow of the city's human rulers in the surface world. He is an acquaintance of many nobles and a contemporary of many successful merchants. His daughter Hisvet is of marriageable age and attracts her fair share of attention from wealthy bachelors. Beyond his expansive financial interests, little concerns Lord Null except for a rigid devotion to the rats' ascendancy.

Neither Lord Null or Hisvin are considered to be friendly; both identities maintain a guarded air of condescension and impatience with those around them. Games Masters can play these tendencies up to make a memorable villain character, though another option exists: Hisvet might seek to make alliances with potential sympathisers, hoping to use them as allies when the rats next strike the surface world. Perhaps it is an unlikely prospect for any Player Character to go along with such a plan (unless for infiltration purposes) but characters uncovering

how far Hisvin's web of surface-alliances stretches can make for some intriguing gameplay through the halls of Lankmar's powerful social elite.

DEMOISELLE HISVET

The Demoiselle Hisvet stood as tall as the Mouser, but judging by her face, wrists and ankles was considerably slenderer. Her face was delicate and taper-chinned with small mouth and pouty upper lip that lifted just enough to show a double dash of pearly tooth. Her complexion was creamy pale except for two spots of colour high on her cheeks. Her straight fine hair, which grew low on her forehead, was pure white touched with silver and all drawn back through a silver ring behind her neck, whence it hung unbraided like a unicorn's tail. Her eyes had china whites but darkly pink irises around the large black pupils. Her body was enveloped and hidden by loose robe of violet silk except when the wind briefly molded a flat curve of her girlish anatomy. There was a violet hood, half thrown back. The sleeves were puffed but snug at the wrists. She was barefoot, her skin showing as creamy there as on her face, except for a tinge of pink about the toes.

— The Swords of Lankmar

Hisvet is the daughter of Lord Null of the Council and treated somewhat like a princess among the rats of Lankmar Below. Like her father, she is a human product of the rat-human breeding process, and although she is dedicated to seeing the rats rule the surface world, her efforts are less intense than her father's. For example, she takes a human lover even though he was personally responsible for fouling the surface invasion.

Games Masters have an excellent character in Hisvet to bridge the gap between Lankmar Above and Below. Though she need not become a character's lover if the storyline does not develop that way, it is admittedly likely that something in one of the male characters will appeal to this capricious and sensual young woman. A tale of love flourishing amongst eerie sorceries and war can make for a satisfying campaign arc for some characters.



Rime Island

Claws

FROZEN SEA

Mo-Ombrusk

the Bones of the Old Ones

Illik-Ving

THE COLD WASTE

the Trollster Mountains

Forbidden City of Black Idols

the Mountains of the Giants

GREAT FOREST

Mlung Mar

Ool Plains

Ool Hrusp

Kvaich Mar

Gnamph Mar

Klelg Mar

Desert

City of Ghouls

Sea of Monsters

SHADOW LAND

Ool Krut

Dragon Rocks

Sarheerumar

the Parched Mountains

INNER SEA

LANKHIMAR

Ilthmar

the Great Salt Marsh

Sinking Lands

POISONED DESERT

Mingables Caves

Kartishla

Earth's End

OUTER SEA

Caese

Tovilyis

Quamall

the Mountains of Hunger

Klesh

Tisinitit

Horboixen

EASTERN LANDS

SEA of the EAST

Kokgnab

Nehwon





THE NEHWON GAZETTEER

Byond Lankmar, the wider world of Nehwon is a place of intrigue, conflict, legend and adventure. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser use the City of the Black Toga as a base and a home, always returning there after their journeys, but they often go walking across the face of the world seeking excitement, new experiences, the temporary joys of treasure and coin and of course, simple bragging rights.

Games Masters will find all the information they need to set their campaigns outside of the City of Lankmar here, placing the action elsewhere in Nehwon. The sourcebook *A Guide to Nehwon* expands on much of the information here, though what is provided will be more than enough to plot out such stories as venturing across the icy climes of the Cold Wastes, evading capture and slavery at the hands of the Steppe-dwelling Mingol nomads or travelling to filthy Ilthmar and witnessing the rituals honouring their foul rat and shark gods.

The Cold Wastes

Not quite arctic tundra but certainly not far removed, the Cold Wastes are a region of skin-chilling winds, colossal mountain ranges and alpine and foothill forests, as well as home to wild beasts and monsters found nowhere else in the world of Nehwon. Ravines split the land like canyon-scars on the Cold Wastes' icy skin, while ivory-white mountains pierce the sky on every horizon – snow-blanketed giants fencing in this inhospitable wasteland of tundra plains and forests.

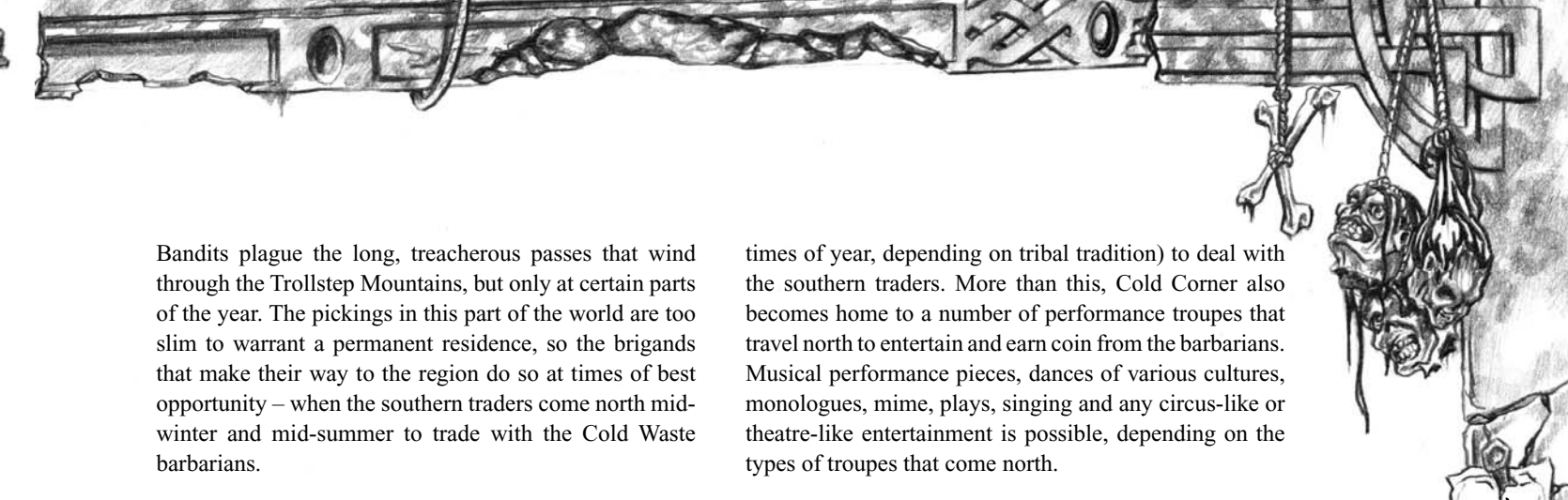
To the north is the Frozen Sea and Rime Isle, beyond which the endless reaches of the polar ice cap stretch on as far as mortal man could ever travel. To the south, past the Barrier Mountains and the Trollstep Range where the temperatures rise sharply, the Great Forest and the Land of the Eight Cities reside in warmer climes. To the east, as the land slowly sinks with each passing league, the Great Steppes are home to the Mingol hordes.

This is the Cold Wastes, then – a place of oppressive loneliness and cold comfort, where life is rare in the endless desolation and what life does survive is rarely in human form.

Trollstep Mountains

The range known as the Trollsteps is a craggy chain which marks the southern border of the Cold Wastes. The temperature here is at its highest by Cold Wastes standards, though the winters remain comparatively harsh to the rest of Nehwon. Travelling south over the Trollsteps brings a wanderer into the Great Forest and the Land of the Eight Cities. Illik-Ving, one of the eight city-states that comprise the nation, is situated near one of the most reliable and oft-used passes through the Trollsteps. Avalanches and rock-falls are common in most other passes through the range.





Bandits plague the long, treacherous passes that wind through the Trollstep Mountains, but only at certain parts of the year. The pickings in this part of the world are too slim to warrant a permanent residence, so the brigands that make their way to the region do so at times of best opportunity – when the southern traders come north mid-winter and mid-summer to trade with the Cold Waste barbarians.

The amount of business that goes on between the arctic nomads and the southern folk can be surprising to green brigands in the foothills for their first banditry. The nomads sell their rainbow-dyed bear, wolf and snow cat furs, wooden carvings of exceptional craft, shards of amber and ambergris, snow-diamonds visible only at night, cured (and sometimes glossed) animal pelts for use as rugs and ice-herbs found only in the frozen northern climes.

The traders come north to sell woven fabrics in styles unseen by the barbarians, as well as hot spices to flavour food, the curious wines of various cultures, vast quantities of blued and browned iron to be shaped into weapons, honey and similar preserves, waxen candles, fire-powders (that flare with a coloured roar) and other products from the civilised south.

A great deal of white snow potato brandy is consumed and traded in these meetings, with the barbarians never shy of sharing their specialty alcohol. Few southerners ever develop a real taste for the brew, however.

If a brigand group time their northern excursion just right – perhaps by operating out of Illik-Ving or another nearby Eight City settlement – the profits can be significant. Hitting the merchants on the way back when they lead wagons loaded with money and exotic northern stock seems to be the best way to make a living by this particular approach to banditry. Of course, many merchants travel in groups and hire caravan guards to ward off such attacks, providing Games Masters with an opportunity to present a trade- or travel-based storyline with the characters on either side of the law in these freezing mountain passes.

Cold Corner

Like a deep, black scar in the tundra's face, Trollstep Canyon is a deep gorge that half-rings the large patch of territory known as Cold Corner. Here, the Cold Waste tribes traditionally gather each mid-winter (and at other

times of year, depending on tribal tradition) to deal with the southern traders. More than this, Cold Corner also becomes home to a number of performance troupes that travel north to entertain and earn coin from the barbarians. Musical performance pieces, dances of various cultures, monologues, mime, plays, singing and any circus-like or theatre-like entertainment is possible, depending on the types of troupes that come north.

Traditionally, if the performances involve any female nudity, the women of the tribes are barred from attending the show. This can lead to resentment and comically-violent snowball fights between the barbarian women and both their own husbands and the female performers, which can occasionally lead to deaths if the missiles have been rock-loaded or frozen first. The males of the tribe are expected to bear these indignities with stoicism. The females in the performance troupes learn fast to travel in groups for fear of a snowballing or, worse, a beating.

The tribes of the north tend to follow a simple naming scheme. The *Swords* novels mention the Snow Clan, the Ice Tribe, the Frost Companions, for example. These matriarchal clans wander the near-arctic regions, making their tent villages across the tundra as they follow the whims of their leaders and hunters. Cold Corner is the only established gathering place for the northern barbarians to meet in one place (outside of tribal wars or chancing across one another in the wild) and is commonly accepted as neutral ground. It is also a place where the ice sorceries of the barbarian women are eerily strong.

Godshall

Godshall on the inside was a tall crazy longship of chill blackness inadequately lit and warmed by an arc of candles in the prow, which all the rest of the year was an altar, but now a stage. Its masts were eleven vast living pines thrusting up from the ship's bow, stern and sides. Its sails – in sober fact, its walls – were stitched hides laced tautly to the masts. Instead of sky overhead there were thickly interthrusting pine branches, white with drifting snow, beginning a good five man's-heights above the deck.

— The Snow Women

In Cold Corner, Godshall is the main structure around which all other tents are pitched. At the altar end are the tents and wagons of the performers and merchants. At the opposite end rest the dozens, perhaps hundreds of tents set up by the visiting tribes. While Godshall is used to worship the barbarians' gods (see below) for most of the year, it becomes the performance hall for the midseason shows when tribes and traders converge on Cold Corner.

Games Masters have a variety of ways to bring characters together and conduct adventures in Cold Corner. Southern characters could come north to trade, escort merchant caravans, perform for the Cold Wastes barbarians or simply travel to learn more of their culture. The barbarians themselves are well-known for their nomadic ways and males are especially likely to see the appeal in travelling back south with the troupes and merchants once the few weeks' of entertainments are finished. Fafhrd himself leaves Cold Corner in the company of Vlana, a mime artist and culture dancer, heading south to pursue her vow of revenge against the Thieves' Guild of Lankmar.

In later stories of the *Swords* saga, it is said that the Snow Clan were massacred to the last soul by a horde of Ice Gnomes.

No-Ombrulsk

Set far to the north-west, many leagues past the borders of the Great Forest and considered part of the Cold Wastes, No-Ombrulsk is a port on the Outer Sea.

Wooden structures are rare here, as the Great Forest is so distant. The people of No-Ombrulsk are hardy, sea-faring fisherfolk, who often must contend with their harbour being frozen in the icy winter season. The black ramparts of the city's walls are visible many miles from the shore, making a distinctive skyline to sail by.

Mountains of the Giants

This is the largest range of mountains in Nehwon, with the peaks taller than all rivals, the climbs all the more treacherous and the inhabitants even more unusual. These sky-piercing peaks and their lesser foothill cousins run through the north of the Cold Waste like the region's spine, with the Bones of the Old Ones even further north and the Great Rift Valley to the east.

Early one evening, weeks later, the sky's grey cloud-armour blew away south, smashed and dissolving as if by blows of an acid-dipped mace. The same might northeast wind contemptuously puffed down the hitherto impregnable cloud wall to the east, revealing a grimly majestic mountain range running north to south and springing abruptly up from the plateau, two leagues high, of the Cold Waste – like a dragon fifty leagues long heaving up its spike-crested spine from icy entombment.

— Stardock

Here among these stone giants, the most skilled climbers and rock-scalers in Nehwon's history have come and died on the icy slopes with only a rare few surviving to return with tales of success. From south to north, the mountain chain that draws the eyes above all others is the one consisting of The Hint, Gran Hanack, Obelisk Polaris, Stardock, White Fang, the Tusk and the Ripsaw.

Games Masters wishing to set their campaigns in inhospitable climes need look no further than the foothills and peaks of the Mountains of the Giants. Here the beasts and harsh conditions of the Cold Wastes are at their most prominent and powerful. Characters can find themselves tied to the Mountains of the Giants by the challenge of adventure, such as the Grey Mouser seeking to climb Stardock in the name of treasure-hunting, or by aspects of their character background, such as Fafhrd looking at the towering peaks and wondering if he could make the kind of climb that killed his father.

Fafhrd is hardly the only man to lose a relative or a companion in the mountain range, and a bitter, tense and energised storyline could result from a group of Player Characters seeking the bones of a lost friend who never returned from a climb, in order to give him a proper burial, or hunting the classic rumoured gemstone treasure at the peak of these towering stone giants.

Another consideration is one of mining. No permanent mines exist in the foothills of the Mountains of the Giants, both because the region is so inhospitable and too remote to transport the metals back to civilisation with any speed. However, there are surely some very valuable

veins of ore in the range, and perhaps even the potential for gems (especially given the legends about Stardock). Games Masters might want to consider having an intrepid and optimistic soul set up a mine in the Mountains of the Giants, with the characters as factors in the control of the operation. Lankhmar is undoubtedly too far for the trip to be worthwhile, but such an operation might start up in or near one of the northernmost Eight Cities, such as Illik-Ving or Mlurg Nar.

Firstly, the convoys of supplies to and material from the mine would need guarding from any bandits and any creatures that seek to prey on the people manning the supply line. Secondly, the mine site itself would need protection, both from the inhuman residents of Stardock and the many creatures that call the mountain range home. Thirdly, characters might also be charged with seeking out any legends of gemstones on or around Stardock; they might be paid to find any such gems and either bring them back to their employers or test the area for gem-mine potential.

While the Cold Wastes can seem desolate and empty at first glance, Games Masters can find story hooks in even the most empty and foreboding places – in fact, with a little effort these can sometimes be the most promising areas of all. There is a lot to be said for scrambling chases across loose shale halfway up a mountain, fighting white-furred giant serpents that lash out from rocky snow-topped ledges and discovering just what lives down in the blackness of the caverns beneath Nehwon's greatest mountain range.

The Ripsaw

'Travel your eye to the first great northerly upthrust,' he told the Mouser, 'that phalanx of heaven-menacing ice spears shafted with dark rock and gleaming green – that's the Ripsaw'.

— Stardock

The Ripsaw is the northernmost peak in the range, formed of a cluster of jagged slopes and skyward-reaching rocky blades. The Ripsaw thrusts up above most of the Mountains of the Giants, dwarfing all but its greatest siblings in the rest of the range. Though the several mountains that make up the Ripsaw's spiky face are not as tall as the other giants in the range, the formation is

known for being un-scalable. The Ripsaw has claimed many lives over the years, as the jagged climb means cuts and infections for even experienced climbers, and even short falls can be lethal as the climber lands on spiny rocks below. Scaling the Ripsaw would earn a man bragging rights around the camp fires of any Cold Wastes tribe, though he would need the scars to prove he had done it.

The Tusk

'Then, dwarfing them, a single ivory tooth, unscalable by any sane appraisal – the Tusk he's called'.

— Stardock

The Tusk is the second mountain from the north of the Mountains of the Giants, a peak of smooth slopes and few handholds so that any ascent is next to impossible. The Frost Companions tribe are known to pitch their sprawling tent-village in the shadow of the Tusk from time to time.

White Fang

'Another unscalable then, still higher and with south wall a sheer precipice shooting up a league and curving outward toward the needletop: he is White Fang, where my father died – the canine of the Mountains of the Giants'.

— Stardock

The true un-climbable peak is that of White Fang, the third mountain from the north in the range. Many sections of White Fang are completely sheer, especially on the south side, making any ascent a bone-aching, wearying proposition of spiralling up the mountain seeking outcroppings and hand holds. The bones of Nalgron, Fafhrd's father, were found low down on White Fang. After the fall that led to his death, perhaps by the ice sorcery of Mor, Fafhrd's mother, he was taken and buried at Cold Corner. White Fang attracts many daring climbers and rewards most of them with naught but death.

The Hint

'The Hint, she's named, or the Come On. Little enough she looks, yet men have frozen knighting on her slopes and been whirled to death by her whimsical queenly avalanches'.

— Stardock

The Hint represents a deceptively difficult climb. More a giant snow-dome than a cloud-piercing peak, it is the smallest and southernmost mountain in the range. The route to the top of the crag is actually plagued by frequent avalanches and rockfalls that thunder down the gently-rolling slopes. Unfortunately for any climbers seeking to use the Hint as an easy beginning before joining another mountain halfway up, it only joins with Gran Hanack in a particularly difficult section of scree slopes and overhangings.

Gran Hanack

'Then a far vaster snow dome, true queen to the Hint's princess, a hemisphere of purest white, grand enough to roof the council hall of the gods that ever were or ever will be – she is Gran Hanack, whom my father was first of men to mount and master'.

— Stardock

Another vicious climb, though nothing compared to White Fang, is Gran Hanack. At the base of this great mountain, the Snow Clan pitch their town of tents as part of their nomadic but regular roaming pattern around the Cold Wastes.

Obelisk Polaris

'After Gran Hanack and nearest to us of them all, a huge flat-topped pillar, a pedestal for the sky almost, looking to be of green-shot snow but in truth all snow-pale granite scoured by the storms: Obelisk Polaris'.

— Stardock

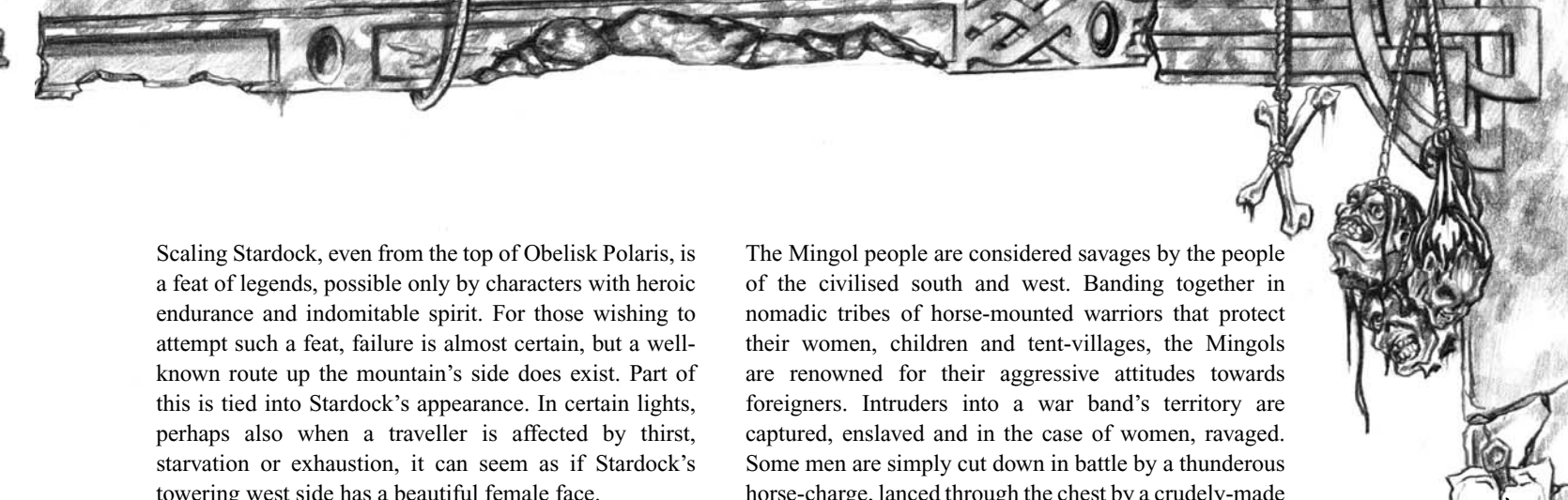
Obelisk Polaris is one of the tallest mountains in all Nehwon, falling short of only White Fang and great Stardock itself. Anyone risking the climb to Stardock's peak, such as when Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser made the ascent in the *Swords* novels, is wise to use Obelisk Polaris as a base for the climb. It is regarded as a 'reliable' mountain, short on avalanches and creature ambushes, though of course it still takes many days to reach the point where Polaris meets Stardock. The flat-topped peak of the Obelisk reaches only halfway up the height of Stardock, so a climber's journey is far from complete once he masters Polaris and makes the leap or quick-footed crossing to the greatest mountain of all.

Stardock

*'Who mounts white Stardock, the Moon Tree,
Past worm and gnome and unseen bars,
Will win the key to luxury:
The Heart of Light, a pouch of stars.
The gods who once ruled the world
Have made that peak their citadel,
From whence the stars were one time hurled
And paths lead on to Heav'n and Hell.
Comes, heroes, past the Trollstep rocks.
Come, best of men, across the Waste.
For you, glory each door unlocks.
Delay not, up, and come in haste.
Who scales the Snow King's citadel
Shall father his two daughters' sons;
Though he must face foes fierce and fell,
His seed shall live while time still runs'.*

— Stardock

Legends surround mighty Stardock as if it were the eye of a story-storm. Tales of treasure atop its peaks are written into scholarly texts and found in the scrawls of madmen. Stories of invisible creatures and gnomes that walk its ridges and snow-capped plateaus are told around tables in taverns of the civilised south. Armies of white serpents, snow wolves and ice cats are rumoured to slither and stalk across its stone skin, and a hundred barbarian camp-tales all forbid ascent up this one mountain above all others.



Scaling Stardock, even from the top of Obelisk Polaris, is a feat of legends, possible only by characters with heroic endurance and indomitable spirit. For those wishing to attempt such a feat, failure is almost certain, but a well-known route up the mountain's side does exist. Part of this is tied into Stardock's appearance. In certain lights, perhaps also when a traveller is affected by thirst, starvation or exhaustion, it can seem as if Stardock's towering west side has a beautiful female face.

The effect is drawn from the colouration and angles of the mountainside. At the base of Stardock is her 'skirt,' better known as the White Waterfall. Her head is made up of the Tresses and the Face. The Tresses are two slopes of avalanche-prone snow on either side of her Face, which seem to move with the continuous flow of ice and frost falling down them. The Face is noticeable for the dark patches of stone that appear to make up the woman's beautiful visage.

Bones of the Old Ones

Further north than even the Mountains of the Giants are the Bones of the Old Ones. This range is situated near the north-western shore, serving as the final boundary before the land becomes sea and the sea in turn becomes polar ice cap. Few who make it overland this far north ever return.

The Great Rift Valley

This vast, dipping valley marks the border of the Cold Wastes and the Great Steppes. The lengthy gash in the land is deep below the level of the Cold Wastes – almost a league, in some places – making the landscape warm, pleasant and (compared to the Wastes) a paradise of wildlife and vegetation.

The Rift Valley is marked as the end of the hostile tundra terrain making up the northlands and the start of more temperate climates. A forest runs through the Great Rift Valley, which the Mingols of the Steppes occasionally venture into to hunt.

The Great Steppes

Lowland grassy plains sweep out endlessly to the east, taking up a vast patch of northern Nehwon. Here the Mingol tribes roam this north-eastern land, claiming the region of the world from the northern ice cap to the Empire of Eevamareensee in the south.

The Mingol people are considered savages by the people of the civilised south and west. Banding together in nomadic tribes of horse-mounted warriors that protect their women, children and tent-villages, the Mingols are renowned for their aggressive attitudes towards foreigners. Intruders into a war band's territory are captured, enslaved and in the case of women, ravaged. Some men are simply cut down in battle by a thunderous horse-charge, lanced through the chest by a crudely-made spear or slain by an expertly-swung scimitar.

In all of Nehwon, no people are considered more hostile and barbarous than the Mingols. Open warfare is not unknown between the Steppes hordes and both the Land of the Eight Cities and Lankhmar. Each assault is repelled, usually at great cost, and many scholars wonder just what the horseback nomads really desire out of such war, if there even is any desire beyond the thrill of bloodshed and the barbaric honour of killing others. When the Mingols are not openly at war with other nations (and it can be a hard thing to judge) roaming bands attack settlements intent on plunder, pillage and murder.

Battle between the Mingol tribes is also a common occurrence. Travellers moving through the Great Steppes have reported many times of seeing skirmishes between Mingol tribes, with the stocky plains ponies of the nomads carrying dozens or hundreds of shrieking warriors into battle. It is said in Lankhmar that swords clink together as often as coins. In the wild plains of the Great Steppes, any clashing metal is always sword or axe against blade or armour – little trade ever goes on between the tribes and the rest of Nehwon.

It is a misrepresentation to assume *all* Mingols in Nehwon are simply violent barbarians. For all their warlike nature and reputation as fearsome blood-letters, Mingols can be prodigious travellers and explorers, curious about other nations and climes rather than burning with the desire to invade them. Mingols encountered in the civilised lands to the south and west of the Steppes make livings as cartographers, explorers, traders, craftsmen and sell-swords much like anyone else. Lankhmar, as a haven for any and all people on both sides of the law, attracts many Mingols, drawn by the dual lure of decadent civilisation. The Imperishable City boasts no few Mingol-born traders, sailors and thieves, as well as a horde of slaves put into indentured servitude for their crimes in the city or as prisoners of war.

Adventuring in the Cold Wastes

Games Masters with a penchant for sticking to terrain and weather rules will find the Cold Wastes an exciting mix of difficult conditions and dangerous going for their players. The following is a reference guide to help Games Masters plan the journey conditions of their character groups as they traverse the icy realms of northern Nehwon.

Tundra

The frozen north can be an unpleasant and difficult place to journey through. Much of the region is desolate tundra, occasionally covered in a thin later of snow. This has no game effect other than ensuring characters will need to wrap up warm and carry supplies, or risk Exposure as detailed on page 87 of *RuneQuest*.

Approximately half of the Cold Wastes are made up of deeply-packed snow fields in the winter, 30% in the autumn and 10% in the spring and summer. This denser snowy terrain imposes Slight Adversity conditions on adventurers, as detailed on page 85 of *RuneQuest*.

Snowstorms

The tundra and ice fields may not always be hard-going on their own, but blizzards are common enough to make marching across even the relatively flat tundra a matter of willpower and muscle endurance. The Games Master is the ultimate arbiter of the weather in his campaign, but a realistic assumption would be to have snowstorms appearing on approximately 10% of days in the summer and spring, and 50% in the winter and autumn. Many of these will be little more than light or heavy snowfall, but there is a further 10% chance that snowfall in the summer or spring will really be a freak blizzard come out of nowhere, and in the autumn or winter that rises to 30%, representing the frequent seasonal storms of the Cold Waste.

In snowfall, the conditions are considered Slight Adversity as detailed on page 85 of *RuneQuest*. Coupled with dense snow terrain, this becomes Moderate Adversity. During a true blizzard, no matter what the terrain conditions, any adventuring out of doors takes place in situations considered Great Adversity. In addition, Illumination is considered Dark, as detailed on page 86 of *RuneQuest*, due to the reduced visibility.

Climbing

The real tests of strength and stamina in the Cold Waste come with attempts to climb the Mountains of the Giants. Climbing kits, described on page 40 of *RuneQuest*, are practically essential.

The mountains are physically climbable, though the effort and skill required means that all but the most gifted and dedicated climbers will probably fail – possibly winding up dead. On each of the Mountains of the Giants, climbers do not need to roll most of the time, using the standard climbing rules on page 23 of *RuneQuest* and only making tests when the surface becomes significantly more difficult. On Stardock, White Fang and the Tusk, frequent tests are necessary, with a 30% penalty to the Athletics roll. If the weather is stormy or windy, this penalty rises to 50%.

Climbing with a team makes things at least a little easier. The rules for Assistance on page 22 are especially useful to adventurers helping each other out on the treacherous climbs. Since the ascent of each mountain is a matter of days, or even weeks, reliable companionship is paramount.

Any attempts to climb these mountains are considered Medium Activity, as detailed on page 86 of *RuneQuest*. The exceptions to this rule are the mountains Stardock, White Fang and the Tusk, which all count as Heavy Activity, no matter how slowly they are climbed. Frequent rests are par for the course.

Games Masters may want to pay close attention to levels of characters' Fatigue, also found on page 87 of *RuneQuest*, and Encumbrance on page 89. The rules for Falling are also on page 89 and might come in handy for particularly unlucky dice rolls.

Land of the Eight Cities

The Land of the Eight Cities, also called the Forest Land, is mostly blanketed in the dense green covering of the Great Forest. Dotted in and around this huge woodland are eight city-states unified by an overlord who rules from Kvarch Nar, the largest of the settlements. He is served in turn by dukes appointed to govern each of the other city-states.

To Lankhmarts, no civilised settlement outside of Lankhmar itself truly deserves the title of 'city.' This rings true beyond a mere sense of Lankhmarese superiority, as no other city rivals Lankhmar in size and the Eight Cities themselves are more akin to large towns by any fair measurement.

The proximity of the Land of the Eight Cities to the Great Steppes means that the Mingol hordes fall on the easternmost of the Eight Cities and their satellite villages with alarming regularity. Illik-Ving, Gnamph Nar, Klelg Nar and Sarheenmar are most noted for their endurance and suffering (and occasionally sacking) under Mingol sieges.

Much of the architecture in the Land of the Eight Cities is shaped and cured wood. Almost all buildings in the city-states are created of timber, with lumber being the principal foundation of the Forest Land's economy. Successful timber merchants in, say, Kvarch Nar are the local equivalent of grain merchants in Lankhmar.

Of course, this does mean the cities have a tendency to burn to the ground when the Mingols breach their defences...

Gnamph Nar

One of the larger of the Eight Cities, Gnamph Nar is a port city on the northern shores of the Inner Sea. For its size (which nowhere approaches Lankhmar's vastness) it is a bustling port with lively, chaotic docks and no shortage of taverns catering to sailors. It is perhaps most famous for a problem with piracy and is a known haven for both pirates and crimps, the latter of which press-gang people into serving on the ships that ply the warm waters of the Inner Sea.

Gnamph Nar sees a great deal of north- and south-bound trade running to and from Cold Corner. Though it is far removed from Cold Corner by the entire width of the Great Forest, many trade routes up to the Cold Wastes begin and end at Gnamph Nar. The lax customs authority and flood of 'privateers' mean that merchandise can be found on the cheap more often than not, as can plunder that is sent north to earn a pretty penny from the barbarians or be looted in turn by the bandits plaguing the Trollstep passes.

There is a significant amount of illegal trade in narcotics, fencing, contraband and smuggled weapons sold to the Mingols, running straight from Lankhmar to Gnamph Nar. Players wishing to get involved in Inner Sea piracy or with nautical backgrounds featuring a spice of freebooting will find Gnamph Nar to their liking.

Illik-Ving

Illik-Ving is a small town that straddles the northernmost border edge of the Great Forest. It is one of the two main supply stops and convoy rests along the trade route to Cold Corner, and sees a great deal of traffic at certain mid-seasons. Illik-Ving is at the south end of a reliable pass through the Trollstep Mountains.

Bands of mercenary groups are known to make their camps around Illik-Ving – some are hired to protect the city from Mingol raids, some are employed as caravan guards and some simply camp out there as bandits, waiting for the time to strike north- and southbound merchant traders.

Klelg Nar

To the east of Gnamph Nar lies Klelg Nar, another port with the Inner Sea lapping at its southernmost edges. Two main factors make Klelg Nar a riskier proposition for bringing in cargo. The first is that the laws against piracy, crimping and freebooting are nowhere near as lax as in Gnamph Nar, so Klelg Nar is one of those rare Nehwonese port cities to rely mainly on legal trade to provide its economy.

Secondly and perhaps more importantly, Klelg Nar has borne the brunt of vicious Mingol assaults many times over the years. Though it maintains a large enough ducal garrison, and no shortage of mercenaries also funded by the duke, Klelg Nar is regarded as a lodestone for attracting Mingol trouble. In the *Swords* novels, when Lankhmar suffers the Rat Plague, it is

said that Klelg Nar endures yet another Mingol siege but emerges unburned and relatively whole after the conflict.

Games Masters wishing to set campaigns close to the Steppes and have players deal with the Mingols will find Klelg Nar a good potential base for the game. Combative characters are especially likely to find a place (and a busy career) in Klelg Nar, though enterprising merchant characters might enjoy the trials and struggles of raising a merchant empire in the shadow of Mingol attacks and harsh contraband laws.

Kvarch Nar

The capital of the Lands of the Eight Cities, and the only one that could ever be considered grand in the entire Forest Land, Kvarch Nar is the seat of power for the Eight Cities' Overlord. In the *Swords* saga, this was a man by the name of Movarl, an inspired naval commander with a noted mercenary bent.

On the edge of the Inner Sea, set directly opposite Lankhmar to the south, Kvarch Nar is a bustling port that far exceeds the other city-states in size and industry. Though the taxes are high here, an immense amount of trade flows between Kvarch Nar and the City of the Black Toga, interrupted only by infrequent piracy out of other Inner Sea ports and the occasional sea-based Mingol invasion. Between Kvarch Nar's significant standing navy and Lankhmar's own sea forces, such invasions rarely last long. The piracy, however, continues nearly unabated, since the right pockets have been lined with the right coins often enough for such minor inconveniences to be ignored.

One of the most beautiful structures in Nehwon, regarded as one of the wonders of the world, is located in Kvarch Nar. The wooden palace of the Eight Cities' Overlord, formed from hundreds of thousands of trees, takes up a great deal of land near the harbour, drawing the eye with its expert craft and delicate-seeming construction.

Games Masters wishing for a large city-based campaign set away from Lankhmar might find Kvarch Nar an excellent choice. Nearly the same levels of trade, thievery, culture and decadence exist here as they do in Lankhmar, and travel between the two cities is cheap and regular. Certainly any merchant-based games that take to the Inner Sea will find a port in Kvarch Nar once or

twice, as the trade opportunities are varied and tempting. The majority of merchant vessels cutting the waters of the Inner Sea in a southerly direction are shipping quality lumber to Lankhmar. The majority heading north from the Imperishable City are, of course, shipping grain to Kvarch Nar.

An interesting societal tradition is for Eight Cities men to treat their women (especially in Kvarch Nar) with special reverence. Accusing a woman of an indecent act or casting aspersions on her honour, whether factual or false, is the fastest way to initiate a duel with the nearest skilled Eight Cities swordsman. Note that the men of the Forest Land generally believe women are allowed to get up to whatever they want – it is just the accusations and aspersions that earn a man the duel or the beating.

Mlurg Nar

Of all the Eight Cities, Mlurg Nar is the most curious, serving as a meeting point for barbarians, Mingols, thieves, merchants, brigands and miners – all in one melting pot of a mining town. While most other cities in the Forest Lands focus on their lumber trade, Mlurg Nar is situated in the north-east of the forest, near the Mingol Steppes. Here can be found an unreliable pass through the Trollsteps into the Cold Wastes, as well as many rich veins of ore within the mountain range itself.

This is a recipe for conflict, which would be greatly exacerbated if only the city were not so small. In the forested wilds, bandit groups roam the woodlands preying on ore-laden caravans in order to sell them on elsewhere. Bands of sell-swords also exist in the forest, hired to protect Mlurg Nar and the extensive network of mines from Mingol attacks. Within the town, thieves, extortionists and cut-throats prey on the wealthy ore merchants and their small metal-trader guilds whenever they can. Couple this with south-venturing Cold Waste barbarians come to trade or adventure, and west-walking Mingols come for the same reasons, and the instability (and crime rate) of Mlurg Nar suddenly starts to make a very uneasy kind of sense.

Games Masters setting campaigns in Mlurg Nar, or having their players travel through the town, are spoilt for choice when it comes to encounters with a variety of Non-Player Characters.

No-Ombrulsk

Set far to the north-east, many leagues past the borders of the Great Forest and almost considered part of the Cold Wastes, No-Ombrulsk is the only Eight Cities port on the Outer Sea.

Wooden structures are rare here, at least compared to the rest of the Eight Cities, as the Great Forest is so distant. The people of No-Ombrulsk are hardy, sea-faring fisherfolk, who often must contend with their harbour being frozen in the icy winter season. The black ramparts of the city's walls are visible many miles from the shore, making a distinctive skyline to sail by.

Ool Hrusp

Ool Hrusp has built a name among Nehwon's cities but not for anything grand or noble. Situated on the north-western edge of the Inner Sea and ruled during the *Swords* novels by Mad Duke Lithquil, the small city-state is known for its large cattle trade and guild of livestock farmers, but is truly renowned for its gladiatorial arena. This arena was established by the murderous Mad Duke, and features battles to the death between any people Lithquil's soldiers and agents imprison. Sometimes they



are Cold Waste barbarians or Mingol travellers who venture too close to the wrong outpost of civilisation, though frequently enough the Mad Duke watches trained gladiators butchering unskilled prisoners who were once traders, craftsmen, farmers and thieves.

Lithquil's bloodlust has a powerful influence over his heart, but so does his paranoia. At all times the Mad Duke is guarded by several highly-trained retainers, all experienced in battle and well-armed as well as well-armoured.

Games Masters wishing to conduct a campaign with the classic genre trope of arena battles need look no further than the malice-born pits of Ool Hrusp. The prizes for victory in the fighting circle are slave girls, fame and freedom. The reward for failure is brutally obvious, and far more often earned.

Ool Krut

Perhaps the smallest of the Eight Cities is the west coast town of Ool Krut, bordering the edge of the Outer Sea. The most prominent export here each season is hundreds and hundreds of sheets of stout canvas. Ool Krut sail canvas is expensive in the extreme and only purchased by the wealthiest of captains.

Those residents not involved with the making of Krut-canvas sails are usually fishermen or workers in the town's disproportionate number of taverns.

Ool Plerns

Situated on the western coast of the Forest Land is the least of the Eight Cities – Ool Plerns. In truth, this settlement is little more than a frontier coastal village manned by woodcutters and their families.

The East

To the east of the Imperishable City is a great continent many times the size of the land of Lankhmar. Here in the north are the Parched Mountains and the City of Ghouls, while the south sees the delights of Horborixen and the southeast is known as the Eastern Lands. In the farthest east lies the Empire of Eevamarensee, while the centre of the region is taken up by the expansive Poisoned Desert with the Sea of Monsters to the north of that blasted, hateful terrain.



Ilthmar

Despite being much smaller than Lankhmar, Ilthmar's reputation is several shades darker. It is a city well-known for its filth, both on the streets and in the hearts of its citizens. Murder and thievery are vastly more common here even than in Lankhmar, and the populace pays reverence to the animal rat and shark gods instead of mortal men and women ascended to divinity.

Taxation strangles the economy while fuelling it at the same time, for the richest citizens of Ilthmar are rich indeed, affording greater luxuries and encouraging more imports, while the poor are nearly destitute and work twice as hard to earn their bread. The criminals that blacken Ilthmar's reputation and plague the streets are disorganised and predatory, lacking the relative sophistication of Lankhmar's underworld.

Icons, statues, shrines and wall murals are found everywhere in the city, all portraying the feral Rat God of Ilthmar. In the city's docks, the icons turn to portrayals of the bloodlusting Shark God. The harbour itself is always teeming with sharks, as it is Ilthmarish law to cast prisoners into the port waters, feeding them to the sharks as a means of holy execution.

For all its foulness, Ilthmar is considered the crossroads of the known world for travellers, adventurers, vagabonds and wanderers of all stripes. It is situated not far from the Sinking Land, right on the south-western edge of the Inner Sea. North is the Land of Eight Cities and the Mingol Steppes, north-east is the City of Ghouls, east is the Empire of Eevamarensee, while to the south-east are the Eastern Lands and great Horborixen. To the west across the Sinking Land lays mighty Lankhmar, and bands of dark-clad Ilthmar land-pirates have been known to chase down travellers, pursuing them right up to the very walls of the Marsh Gate in a bid to steal their coin and weaponry.

Since Ilthmar sees so much traffic from travellers and foreigners, passing through or determined for whatever reasons to stay, they also bear the brunt of Ilthmar's significant taxes, many of which are designed purely to bleed travellers dry of coin. Gate taxes, district-entrance taxes, goods taxes, weapons taxes, market taxes and inn taxes are all levied against incomers to the city, taking a few Tiks here, a few Agols there and a few Smerduks off the top. It all adds up fast. A common phrase among those who have visited Ilthmar runs like so: *'By toll or*



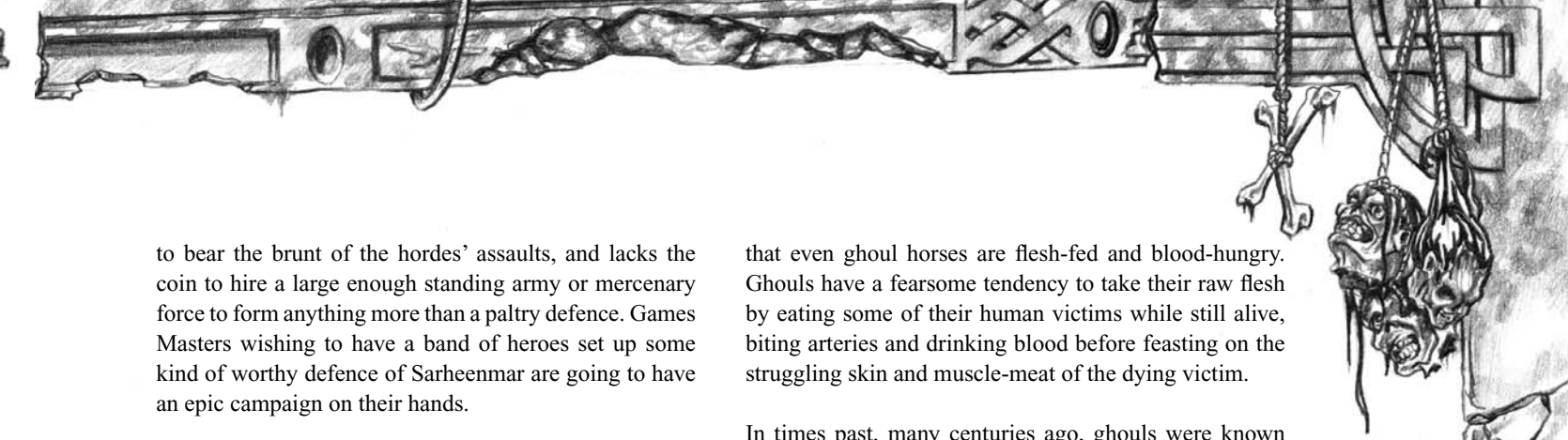
by toll, Ilthmar takes your coin,' in reference to both the taxation and the thug gangs that roam the streets after dark (and occasionally before dark).

The light and bubbly wines of Ilthmar are common trade items that reach many lips in Lankhmar. Traders risking the journey across the Sinking Land or simply carrying stock to the Imperishable City by ship are a relatively common sight.

Sarheenmar

On the Inner Sea's eastern coast is the city-state of Sarheenmar. To the east, a mountain pass winds through the southern tip of the Barrier Mountains, past the Sea of Monsters, and leads to the City of Ghouls. To the south is a road leading to Ilthmar and the Sinking Land. To the north, the road leads to Klelg Nar.

Sarheenmar, like Ilthmar, is a multicultural city, seeing visitors from all over Nehwon. The city itself is an unremarkable place, more a travel-stop for most than an actual home. Continuous sackings and razing by the Mingols sweeping down from the Steppes make living in Sarheenmar an unattractive proposition. It certainly seems



to bear the brunt of the hordes' assaults, and lacks the coin to hire a large enough standing army or mercenary force to form anything more than a paltry defence. Games Masters wishing to have a band of heroes set up some kind of worthy defence of Sarheenmar are going to have an epic campaign on their hands.

The City of Ghouls

After an instant's shock, Fafhrd realised these must be ghouls, whose flesh and inner organs, he had heard – with much scepticism, but now no longer – were transparent except where the skin became sallow or rosily translucent on the genital organs and on the lips and small breasts of their women.

It was said also that they ate only flesh, human by preference, and that it was strange indeed to watch the raw gobbets they gulped course down and churn within the bars of their ribs, gradually fading from sight as their sightless blood assimilated and transformed the food – granting that a mere normal man might ever have the opportunity to watch ghouls feast without becoming a supply of gobbets himself.

— The Swords of Lankmar

On the western coast of the Sea of Monsters, the mysterious City of Ghouls is renowned primarily not for its architecture or location, but for its eerie residents. Ghouls are ostensibly human, though their flesh and innards are transparent, revealing only a thin outline of skin and leaving bare bones visible beneath. They are an exceptionally skinny and rangy folk, even counting their near-invisible flesh in the equation of physical size. The animals of the region are similar in appearance, most famously the herds of horses maintained in and around the city, often used as war mounts.

Ghouls earn their name not from an inhuman or undead state, but from a propensity to eat only flesh, never bread, fruit or vegetables. The flesh they do eat must always be raw and never cooked. Some scholars insist this curious feasting is for religious reasons, others cite other barbarous traditional factors, pointing to the fact

that even ghoul horses are flesh-fed and blood-hungry. Ghouls have a fearsome tendency to take their raw flesh by eating some of their human victims while still alive, biting arteries and drinking blood before feasting on the struggling skin and muscle-meat of the dying victim.

In times past, many centuries ago, ghouls were known for lurking around graveyards to eat the flesh of the dead and buried. It is believed that modern ghouls are beyond such primitive and foul desecration, but the stories are still told around tavern tables and camp fires. The ghouls of Nehwon's current speak High and Low Lankmarese rather than Old Ghoulish, though experts in that ancient dead tongue do still exist.

Ghoul society is warlike, with many citizens of the City of Ghouls trained in the bearing and use of weapons. The city has been known to muster armies to attack the easternmost Eight Cities on many occasions, sometimes coordinating (or at least coinciding) their assaults with the Mingols' in order to overwhelm the Eight Cities' defences. Sarheenmar suffers a burning and razing in the *Swords* novels, as the result of a three-way war between the city, the ghouls and the Mingols.

In addition to these more concerted war efforts, veteran travellers are well aware of Ghoul cavalry bands hunting down groups of humans wandering through the territory close to the City of Ghouls. As with the Mingols, the Ghouls seem to greatly respect strength and skill on the field of battle.

The Parched Mountains

The Parched Mountains are an arid, inhospitable, almost supernaturally barren range of imposing peaks and crags. They stand on the border of Shadowland, between that region and the Poisoned Desert to the south and the City of Ghouls to the east, warding all sane mortals away from entering Death's dark realm. Dead trees long expired from thirst are occasionally seen here and there, but mostly it is clear that little plant life was ever born in this dusty, rocky soil at all.

The top of the mountain range begins to the east of the Sea of Monsters, while the tail end of the chain stretches south even past the Poisoned Desert. Two passes cut through these murderous, waterless mountains. The Northern Pass, once used by the Grey Mouser in the *Swords* novels, is located east of the Sea of Monsters. The Southern Pass, once used by Fafhrd in the same story, is located in the northwest part of the

Poisoned Desert. All other crossings take a traveller over harsh mountainous terrain and add days to the journey – days that spell death for anyone without a goodly supply of water.

The Poisoned Desert

This desert is an expanse of arid and lifeless plains land to the far southwest of Shadowland and the Sea of Monsters. Travellers rarely venture here because the terrain is savage on any wanderer and to the direct northwest is the Parched Mountains – an equally barren patch of Nehwon, and uncomfortably close to Death's realm.

The Eastern Lands

Split by the crop-watering, trade-giving River Tilth, the Eastern Lands are formed from plains land and deserts in equal measure. They are situated to the south-east of Ilthmar and to the south of the Poisoned Desert. Little is said of the Eastern Lands in the *Swords* novels, though it is known that the land is split again by the great range called the Mountains of the Elder Ones, which legends state are at least partially the remains or the stone tombs of dead gods.

HORBORIXEN

The capital of the Eastern Lands is smaller than Lankhmar but in many ways grander. Its wealth is displayed in beauteous architecture and the arts of the most skilled craftsmen and women in the wide world of Nehwon. The capital itself, sheltering the Great Golden Palace at its centre, is known by the grand title of Horborixen, Citadel-City of the King of Kings.

The King of Kings has absolute and ultimate power over the people of Hoborixen. He has the right to claim any woman he finds pleasing and have her brought to his harem to live until he tires of her. No protest can be made – at least not if the protester wishes to avoid an execution. The King of Kings extends his powers of life and death over his subjects to the point where none in his presence, 'even his own vizier or most-beloved son or favourite queen,' are allowed to speak the name of Death's realm, Shadowland, and escape with their lives after uttering it. Instant execution is the lot of any soul speaking the word within earshot of the ruler of the Eastern Lands.

Games Masters will note that this is a perfect example of the unstable, often insane rulers holding the thrones of Nehwon's lands. Clearly, Lankhmar's Radomix Kistomerces-Null was a wild exception in the world's

long line of spineless, mad and corrupt kings. This is probably part of the reason why Death took such a personal exception to the peaceable scholar-king of the Imperishable City.

TISILINILIT

A distant outpost of the Eastern Lands is the mystic city of Tisilinit. The architecture is unique among Nehwonese cities, with slender, towering, opalescent spires bedecked with colourful banners. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser travel through Tisilinit, perhaps purely for the joy of seeing it first-hand, but do not adventure there.

Empire of Eevamarensee

To the far, far reaches of the east lies the diminished and diplomatically-subtle Empire of Eevamarensee. Information is scarce regarding the nation beyond its weak and ineffectual presence among the kingdoms of Nehwon. It was once a great empire with claims to large tracts of Nehwon's land, though it is now a skeletally-shrunken echo of its former glory. Curiously, the empire is described as 'so decadent, so far-grown into the future, that all the rats and men are bald and even the dogs and cats are hairless.'

Little information is provided of the empire in the *Swords* novels. Little in the way of adventure seems to be on offer in the region, at least if the travels of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are anything to judge by.

The Land of Lankhmar

The continent of Lankhmar sits between the Inner Sea and the Sea of the East, joined to the rest of Nehwon by the unreliable geology of the Sinking Land and a thousand ships that carry news and trade to and from the greatest port in the world. At the northern tip of Lankhmar the land sits Lankhmar the city: the City of the Black Toga, City of Seven-Score Thousand Smokes, City of the Stinking Black Bones.

Lankhmar

A dirty jewel in Nehwon's tarnished crown, the decadent and near-lawless city of Lankhmar serves as the base of almost every adventure of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser. It is dealt with in extensive detail in *City of the Black Toga*.



The Great Salt Marsh

Leaving Lankhmar through the Marsh Gate in the city's eastern wall or the End Gate in the south-east brings a traveller face-to-face (or rather, boot-to-slime) with the Great Salt Marsh that stretches out for many leagues to Lankhmar's east. This silty-watered swampland is home to white-bodied salt spiders larger than a big man's hand, vicious marsh leopards gazing down from high trees with glinting blue eyes, poisonous swamp cobras that glide through the shallow water, coiling around ankles and a host of even less pleasant, less friendly creatures. The most notable aspect of the Great Salt Marsh (beside the general consensus that it is a vile place) is the smell. The gassy 'eggs and excrement' reek of the swampland reaches over the walls of Lankhmar's east side on stormy or humid days, creating quite the stench in the eastern parts of the city.

Beasts and bugs of all shapes and sizes call the Great Salt Marsh home. The opportunities for dangerous combats in the knee-, ankle-, waist- and even neck-deep bog water can provide some tough challenges for groups of characters wishing to navigate the swamp. Actually mapping the Great Salt Marsh is an impossible task,

what with the muddy, marshy terrain changing with each and every coastal storm. New paths rise out of the muck during relatively dry seasons. Old paths sink into the salty ooze with each rainfall. A cartographer would die of old age before he ever succeeded in accurately mapping even half of the swamp and its various changes, and that is in the unlikely event of some poisonous, predatory creature not killing him first.

To the east of the Great Salt Marsh is the Sinking Land. Though traversing the swamp is the fastest route from the Sinking Land to Lankhmar and vice versa, most travellers would rather add a week to their journey than risk braving the foul and vast spread of the black-watered marshland. Given the number of daring souls that never return from an ill-conceived journey through the marsh, this comes as little surprise.

The mechanics for presenting the creatures of the Great Salt Marsh are detailed in *Creatures of Nehwon*. One resident of the sprawling swamp bears special mention. Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, the patron wizard of the Grey Mouser, makes his home here. Full details can be found in *Of Sheel & Ning* on page 153.

The Sinking Land

Lankhmar philosophers believe that the Sinking Land is a vast long shield, conclave underneath, of hard-topped rock so porous below that it is exactly the same weight as water. Volcanic gases from the roots of the Ilthmar Mountains and also mephitic vapours from the incredibly deep-rooted and yeasty Great Salt Marsh gradually fill the concavity and lift the huge shield above the surface of the sea. But then an instability develops, due to the great density of the shield's topping. The shield begins to rock. The supporting gases and vapours escape in great alternate belches through the waters to the north and south. Then the shield sinks somewhat below the waves and the whole slow, rhythmic process begins again.

— The Swords of Lankhmar

This unstable bridge of land between the Great Salt Marsh and Ilthmar is the only overland route travellers can take from the continent of Lankhmar to the rest of



Adventuring in the Great Salt Marsh

All around him stretched the dismal reaches of the Great Salt Marsh, acres of knife-edged sea grass hiding treacherous creeks and deadly sink-holes and pimpled with low hummocks crowded with twisted, dwarfed thorn trees and bloated prickly cactuses. While its animal population ran a noxious gamut from sea leeches, giant worms, poison eels and water cobras to saw-beaked, low-flapping cadaver birds and far-leaping, claw-footed salt-spiders.

— The Swords of Lankmar

Adventuring in the boggy expanse of marsh and swampland is not for the faint-hearted. There are many good reasons for travellers to give the Great Salt Marsh a wide berth and anyone risking a march through the bog is likely to meet every single one of those reasons up close and personal. The following section provides a quick reference for Games Masters with a group of players mired in the black foulness of the marsh.

MIST

As a coastal marshland, there is a 20% chance of the Great Salt Marsh being wrapped in fog on an hour by hour basis. The Games Master makes the test every hour to see if the mist remains or burns away under sunlight. If there is mist, a further roll should be made to see if it is a thin mist or deeply dense fog. On a roll of 70% or less, the fog is thin and merely inconvenient. Treat the characters as adventuring in Partial Darkness as detailed in the Illumination rules, on page 86 of *RuneQuest*.

On a roll of 71% and above, the fog is dense and actively hinders all progress through the swamp, using the Illumination rules for Dark, also on page 86.

MARSH WATER

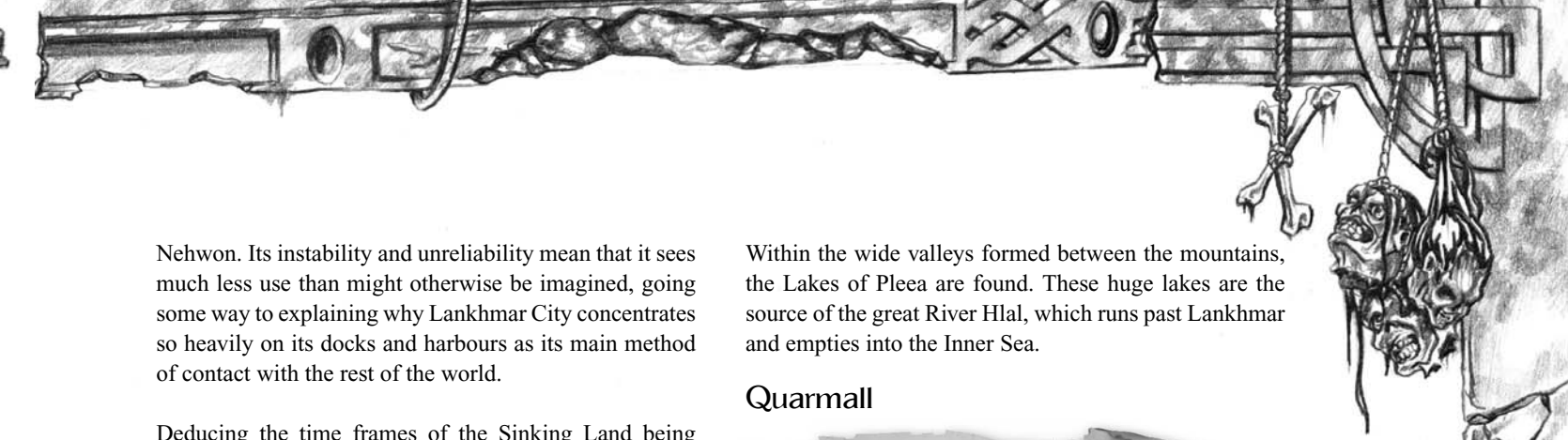
Far more unpleasant and inconvenient than the mist is the unreliability of solid paths through the swamp and the near-constant need to wade through the black-watered, salty foulness that floods the land here. When the marsh water is ankle- or knee-deep (which is most of the Great Salt Marsh) characters are subject to travelling in Slight Adversity conditions, as detailed on page 85 of *RuneQuest*.

In areas at the Games Master's discretion where the marsh water becomes up to waist-deep (which is still relatively common) characters suffer Slight Adversity and are also considered to be performing Moderate Activity, as detailed on page 85 of *RuneQuest*.

Lastly, when the black water's reach chest- and neck-deep, characters are considered to be in Great Adversity, though because of the brackish water's thinness, they are still only considered to be performing Moderate Activity.

Games Masters might wish to pay special attention to the rules for Encumbrance on page 89 of *RuneQuest*. For especially foul patches of marshland, such as sinkholes where the water is unusually deep (or for very short characters...) the Games Master will need to be familiar with the rules for Swimming, as noted on page 23 of *RuneQuest*. The unluckiest characters might even fall victim to the rules for Suffocation, on page 90.

A host of creatures found in the Great Salt Marsh are described in *Creatures of Nehwon*. In addition to these, some Games Masters might consider it realistic (and perversely amusing) to assume that many of the bugs, beasts and plants in the swampland are poisonous or venomous to some degree. The rules for poison are on page 90 of *RuneQuest*.



Nehwon. Its instability and unreliability mean that it sees much less use than might otherwise be imagined, going some way to explaining why Lankhmar City concentrates so heavily on its docks and harbours as its main method of contact with the rest of the world.

Deducing the time frames of the Sinking Land being risen or submerged is no easy feat. Once raised, the land bridge can be strong at first, quickly becoming unstable in hours but remaining elevated for a day or more. Once submerged, a traveller might be waiting within sight of the opposing shore for several hours or days before the Sinking Land makes its impressive rise again. On average, the land bridge rises and sinks several times a week. Anyone caught on the Sinking Land as it begins to sink will have only scarce minutes to cover the distance remaining to the other side. A general rate of submersion would have the Sinking Land lowering into the water at a rate of 1D12 inches a minute. Water rushes in from both sides as the land itself shakes and wobbles as if struck by an earthquake. Only the fastest horses can hope to outpace the inrushing water, which floods across the land at a rate of 20-40 miles an hour, depending on a Games Master decision as to how fast the ground is sinking.

The land bridge is several miles across at its narrowest point, and covers the 30 miles between the edge of the land of Lankhmar and the coast of the eastern continent. When fully submerged, the Sinking Land descends from at least a dozen to many dozens of feet down into the mixed waters of the Sea of the East and the Inner Sea.

As geological wonders go, the Sinking Land is one that has claimed more than its fair share of lives over the years.

Tovilyis

The aptly-named Beggar City of Tovilyis is a teeming hive town of the downtrodden, the destitute, the unemployable and the forgotten folk of the land of Lankhmar. Those with talent and ambition leave the corrupt and squalid city as soon as they are able. The rest live in poverty, work in poor conditions and labour in the less-prosperous grain fields that fail to rival Lankhmar's sweeping plantations to the north.

The Mountains of Hunger

Splitting the land of Lankhmar like a spine of rocks and pinnacle-vertebrae, the Mountains of Hunger are a barren and unwelcoming range, with several dormant volcanoes that occasionally belch gouts of black smoke into the sky.

Within the wide valleys formed between the mountains, the Lakes of Pleea are found. These huge lakes are the source of the great River Hlal, which runs past Lankhmar and empties into the Inner Sea.

Quarmall

'The city-state of Quarmall houses a civilisation almost unheard of in the sphere of anthropoid organisation. Perhaps the closest analogy which might be made is to that of the slave-making ants. The domain of Quarmall is at the present day limited to the small mountain, or large hill, on which it stands; but like a radish the main portion of it lies buried beneath the surface. This was not always so.'

Once the lords of Quarmall ruled over broad meadows and vast seas; their ships swam between all known ports and their caravans marched the routes from sea to sea. Slowly from the fertile valleys and barren cliffs, from the desert spots and the open sea the grip of Quarmall loosened; not willingly but ever forced did the Lords of Quarmall retreat. Inexorably they were driven, year by year, generation by generation, from all their possessions and right; until finally they were confined to that last and staunchest stronghold, the impregnable castle of Quarmall. The cause of this driving is lost on the dimness of fable; but it was probably due to those most gruesome practices which even to this day persuade the surrounding countryside that Quarmall is unclean and cursed'.

— The Lords of Quarmall

The domed mountain that shields the Quarmallian people from the outside world is visible from many leagues away in several directions, dominating the skyline among a number of lesser hills that surround it. Though the citizens of this strange and secretive under-empire maintain some cattle stocks outside in the foothills of their minor mountain range, practically the entire populace dwells within the great domed mountain – also called Quarmall – and have done so for generations.

The society inside the dark caverns and the web-way of near-lightless tunnels is one founded on the backs of a slave caste, overseen by the elite few powerful and corrupt enough to claim authority. The under-city is a huge and sprawling affair, with some sections even disused as the population dwindles and the older tunnels are abandoned, or new caverns open elsewhere in the mountain. The upper levels are still close enough to the surface that air flows through the tunnels unaided. The inhabitants of the lower tunnels, however, would be left breathless and gasping without some kind of air circulation system in effect. Indeed, the lower levels would be completely uninhabitable. As such, they are kept aired by teams of slaves manning great, slow-moving treadmill-fans that perpetually keep the air moving down into the lower tunnels.

The rulers of Quarmall are believed to be the most powerful conclave of magicians in the entire world of Nehwon, excepting Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes. Quarmall's sorcerer-lords have been known to engage in underhand and malicious civil wars, as displayed in the *Swords* saga when Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser both find themselves in the employ of opposing dark-hearted heirs to the Quarmallian throne. Most rulers maintain a host of powerful magicians as an inner circle of protectors and advisers, charging these sorcerers with keeping the lords from all magical harm.

Quarmall's slave-stocks are impressive – at least to those with an eye for trading in flesh. No other kingdom maintains such a high percentage of its overall population as slaves, with the numbers of captured and bound souls serving in the tunnels until their dying days reaching perhaps half of the total population. Slaves are maidservants, miners, tunnel-diggers, shepherds, throne- and litter-bearers, manual labourers (such as those working on the fans under the eyes of a whip-wielding overseer) and last and least pleasant of all, fodder in magical wars.

A genuine slave uprising would likely bring Quarmall grinding to a halt and finish the toppled empire once and for all, so much does the society depend on its lowest caste. Though slavery in Quarmall is supposed to be for life, spirited (and fortunate) souls have been known to escape their imprisonment in the darkened tunnels. Slingers line the parapets of the domed mountain, sending lethal shot after any attempted escapees. It takes no little skill and a host of luck to make it out of Quarmall alive, but nothing

in Nehwon tastes sweeter than sunshine and wind on the skin of a man who has spent years of his life in the dim passages and caverns of the under-kingdom.

Quarmallian aristocrats are known to hire foreigners as mercenaries, agents and sword-champions from time to time. Few residents of the mountain city ever venture outside of their eerie kingdom, however, unless they are on a specific errand for a more important member of society. Games Masters should note that a goodly proportion of characters with the slave cultural background are likely to hail from Quarmall, perhaps second only to Lankmar in that regard.

Klesh

The dark-skinned southerners that travel north to Lankmar originate in the thick and mazy jungles of Klesh, which completely dominate the southwest of the continent. Unlike the so-called barbarians of the savage Mingol tribes, the Kleshites that dwell far removed from civilisation and its accompanying decadence are rarely motivated by war. Klesh as a jungle nation has never opened its borders to outsiders, but much of the reason it remains mysterious and exotic is because of its distance from all other significant Nehwonese nations.

Trade is sedate but not nonexistent between Klesh and the rest of the world. Ivory, tobacco, jungle spices (for both foods and teas) and several rare herbs used for poultices in healing various ailments, which bleed north in a steady trickle of trade, are all found in Klesh. The trick for enterprising merchants is to find a commodity that the Kleshites need, for they are a remarkably self-sufficient and admirably independent nation. The Grey Mouser has discovered that ambergris is more valuable in Klesh than rubies, and profits accordingly. Similar discoveries no doubt await enterprising players with mercantile characters.

Metal weapons which would widen the eyes of any primitive culture are received half-heartedly and reluctantly here, almost as if such inventions were below Kleshites' notice. With Kleshites rarely going to war and their own handcrafted weaponry serving well enough in the jungles, this last assumption is probably true. Weapons of war are only of use to warriors. The Kleshites are hunters, not soldiers.

A popular tale told of the black-skinned southern folk is that they hoard incredible reserves of gold beneath the jungle canopies, which the right trade offer (or the

right army) could 'entice' the Kleshites into sharing. The merchant and explorer expeditions that have left to learn the truth of this matter have never returned. Some say this is because the Kleshites are a secretive and private people, killing all intruders found deep-walking in their jungles. Others state that because Kleshites are largely peaceable folk, it is much more likely that these foolish entrepreneurs were lost in the alien southern jungles and killed by the-gods-only-know-what creatures live there.

The Outer Sea

Kokgnab

Scarcely mentioned in the *Swords* tales, Kokgnab is known to be a distant and small nation of seafarers, fisherfolk and farmers, located at the opposite end of the land of Lankhmar to the Imperishable City. Its exoticism is mentioned more than once and given the nature of the region's name (which is Bangkok spelled backwards) it might be considered a Nehwonese approximation of medieval Thailand.

The Outer Sea stretches from the west coast of the Land of the Eight Cities, across half the world to the unconfirmed Western Continent and north to the huge and still-spreading polar ice caps. Rime Isle is situated in

these icy waters. Simorgya is submerged many leagues below the freezing waves. Glimpsed occasionally beneath the waves and rising out to bring death to ships and men alike, the sea monsters of the Outer Sea are terrifying near-legendary beasts that no sailor wishes to encounter.

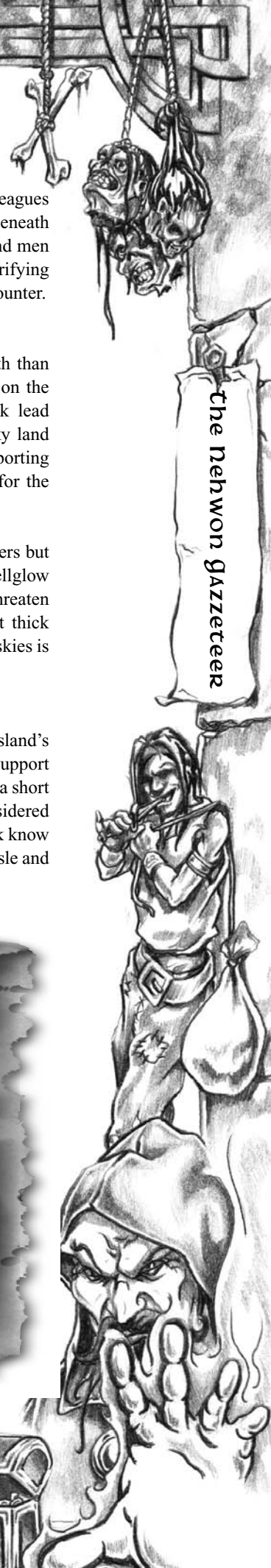
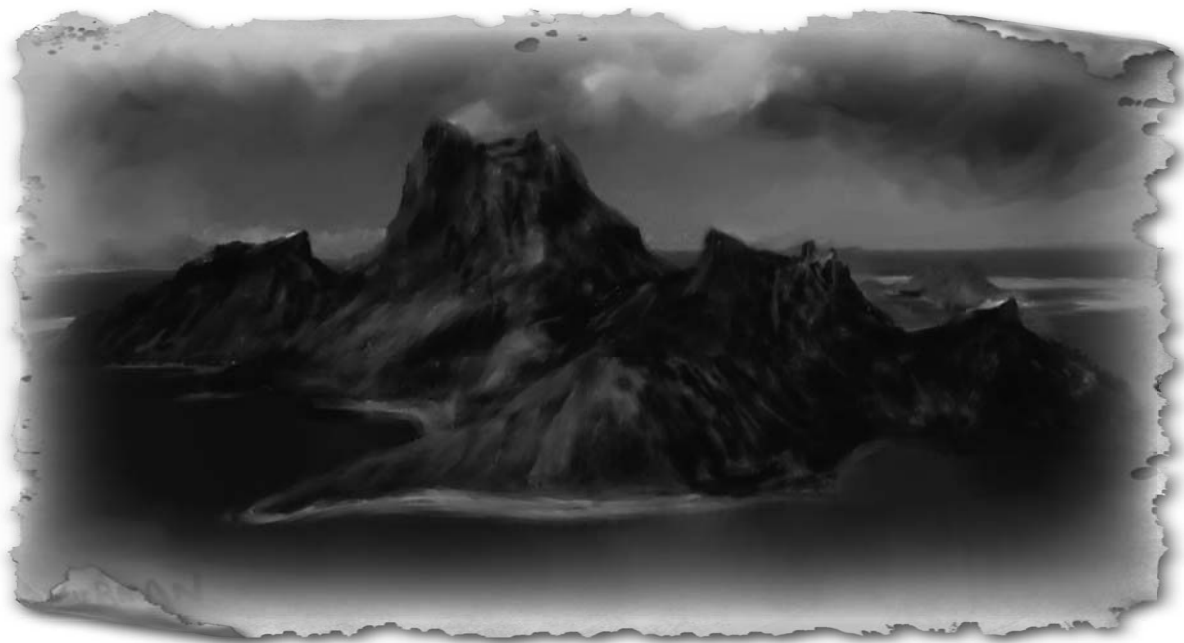
Rime Isle

Considered by most Lankhmarts to be more myth than reality, Rime Isle is the northernmost settlement on the face of Nehwon. The hardy Rimeland fisherfolk lead simple lives in small villages, dwelling in a rocky land where timber is rare and precious. Merchants importing quality lumber here would have fat coin purses for the rest of their days.

The island is populated not only by the Rimelanders but also by two active volcanoes, known locally as Hellglow and Darkfire. Eruptions are infrequent and do not threaten the Cold Harbour and Salthaven settlements, but thick black smoke belching out into the bright northern skies is commonly seen from these stone giants.

Salthaven

Salthaven on Rime Isle's southern coast is the island's main trading port. A sizeable harbour is able to support several large ships and has warehouses for storage a short way back from the docks. Though the island is considered legendary by many people in Nehwon, enough folk know the truth for there to be brisk trade between Rime Isle and the rest of Nehwon.



Cold Harbour

The northern settlement (and the only other settlement large than a hamlet on the rest of Rime Isle) is Cold Harbour. Though ships can dock here in the settled waters of a large bay, Cold Harbour itself is little more than a fishing village populated by a few hundred people.

Rimic Place-Names

Fafhrd thought, what cheerful names they favour, and scanned ahead. Heather and gorse were becoming scantier and stretches of lichened, shaly rock beginning to show.

— Rime Isle

Rimelanders have a penchant for curious names in some instances. For example, the expanse of inhospitable tundra on Rime Isle that crosses the centre of the island is known as the Deathlands by locals. One of the beaches along the coast of the Isle is referred to as the Beach of Bleached Bones.

Due to a curious current, this beach is the location for many items, bodies and chunks of ships that sink in the Outer Sea to eventually wash up. Rimelanders walk the beach from time to time, collecting the salvageable materials and objects from amongst the detritus.

Treasures of Lost Simorgya

The Rimic icons belonging to the Rimelanders and guarded by the Treasurer of the Rime Isle Council are considered the ‘atheist-holy’ relics of the island and its inhabitants. These are the most precious and valuable relics on the island and are easily among the most valuable items in all of known Nehwon. The Rimelanders generally cite that these icons have been in their possession for centuries and end all conversation there. The truth of the matter is a little more convoluted.

These treasures, which go by grandiloquent names such as the Golden Arrow of Truth, the Gold Circles of Unity, the Gold Cube of Square-Dealing, the Golden Ruler of Prudence and the Little Gold Cup of Measured Hospitality (to name but a few) are not actually Rimic in origin. They are Simorgyan relics from that sunken and lost land, come into the possession of the Rimelanders by one of two ways.

The first possibility is that like many objects in the Outer Sea, the treasures washed up on the Beach of Bleached Bones. This is the tale put forth by most Rimelanders when questioned on the topic.

The second possibility, one which is legendarily believed to have somehow hastened or been responsible for Simorgya’s sinking, is that Rimic raiders stole the icons and fled back to their Isle laden with the holy relics of ancient Simorgya.

Whichever story is true (and that in itself is the province of the Games Master to decide) the Rimic icons are worth dizzying amounts of money to many collectors and magicians across the length and breadth of Nehwon, not least of all the Rimelanders themselves who would pay dearly to either have the icons found if they were stolen, or handed over for a large reward in the case of new Simorgyan relics being discovered.

While the belief that these golden relics each possess some kind of magical power remains unconfirmed, it does seem likely given the vast reverence paid to them by the Rimic folk.

Simorgya

On the massive threshold Fafhrd involuntarily halted, dumbstruck by the realisation of the source of the faint yellow light he had noticed in the high windows. For the source was everywhere: ceiling, walls and slimy floor all glowed with a wavering phosphorescence. Even the carvings glimmered. Mixed awe and repugnance gripped him. But the men pressed around and against him, and carried him forward. Wine and leadership had dulled their sensibilities and as they strode down the long corridor they seemed little aware of the abysmal scene.

— The Sunken Land

Ancient Simorgya, the submerged kingdom, is the Atlantis-tale of Nehwon. Once it was a realm sitting above the ocean's waves; now it is lost to the black depths of the Outer Sea.

Some explorers, whether lifelong mariners or sailors flung far out to sea by hostile weather, have reported sighting portions of Simorgya risen out of the cold waters and remaining on the surface of the sea for short periods of time. It is not known why this happens, though some unknown and unknowable magic is the likeliest explanation.

Fafhrd and a crew of northerners once set foot on a risen portion of Simorgya with horrifying results. For more details of the adventure and the slaughter of gold-hungry barbarians, see *Adventures of Nehwon* on page 109. For details on the ray-like creatures that killed everyone setting foot on Simorgya except Fafhrd, see *Creatures of Nehwon* on page 99.

Games Masters have the chance to use Simorgya as a way of breathing the legendary aspects of Nehwon into an otherwise low magic campaign. The unearthly eeriness of the sunken city makes it a perfect place to hunt for ancient, alien items of power, as well as a location where it is likely characters will confront frightening and inhuman monsters. In the *Swords* saga, Simorgya was used to add a dash of horror and tragedy into the story. Games Masters might find it satisfying to do the very same in their games – the powerful sense of unease, even disgust that characters will feel here, can create a potent atmosphere.



Godsland

In the Land of the Gods, in short in Godland and near Nehwon's Life Pole there, which lies in the southern hemisphere at the antipodes from the Shadowland (abode of Death), three gods sitting together cross-legged in a circle picked out Fafhrd's and the Mouser's voices from the general mutter of their worshippers, both loyal and lapsed, which resounds eternally in any god's ear, as if he held a seashell to it.

— Under the Thumbs of Gods

Godsland is the realm where all the deities with at least one believer live and interact, kept alive by the faith of mortals. Here they listen to their worshippers, occasionally congratulating themselves on their renown and sometimes plaguing their less-than-faithful followers with minor curses. No mortal has ever sailed or walked to Godsland, and although it is believed to

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be close to Nehwon's southern pole, it is widely thought that walking on the soil of Godsland is an impossible task for mortal beings.

Games Masters are advised that Godsland is detailed here for completion purposes rather than as a potential place to set adventures. Unlike the Shadowland, adventuring in Godsland has little to offer. Face to face meetings with the gods of Nehwon are something that should be used delicately, if at all. It is certainly something rarely dealt with in the *Swords* saga.

Shadowland

The heavy overcast, which began at the watershed of the Parched Mountains, thickened, though not a drop of rain or atom of mist fell. The air was cool and moist and, nourished perhaps by underground water of most distant source, thick green grass grew and an open forest of black cedars sprang up. Herds of black antelopes and black reindeer nibbled the endless grass to a lawn, yet there were no herdsmen or human folk at all. The sky grew darker yet, almost a perpetual night, odd low hills topped by congeries of black rock appeared, there were distant fires of many hues, though none blue, and each vanished if you approached it, and you found no ash or other sign of it at its site. So the Mouser and Fafhrd well knew they had entered the Shadowland, death-feared by the merciless Mingols to the north, by the bone-proud, invisible-fleshed ghouls to the east...

— The Price of Pain-Ease

The Shadowland, set in the northeast of Nehwon and ringed by the Parched Mountains, is the realm of Death himself. One of Nehwon's greater Powers, answerable only to the invisible forces of Chance and Necessity, Death resides here in a black castle, watching over the souls he has claimed and choosing, one by one, the lives he will end in the future.

Adventuring in the Shadowland is a grim prospect at best and a horrifying one at worst. Characters might come face to face with their dead loved ones or slain enemies, or worst of all, attract the attention of Death himself. In the case of the latter occurrence, Death is likely to take great offence at being confronted in his own realm. There is no proof or defence against Death – if he decrees that a man dies, the man immediately dies – though heroes occupy a special place in Death's attentions and he is loath to kill them without arranging to do so in some grand and amusing fashion.

The Black Pavilions

Dotted around the Shadowland are dark-cloth tents, luxurious in craft, slightly wetted by the endless light drizzle that marks the unchanging weather in Death's realm. These pavilions are home to the spirits of the dead, wherein each soul appears gaunt, slightly blue of skin and at times unnaturally still. Living mortals that come to the Shadowland have been known to enter these tents in order to speak with the shades of their dead loved ones and companions, though it is unknown by Nehwonese scholars whether the pavilions exist for everyone in fixed places, or whether a man will only find the tents of those shades relating to his life.

No-one has successfully 'rescued' a dead soul from the pavilions and returned it to the lands outside Death's dark country. Strangely, all souls seem calm and content with their lot; perhaps with death comes an acceptance of mortality.

Death's Castle

Blue flame, silent as the grave, flares up from the towering central chimney of an 'open-gated, open-doored, low, vast black castle on a low long hill.' This is Death's home, his black granite palace, where he reclines on his throne and decides the deaths of all Nehwonese mortals.

Visitors may or may not find Death at home, depending on what Nehwon's least of the Three Great Powers is doing. If he is in residence, he might be open for conversation or he might decide to strangle any intruders in a fit of pique. Death is a being not known for his predictability and it is difficult to work out what such an alien and godlike being is thinking, or what mood he is in.

For more details on Death, see the chapter *Adventures in Newhon*, page 122.

CREATURES OF NEHWON

This chapter deals with the creatures and beasts of Nehwon, as encountered by Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser or described in the *Swords* stories.

Enemies in Campaigns

Games Masters with a passion for the source material will be aware that the majority of antagonists in Leiber's writing are human enemies, be they thieves, murderers or magicians. This is not to say that monsters and classic fantasy creatures should be completely avoided when planning campaigns.

Some aspects of Nehwon suggest evidence that there are inhuman creatures that the stories do not reveal to the reader. Ogres are mentioned at one point and it is easy to believe the Trollstep Mountains earned their name from the monster of the same name, albeit in a more mythological form than the classic high fantasy trope.

The *Swords* tales were largely penned in a time before the traditional high fantasy monsters were traditions. Mythology and folklore were distinct ingredients and elements of what made the monsters of the tales so evocative. Nehwon is populated by creatures like sea monsters, monstrous spiders and ghosts; every inhuman antagonist coming up against the players should have a touch of the mythological about it – insofar as the Games Master is concerned about theme. For some groups inhuman antagonists will play a vital part of the setting's dynamic. Others will be less bothered by them.

Creatures of the Great Salt Marsh

The silty black waters and low-hanging trees of Lankhmar's eastern swamp conceal some of the most vicious fauna in Nehwon. Any expedition through the marshland is bound to have adventurers crossing paths with dozens of examples of these creatures. These animals are among the many reasons so few travellers make it to the other end of the swamp once they enter.

Marsh Leopard

These blue-eyed, dark-furred big cats stalk the low branches and dry patches of the Great Salt Marsh. Unlike many cats, marsh leopards do not fear water and can swim if they must. They prefer to leap down on unsuspecting prey rather than betray their presence with a roar before striking, and attack by biting at throats and wrists or seeking to disembowel with their hind legs and front claws.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6	(10)
CON	3D6+3	(13)
DEX	3D6+3	(13)
SIZ	2D6+2	(9)
INT	6	(6)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	5	(5)

Marsh Leopard Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–2	Right Hind Leg	1/5
3–4	Left Hind Leg	1/5
5–7	Hindquarters	1/6
8–10	Forequarters	1/6
11–13	Right Front Leg	1/5
14–16	Left Front Leg	1/5
17–20	Head	1/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	60%	1D8–1D2
Claw	40%	1D6–1D2

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +8

Movement: 5m

Traits: Night Sight

Skills: Athletics 80%, Dodge 55%, Perception 60%, Resilience 40%, Stealth 75%, Survival 40%, Tracking 40%

Typical Armour: Hide (AP 1, no Skill Penalty)



Salt Spiders

A salt spider big as a platter sailed close by his ear in the grip of the gale, kicking its thick, corpse-white legs, and veered off past the hut...

— The Circle Curse

These leaping spiders vary in size from hand-sized to the size of pumpkins with long legs that make the arachnid look even larger. They are generally pinkish-white or bone-white, and make eerie clicking sounds as they stalk their prey. Unlike most spiders, salt spiders are able to walk on water (with weight-spreading pads at the ends of their legs) though they spend most of their time crawling

from rock to rock and tree to tree, looking for a victim to strike. Marsh leopards, adventurers, low-flying birds...all are fair game to salt spiders.

When salt spiders attack, they do so by springing up at an opponent's face, seeking to cling on to the head or chest and inject its venom as close to the brain or heart as possible. As beasts of the Great Salt Marsh go, salt spiders are among the most aggressive as well as the most common.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	1D4	(3)
CON	1D6	(4)
DEX	3D6+4	(14)
SIZ	1D4+1	(3)
INT	4	(4)
POW	1D6	(3)
CHA	1	(1)

Salt Spider Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-4	Right Legs	0/1
5-9	Left Legs	0/1
10-20	Body	0/2

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	40%	1D2 + Poison

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +9

Movement: 3m

Traits: Poison (see below)

Skills: Athletics 30%, Dodge 40%, Perception 20%, Resilience 30%, Stealth 90%, Survival 50%

Typical Armour: None

Salt Spider Venom

Type: Smeared

Delay: Immediate

Potency: 70.

Full Effect: One hit point damage to location struck, applies -6 penalty to victim's DEX

Duration: 1D10 minutes

Swamp Cobra

These snakes average around six feet in length, are as wide as a man's forearm and are coloured the same black-brown as the muddy swampland in which they live.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	1D6	(3)
CON	1D6	(4)
DEX	3D6+2	(13)
SIZ	1D3	(2)
INT	5	(5)
POW	1D6	(3)
CHA	2	(2)

Swamp Cobra Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-15	Body	1/1
16-20	Head	1/1

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	25%	1D2 + Poison

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +9

Movement: 3m

Traits: Poison (see below)

Skills: Athletics 40%, Dodge 20%, Perception 20%, Resilience 10%, Stealth 70%, Survival 50%

Typical Armour: Scales (AP 1; no skill penalty)

Swamp Cobra Venom

Type: Smeared

Delay: 1D6 combat rounds

Potency: 75

Full Effect: Two HP of damage to Hit Location; applies -8 penalty to victim's DEX

Duration: 1D10 minutes

Creatures of Klesh

Emperor Snake

The Emperor Snake of Klesh is a black-scaled cobra with a wide hood, and has the entirely deserved reputation as the most poisonous creature in Nehwon. These snakes slither through the undergrowth in the tropical jungles of the south, striking in the blink of an eye and delivering their wind-swift poison through their fangs.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	1D8	(5)
CON	1D6	(4)
DEX	3D6+6	(16)
SIZ	1D3	(2)
INT	5	(5)
POW	1D6	(3)
CHA	2	(2)

Emperor Snake Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-15	Body	1/1
16-20	Head	1/1

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	30%	1D2 + Poison

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +9

Movement: 3m

Traits: Poison (see below)

Skills: Athletics 60%, Dodge 50%, Perception 40%, Resilience 20%, Stealth 70%, Survival 60%

Typical Armour: Scales (AP 1; no skill penalty)

Emperor Snake Venom

Type: Smeared

Delay: Immediate

Potency: 95

Full Effect: Five HP of damage to Hit Location; applies -8 penalty to victim's DEX

Duration: 1D4 hours

Jungle Spiders

This arachnid is noted for its ability to fly as well as its luminous chitin exoskeleton which glows with soft light after sunset. In truth its 'flight' is a form of gliding, used to catch birds when the spider leaps from high branches. Kleshite jungle spiders are hunting spiders – they weave no webs and kill by their physical prowess.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	1D4	(3)
CON	1D6	(4)
DEX	3D6+4	(14)
SIZ	1D2	(2)
INT	4	(4)
POW	1D6	(3)
CHA	1	(1)

Kleshite Jungle Spider Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–4	Right Legs	0/1
5–9	Left Legs	0/1
10–20	Body	0/2

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	40%	1D2 + Poison

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +9

Movement: 3m

Traits: Poison (see below)

Skills: Athletics 30%, Dodge 40%, Perception 20%, Resilience 30%, Stealth 90%, Survival 50%

Typical Armour: None

Kleshite Jungle Spider Venom

Type: Smeared

Delay: Immediate

Potency: 85

Full Effect: Applies –12 penalty to victim's DEX

Duration: 1D20 minutes

Creatures of the Cold Wastes

Polar Tiger

These shaggy, white-furred big cats are among the most ferocious predators in Nehwon. They sport vicious sabretusks and outweigh the smaller, lithier ice cats by several times.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6+12	(24)
CON	3D6	(10)
DEX	3D6+6	(16)
SIZ	2D6+14	(22)
INT	6	(6)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	5	(5)

Polar Tiger Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–2	Right Hind Leg	3/7
3–4	Left Hind Leg	3/7
5–7	Hindquarters	3/8
8–10	Forequarters	3/8
11–13	Right Front Leg	3/7
14–16	Left Front Leg	3/7
17–20	Head	3/8

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	70%	1D8+1D10
Claw	65%	1D6+1D10

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 6m

Traits: Night Sight

Skills: Athletics 50%, Dodge 35%, Perception 65%, Resilience 60%, Stealth 40%, Survival 70%

Typical Armour: Thick, shaggy hide (AP 3, no Skill Penalty)

Ice Cat

These cheetah-like cats from the frozen north are half the size of polar tigers and hunt much smaller prey. They can be trained as loyal pets. Hrissa, in the story *Stardock*, is an example of a trained ice cat, loyal to Fafhrd.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6-1	(9)
CON	3D6+3	(13)
DEX	4D6+6	(22)
SIZ	2D6+3	(10)
INT	6	(6)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	5	(5)

Ice Cat Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Hind Leg	1/5
3-4	Left Hind Leg	1/5
5-7	Hindquarters	1/6
8-10	Forequarters	1/6
11-13	Right Front Leg	1/5
14-16	Left Front Leg	1/5
17-20	Head	1/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	45%	1D4
Claw	25%	1D2



Special Rules

Combat Actions: Four

Strike Rank: +14

Movement: 6m

Traits: Night Sight

Skills: Athletics 80%, Dodge 65%, Perception 50%, Resilience 45%, Stealth 70%, Survival 40%, Tracking 30%

Typical Armour: Hide (AP 1, no Skill Penalty)

Snow Serpent

Without more warning than that, a long snowbank between that step and the next reared up its nearest white end a dozen feet and hissed fearsomely, showing it to be a huge serpent with head as big as an elk's, all covered with shaggy snow-white fur. Its great violet eyes glared like those of a mad horse and its jaws gaped to show slashing-teeth like a shark's and two great fangs jutting a mist of pale ichor.

—Stardock

These serpents are hot-blooded mammals, not reptiles. They are protected by thick white fur allowing them to blend in with their surroundings, and they have the ability to breathe clouds of venom at their prey. Poison 'spat' in this manner dissipates into the air after one combat round.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	4D6+12	(26)
CON	4D6+6	(20)
DEX	3D6	(10)
SIZ	4D6+12	(26)
INT	7	(7)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	7	(7)

Snow Serpent Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Tail	3/10
3-7	Body (Rear)	3/11
8-15	Body (Front)	3/11
16-20	Head	3/10



Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	70%	1D6+1D12+Poison
(see below)		
Poison-spit	50%	Poison (see below)

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +8

Movement: 5m

Traits: Poison

Skills: Athletics 40%, Dodge 25%, Perception 35%, Persistence 50%, Resilience 40%, Stealth 80%, Survival 50%, Tracking 30%

Typical Armour: Thick hide (AP 3, no Skill Penalty)

Snow Serpent Ichor

Type: Smeared

Delay: Immediate

Potency: 60

Full Effect: *Bite:* Two HP damage to Hit Location / *Spat:* Two HP damage to 1D4 random Hit Locations

Duration: 2D20 minutes

Ice Gnome

A red glow sprang from the window and somewhat illuminated four faces with piggy black eyes and with low hairless domes above.

The Mouser considered them. They were all four of extreme ugliness, he decided dispassionately. Only their white teeth, showing between their grinning lips which almost joined ear to swinish ear, had any claim to beauty.

— Stardock.

Ice Gnomes are violent, uncouth diminutive beings that dwell atop mountains and in the tundra of the Cold Wastes. Each measure no more than three to four feet in height at best, and all possess thick-nailed, chunky hands, faces of surpassing ugliness and dark, almost-black eyes.

Hordes of these creatures have been known to sweep out of their lairs and do battle with the Cold Tribes of the north. Some Ice Gnomes serve the Invisibles of Stardock as slaves or servants.

Characteristics

STR	4D6	(14)
CON	2D6+12	(19)
DEX	2D6	(7)
SIZ	1D6+6	(9)
INT	2D6+6	(13)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	1D6+2	(5)

Ice Gnome Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/6
4-6	Left Leg	0/6
7-9	Abdomen	1/7
10-12	Chest	1/8
13-15	Right Arm	1/5
16-18	Left Arm	1/5
19-20	Head	0/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Shortsword	40% (36%)	1D6
Sling	30% (26%)	1D6

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +10

Movement: 3m

Traits: Earth Sense, Dark Sight

Skills: Athletics 30% (26%), Evaluate 20%, Lore (Cold Wastes) 80%, Persistence 50%, Resilience 65%, Survival 60%

Typical Armour: Hair shirts (AP 1; skill penalty -4%)

Invisibles

The Invisibles are ostensibly human, though the magical elements of their birth mean they are exceptionally strong and resistant to harm. When creating Invisible characters, always roll 3D6+6 for STR and CON. Everything else remains as it would for normal *RuneQuest* characters.

Creatures of Lankhmar

Iron Statue of the Devourers

The only conceivably salable object outside the shop – but it was a most notable exception – was the tall black iron statue, somewhat larger than life-size, of a lean swordsman of dire yet melancholy visage. Standing on a square pedestal beside the door, the statue leaned forward just a little on its long two-handed sword and regarded the Plaza dolefully.

— Bazaar of the Bizarre

This statue of black iron comes to life (or at least comes to motion) whenever the Bazaar of the Bizarre is threatened. It is remarkably tough to damage from the front, with only unseen attacks from the rear commonly lucky enough to break through its remarkably skilled defence.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 25
CON 13
DEX 11
SIZ 21
INT 13
POW 10
CHA 10

Iron Statue Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–2	Right Leg	7/7
3–4	Left Leg	7/7
5–7	Abdomen	7/8
8–10	Chest	7/9
11–13	Right Arm	7/6
14–16	Left Arm	7/6
17–20	Head	7/7

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Great sword	70%	2D8+1D10



Special Rules

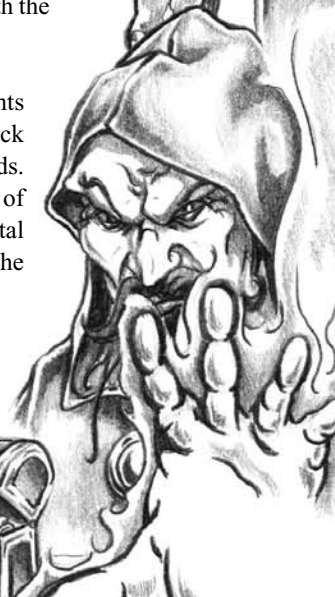
Combat Actions: Two
Strike Rank: +12
Movement: 4m
Skills: Athletics 60%, Perception 50%, Resilience 45%, Stealth 15%, Survival 60%, Tracking 25%
Typical Armour: Black iron skin (AP 7, no Skill Penalty)

The Gods of Lankhmar

The undead black-togaed founders of Lankhmar rest in their foreboding black temple, waiting for the times when their city needs their aid or the residents need to be punished. These mechanics can be used to represent the Dead Master Thieves – or indeed any mummified ancient Lankhmart honoured and preserved into undeath with the same long-forgotten ritual.

If a God of Lankhmar is reduced to zero Hit Points in any Hit Location it will seek to return to the Black Temple at the westward end of the Street of the Gods. Games masters should be aware that destroying one of these ancient elders probably comes with a monumental curse on the killer, such as when Slevyas smashed the skull of Omphal.

Creatures of Lankhmar



CHARACTERISTICS

STR 4D6+6 (20)
CON 6D6+6 (30)
DEX 3D6 (10)
SIZ 3D6 (10)
INT 3D6 (11)
POW 9D6+12 (45)
CHA 0 (0)

God of Lankhmar Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	8/8
4-6	Left Leg	8/8
7-9	Abdomen	8/9
10-12	Chest	8/10
13-15	Right Arm	8/7
16-18	Left Arm	8/7
19-20	Head	8/8

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Staff	60%	Instant
death on a failed Resilience test (-60% penalty)		
Unarmed (Strangle)	60%	
1D3+1D2+Asphyxiation		

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 4m

Traits: Dark Sight, Night Sight, Life Sense

Skills: Athletics 10%, Dodge 10%, Perception 70%, Persistence 150%, Resilience 150%

Typical Armour: Supernatural resilience (AP 8, no Skill Penalty)

Note: The Gods of Lankhmar take double damage from fire weapons.

Creatures of Nehwon

Simorgyan Cloak Beasts

'Well, what I saw was this: a crowd of men wearing big black cloaks – they looked like Northerners – came rushing out of an opening of some sort. There was something odd about them: the light by which I saw them didn't seem to have any source. Then they waved the big black cloaks around as if they were fighting with them or doing some sort of foolish dance...I told you it was very foolish... and then they got down on their hands and knees and covered themselves up with the cloaks and crawled back into the place from which they had come. Now tell me I'm a liar'.

Fafhrd shook his head. 'Only those weren't cloaks,' he said.

— The Sunken Land



These cloak-like creatures are found in the risen tombs and buildings of Simorgya, when that near-mythical place surfaces for a time. They strike by enveloping their prey from a flying strike, suffocating and constricting their victims before slowly crawling back to their lair to feast. In the centre of the cloak beasts' body is a fanged maw that often starts eating before the prey is dead.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 6D6 (20)
CON 3D6+12 (22)
DEX 3D6 (11)

SIZ 2D6 (7)
 INT 4 (4)
 POW 2D6+6 (13)
 CHA 2 (2)

Cloak Beast Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-6	Body (Left)	1/6
7-12	Body (Right)	1/6
13-20	Body (Central)	1/8

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Unarmed (Envelop) (to all Hit Locations) +Asphyxiation	60%	1D3+1D2
Bite	30%	1D8+1D2

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +7

Movement: 1m, 6m when flying

Traits: None

Skills: Athletics 20%, Dodge 30%, Persistence 30%, Resilience 40%, Survival 60%

Typical Armour: Thick hide (AP 1, no skill penalty)



Ghost Hounds

Then, at a small distance, he noted a pale form which he instinctively knew to be Fafhrd. And around the pale form seethed a pack of black, shadowy animal shapes, leaping and retreating, worrying at the pale form, their eyes glowing like the moonlight, but brighter, their long muzzles soundlessly snarling.

— The Howling Tower

These spirits are the ghosts of hounds that died through drawn-out agonising circumstances. They can only be harmed by an out-of-body soul that confronts them in their 'other world.'

They attack a mortal by drawing his soul out when he sleeps, though they can only do this to the targets responsible for their painful deaths. The victim makes a Persistence test each time he falls asleep in order to resist the drawing out of his soul. If he fails the test, he finds himself in the featureless expanses of the other world with the ghost hounds and must survive for 2D4 hours before awakening. His Characteristics, Skills, armour and weapons are as they were in the waking world, but death here spells instant death for the body.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 3D6 (10)
 CON 3D6+3 (13)
 DEX 3D6+3 (13)
 SIZ 2D6+1 (8)
 INT 6 (6)
 POW 3D6 (10)
 CHA 4 (4)

Ghost Hound Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Hind Leg	0/5
3-4	Left Hind Leg	0/5
5-7	Hindquarters	0/6
8-10	Forequarters	0/6
11-13	Right Front Leg	0/5
14-16	Left Front Leg	0/5
17-20	Head	0/5

creatures of nehwon

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	50%	1D8-1D2

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +8

Movement: 5m

Traits: Life Sense

Skills: Athletics 80%, Dodge 55%, Resilience 40%, Perception 60%, Stealth 55%, Survival 40%, Tracking 60%

Typical Armour: None

Beasts of the Bleak Shore

Under the darkening leaden sky he watched twin deaths hatching out for him and his companion. The first hint of the creature came in the form of a long, swordlike claw which struck out through a crack, widening it farther. Fragments of shell fell more swiftly.

The two creatures which emerged in the gathering dusk held enormity even for the Mouser's drugged mind. Shambling things, erect like men but taller, with reptilian heads boned and crested like helmets, feet clawed like a lizard's, shoulders topped with bony spikes, forelimbs each terminating in a single yard-long claw. In the semidarkness they seemed like hideous caricatures of fighting men, armoured and bearing swords. Dusk did not hide the yellow of their blinking eyes.

— The Bleak Shore

These egg-birthered monsters are the magical progeny of the eerie, pale man with the bulging forehead from the Bleak Shore. Their preferred method of attack is to overwhelm their prey with greater numbers, wearing their food out before they eat.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6+6	(17)
CON	3D6	(10)
DEX	3D6	(10)
SIZ	3D6+8	(20)

INT	3D4+1	(9)
POW	3D6	(10)
CHA	1D4	(2)

Bleak Shore Beast Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	3/6
4-6	Left Leg	3/6
7-9	Abdomen	3/7
10-12	Chest	3/8
13-15	Right Arm	3/5
16-18	Left Arm	3/5
19-20	Head	3/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Claw	70%	1D8+1D6

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +9

Movement: 4m

Traits: None

Skills: Athletics 40%, Perception 30%, Resilience 60%, Stealth 10%, Survival 40%

Typical Armour: Scaly skin (AP 3, no skill penalty)





ADVENTURES OF NEHWON

'Fafhrd and the Mouser are rogues through and through, though each has in him a lot of humanity and at least a diamond chip of the spirit of true adventure. They drink, they feast, they wench, they brawl, they steal, they gamble, and surely they hire out their swords to powers that are only a shade better, if that, than the villains'.

— Author's Note, The Swords of Lankmar

This chapter details many of the most noteworthy adventures of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, compiling a list of their most famous escapades, their troubles, the woes and victories that make up their legend. Games Masters can use this section to design similar adventures for their players, mining elements for personal campaign use as they see fit, or simply use the lore herein as tales told over the tables of the Silver Eel regarding Lankmar's most famous adventurers. The final option can inspire some healthy jealousy in players or annoy them to no end, so Games Masters should tread carefully.

The chapter is also designed to be part-index, part-inspiration, reminding Games Masters which stories are in which books and helping Games Masters with any subsequent read-throughs. Players unfamiliar with the source material can either choose to resist the temptation of spoilers or glean a taste of what forms Fritz Leiber considered Nehwon adventures to take.

Swords and Oevltry

The Snow Women

'Aye, your father now bitterly regrets Gran Hanack, White Fang, the Ice Queen and all his other mountain paramours. They cannot help him now. They have forgotten him. He stares up endlessly from lidless sockets at the home he despised and now yearns for, so near, yet so impossibly far. His fingerbones scrabble feebly against the frozen earth, he tries futilely to twist under its weight...'

— The Snow Women

This is the story of Fafhrd's origins, detailing a great deal about the culture of the Cold Wastes. As he approaches his twenties, Fafhrd is displeased with his place in life as a singing skald of the Snow Clan and he chafes under the oppressive matriarchy in the tribe, of which his mother Mor is an influential part. It is revealed that his father, Nalgron, was a passionate climber who also showed signs of defiance to the matriarchal rule. He died while mountaineering, and Fafhrd believes his mother used her Ice Magic to send Nalgron to his death on White Fang. Of greatest discomfort is that his family tent in the arctic nomad tribe's current home of Cold Corner is pitched directly above his father's grave.

The Snow Clan makes its annual midwinter trip south to meet with the southern traders and allow the males of the tribe to enjoy a performing troupe that traditionally accompanies the merchants each year. The

performances take place in Godshall, the only structure of the Snow Clan where women and children are barred. It is from among these exotic southerners that Fafhrd falls for his first love, Vlana. She is a dancer as well as a freelance thief that ran afoul of the Thieves' Guild in Lankhmar. When Fafhrd decides to leave Cold Corner and the Snow Tribe, he vows to accompany Vlana and aid in wreaking vengeance upon the Guild in her name. Vlana is not as honest as Fafhrd hoped – she has made similar pacts with other strong warrior males among the Snow Clan, though Fafhrd kills them in a rage and takes his place at Vlana's side. In his wake he leaves a furious mother and a pregnant lover, Mara.

Campaign Information

The Snow Women reveals a great deal of the northern arctic barbarian tribes, including the slow-working and sinister Ice Magic of the barbarian witch-women. Potential character backgrounds and story hooks from this first tale involve arctic hunters and singing-skalds, along with merchant traders and troupe performers. A Games Master and his players will likely find no shortage of inspiration for characters among the wealth of personalities detailed in this story of the icy north.

A lesson on romance in *Lankhmar* campaigns lurks here, as well. Characters might find themselves besotted with another person who ultimately has his or her own interests at heart and is not above a little treachery in order to get things done.

The Unholy Grail

The wizard lay just inside the buckled door. And he had fared as his house: the beams of his body bared and blackened; the priceless juices and subtle substances boiled, burned, destroyed forever or streamed upward to some cold hell beyond the moon.

— The Unholy Grail

Here the origins of the Grey Mouser (then called Mouse) are revealed; at least, what is known of them is revealed. Apprenticed to the minor wizard Glavas Rho, Mouse returns from a quest set by his master to find the elderly magician slain and his home burned to the ground. The blame lays firmly at the feet of Duke Janarrl, the superstitious and hateful liege lord of the region. His

daughter Ivrian was also an apprentice of Glavas Rho, though not a talented or dedicated one. Janarrl had the old wizard killed to prevent her receiving further instruction. Mouse believes her foolishness or naivety led to Janarrl tracking Rho down, and he swears vengeance on the duke and his daughter.

Ivrian inadvertently leads her father and his men to Mouse's location, interrupting the Black Magic spell he was casting to end Janarrl's life. Captured and taken to the duke's dungeon, Mouse is ready to be killed by racking, and plans one last hate-driven spell to take the duke with him into death. Ultimately Mouse's spell is successful, resulting in Janarrl's death and Ivrian releasing him from the rack. The two join together in flight, heading to Lankhmar in order to put everything behind them.

Campaign Information

The Unholy Grail highlights some of the authority that local liege lords wield even when they are far from Lankhmar City, and offers teasing hints without anything solid about what White Magic may or may not be. What Games Masters looking for campaign flavour are sure to find most interesting is the Mouser's use of Agony and Sympathy in manipulating a Black Magic spell designed to murder Duke Janarrl.

Ivrian is a good example of how to play Games Master characters as trustworthy and untrustworthy to keep the players guessing. The Mouser suspects she has betrayed him because she is often weak before her father – it appears that she was the only way Janarrl could have tracked down Glavas Rho. In truth, Ivrian was revealed to be innocent of at least conscious betrayal.

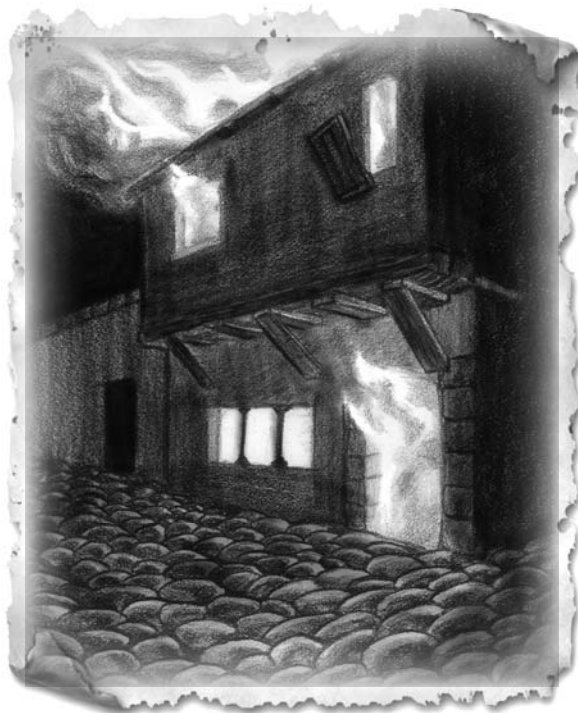
III Met in Lankhmar

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser faced each other across the two thieves sprawled senseless. They were poised for attack, yet for the moment neither moved.

Each discerned something inexplicably familiar in the other.

— III Met in Lankhmar

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser meet for the first time over the bodies of unconscious thieves. They had both picked the same heist and sprung their respective ambushes at



the same time. In that moment, as they regard each other in the heady moments after a fast success, they feel a connection.

After spending some time getting to know one another and each openly delighted to meet a witty and urbane companion to relate with, the two small-time thieves collect Viana from her inn room, purchase a few jugs of wine and assemble at the Mouser's squat-home behind the Silver Eel. Here, in good company and flush with the success of their heist, the two men get drunk. When Viana's grudge against the Thieves' Guild comes up again, the soused pair decides it would be a wonderful idea to scout out Thieves' House that very night. They dress as beggars, hide their weapons as best they can and infiltrate the den of thieves.

Though they catch many an eyeful of what goes on within the walls of Thieves' House, they are exposed before Krovas, the Master Thief, and are forced to flee for their lives. By the time they have reached the house behind the Silver Eel, the Guild has already taken its vengeance. Viana and Ivrian lay dead, smothered by sorcerous night-smoke and stripped to the bone by a horde of rats. It seems Hristomilio, Krovas' magician, works fast. The two companions burn down the house, eradicating the loathsome evidence and cremating their lovers.

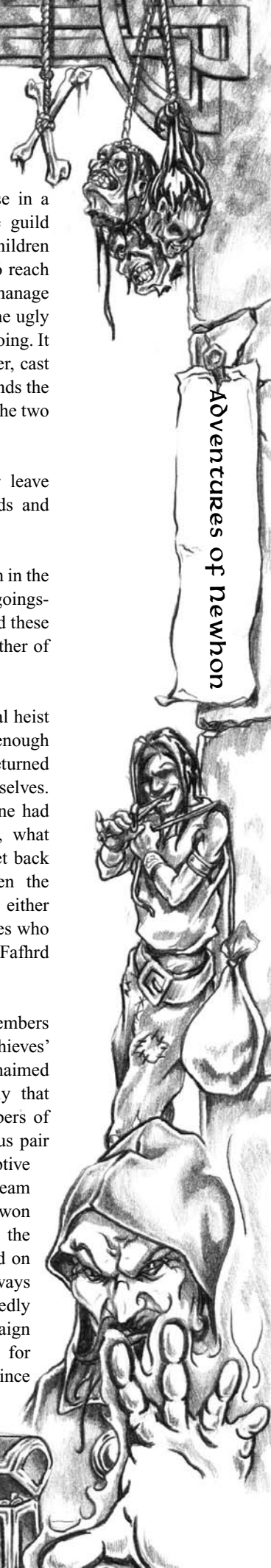
Fafhrd and the Mouser return to Thieves' House in a rage, storming the building and butchering the guild members that get in their way. Even apprentice children are not spared the blade in the duo's mad rush to reach the sorcerer's chamber. Fafhrd and the Mouser manage to reach Hristomilio's room and attempt to slay the ugly sorcerer, though his magic nearly proves their undoing. It is only a last-moment hurl of Viana's silver dagger, cast by the Mouser, that kills the black magician and ends the night-smog spell that threatened to overwhelm the two adventurers.

Vowing never to return to Lankhmar, the pair leave immediately, seeking forgetfulness in other lands and other cities.

Campaign Information: The obvious information in the story is Hristomilio's use of Black Magic and the goings-on inside Thieves' House. Games Masters will find these examples invaluable if their campaigns feature either of them.

It might also be worth noting just how the original heist was planned. Fafhrd and the Mouser both had enough information to hit journeyman thieves as they returned to Thieves' House from a successful heist themselves. That means both the northerner and the Grey One had information about where the thieves had been, what they had taken and the route they had used to get back to Thieves' House. The pair must have gotten the information somewhere, which indicates bribery, either in the Guild itself or perhaps from some constables who were pre-bribed by the thieves and decided to take Fafhrd and the Mouser's money as well.

Characters might find themselves as Guild members when Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser assault Thieves' House – losing friends and perhaps even being maimed in the defence of the headquarters. It is likely that Krovas dispatches his own men and hires members of the Slayers' Brotherhood to chase the adventurous pair down in order to slit their throats for their presumptive attack. Characters looking to be part of a strike team hunting the duo are in for a rollicking tour of Nehwon as they follow Fafhrd and the Mouser across the world. A long-lasting campaign could be founded on the characters being one step behind the duo, always seeking to catch up to their prey but being repeatedly delayed by their own adventures. Such a campaign could boast a variety of character backgrounds, for example: a hunter hired to track the adventurers (since



the thieves and killers sent by Krovas have no wilderness skills), a slave freed because he has information on the duo's whereabouts and a barbarian from the Cold Wastes with a childhood grudge against Fafhrd.

Swords Against Death

The Circle Curse

They lived by thievery, robbery, bodyguarding, brief commissions as couriers and agents – commissions they always, or almost always, fulfilled punctiliously – and by showmanship, the Mouser entertaining by legerdemain, juggling and buffoonery, while Fafhrd with his gift for tongues and training as a Singing Skald excelled at minstrelsy, translating the legends of his frigid homeland into many languages. They never worked as cooks, clerks, carpenters, tree-fellers or common servants and they never, never, never enlisted as mercenary soldiers – their service to Lithquill having been of a more personal nature.

— The Circle Curse

Fleeing Lankhmar to avoid the wrath of the Thieves' Guild and distance themselves from the fresh pain of their lovers' deaths, Fafhrd and the Mouser embark on a Nehwon-spanning series of adventures that form the beginning of their joint legend. It is as they set out from Lankhmar that they first meet Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and as they return that they first meet Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

In the three years between these meetings, the pair rack up an impressive list of feats and deeds. They travel to the beggar city of Tovilyis to seek the Mouser's origins, though they discover nothing of note. A long trek northward takes them in search of Fafhrd's Snow Clan, though again they are met with disappointment and a tale of the tribe having been slaughtered by Ice Gnomes some months before. An adventure across the Great Steppes,

avoiding capture and enslavement by the roaming Mingol warbands, leads into a quest to great Horborixen, citadel-city of the King of Kings, and then even further east into the never-detailed lands beyond Tisilinilit. At one point the pair even enters the service of Lithquill, Mad Duke of Ool Hrusp, arranging 'mock-duels, simulated murderers and other entertainments.' Prospecting for gold in the Mountains of the Elder Ones proves as fruitless as the Mouser's hunt for his origins, while adventuring in the fringes of the Kleshite jungle likewise offers little reward worth speaking of.

Their minds turn to thoughts of what adventures remain in Nehwon, which in turn spins their thoughts back to Lankhmar. Realising that time away from the Imperishable City has not healed the painful memories of their dead loves, the pair decide to abandon their self-exile and return to Lankhmar, using the city as a base for further questing.

Campaign Information: Games Masters will note that *The Circle Curse* offers a lot of hinting with little detail about what these fabulous places the heroes visited were actually like. This does offer a lot of freedom in planning any quests to these areas, though the truly most significant aspects of the story as they pertain to a *Lankhmar* campaign are the appearance of the two wizardly mentors and the perspective Nehwonians have of Lankhmar itself.

Sheelba and Ningauble appear when Fafhrd and the Mouser are abandoning Lankhmar, are in trouble with powerful enemies and are somewhat lost in life. A worthwhile factor in deciding if Sheel and Ning appear to the characters is just when to introduce the wizards. When the characters leave Lankhmar (perhaps for the first time) it can be as good a moment as any, especially if the adventurers are on the lam or in some kind of trouble that a touch of sorcerous assistance could help with.

The fact that Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser hanker to return to Lankhmar but are kept away by their oaths paints the city in a very honest light: it is a dark and dirty place, but it is also the hub of the world's events and the greatest gathering of humanity on Nehwon. It is a common saying that there are adventures to be had everywhere but most have a habit of starting in Lankhmar.

The Jewels in the Forest

'I wonder whose skull this may be?' said the Northerner calmly.

The Mouser regarded the thing, and the scattering of bones and fragments of bones beside it. His feeling of uneasiness was fast growing to a climax, and he had the unpleasant conviction that, once it did reach a climax, something would happen.

— The Jewels in the Forest

Following a note in the margin of a parchment in the library of Lord Rannarsh of Lankhmar, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser set out to locate the so-called Treasure House of Urgaan of Angargni. Urgaan, it seems, was a wealthy architect and sorcerer who created an impenetrable treasure house to thwart all manner of thieves. The writing appears to be at least 500 years old, promising a diamond the size of a man's skull, rubies the size of cat skulls and riches of similar ilk.

Racing to beat them to the prize is Lord Rannarsh himself, accompanied by several of his guards and enraged at the theft of his parchment.

Upon arriving in the region – a day's ride south of the village Soreev – Fafhrd and the Mouser are ambushed by the nobleman and his men, but manage to escape into the treasure house, which appears as a large, shallow dome, resting on walls that form an octagon. In front and merging into it are two lesser domes, while a tower rises asymmetrically from the rear part of the main dome. The entire structure features only a few windows and is formed of uniformly dark grey stone.

Within the large and unusual structure, Fafhrd and the Mouser find bodies and many bones that appear crushed as if by great falls of stone. In the pursuit through the treasure house, the Mouser slays Lord Rannarsh, though he feels a surge of disgust at being the cause of the man's pointless death.

As they go from room to room, they come across Arvlan of the Angargni, who claims to be the descendent of Urgaan and on a quest to destroy the accursed treasure

house. He reveals that his ancestor was a man who had congress with demons and was afflicted so that he could never enjoy pleasure or even simple lust. The pious Arvlan, who appears to be a priest or at least a hermit dedicated to the Great God, is later found dead – also apparently crushed.

The Mouser surmises that the treasure house has some kind of magical guardian, which can be detected by the premonitory stirrings of supernatural fear felt in the victims. Fafhrd and the Mouser reach the treasure room, marked with Urgaan's declarative writing, and set about removing the stone block upon which it is written that the jewels hide behind. The Mouser, feeling a bout of sickness, not fear, goes to the window and sees a peasant girl approaching the treasure house, apparently gripped by the supernatural terror of the place. He flees out of the building to warn her away, leaving Fafhrd to finish the plundering.

As the Mouser reaches her, the treasure house appears to bend and warp, with the stone itself lashing out at them. The tall tower bends into a club-like appendage and hammers down into the ground. Inside, Fafhrd has found the jewels, though they are connected with gold bars and resting in a strange fluid, appearing eerily organic in some way. They thrum and move as the treasure house starts to warp, and Fafhrd flees empty-handed.

The duo return to Lankhmar, no richer for the experience but with quite a tale to tell.

Campaign Information: This adventure has many aspects that Games Masters may wish to weave into their own storylines. The notion of ancient parchments and texts containing mention of long-forgotten tombs and treasure houses is a classic and interesting plot hook, and if rival groups seek the treasure at the same time as the characters, the campaign can take some interesting turns as both groups seek to thwart the other's quest.

It is best to open up such an adventure by offering a decent riddle, poem or historical text based on the location in question. The hints and descriptions written in Lord Rannarsh's parchment speak teasingly, challengingly, defying any would-be treasure-hunters to risk their lives against powerful and unknown defences in order to gain incredible wealth. Even in the centuries after their death, sorcerers can leave a legacy of evil, harming others long after they are gone from the mortal world.

This adventure also highlights how worrying it can be when a nobleman sets his sights on ending a character's life, since most have the pride and resources necessary to put up a sincere chase. Lord Rannarsh and his crossbow-bearing guards were very nearly the end of Fafhrd and the Mouser. Few antagonists will have the influence and resources of Lankhmar nobility, and killing them will often bring new troubles. Though Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are not concerned about the law finding out about the murder, the Mouser feels intensely uncomfortable at having killed a man for such a poor reason. They both suspect the nobleman hurled himself into battle purely to die, hoping to escape the supernatural fear and the shame of revealing his terror to strangers.

The treasure house itself is a mixture of ancient legendry, magical traps and apparent evil. Its only intent was to harm those who came seeking the riches within and judging by the bones, the bodies and the story of Arvlan, it has done just that many times over the centuries.

The supernatural terror and warping, crushing walls will be difficult for any group to oppose if they take a trip to the southern Lankhmar forests and seek entrance to the treasure house. However, there is a great deal of potential danger and excitement in such a quest, especially if the characters are ultimately successful and destroy the malicious, strangely-alive structure once and for all.

Thieves' House

Certain members of the Thieves' Guild become aware of a scrawled note that states that centuries ago, a skull with jewels for eyes was stolen from them by the priests of the Temple of Votishal. It is also noted that this skull should be returned immediately to the Guild so that they can place it in the Thieves' Sepulchre. Though the current Master Thief and his advisors know nothing of this skull or any 'Thieves' Sepulchre,' the mention of the skull having rubies for eyes awakens their interest.

They arrange for Fafhrd and the Mouser to sneak into the Temple of Votishal, get past the crypts which are rumoured to be locked by wards beyond the skill of mortal thieves, overcome the legendary beast that guards these subterranean cellars and steal the skull themselves. Once this is completed, the thief Fissif steals the jewelled skull from the adventurers and flees back the Thieves' House.

Only then he realised the hateful dusty odour was thick in his nostrils, that the room was in utter silence, that from the corridor came a hot wind and the sound of marching bones clicking against the stone pavement. He saw Slevyas look over his shoulder, and he saw a fear-like death in Slevyas' face. Then came a sudden intense darkness, like a puff of inky smoke. But before it came he saw bony arms clasp Slevyas' throat, and, as the Mouser dragged him back, he saw the doorway crowded with black skeletal forms whose eyes glittered green and red and sapphire. Then utter darkness, hideous with the screams of the thieves as they fought to crowd into the narrow tunnel in the alcove. And over and above the screams sounded thin high voices, like those of bats, cold as eternity.

— Thieves' House

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are less than thrilled at this deception, especially given how much effort the theft took on their parts. They go to Thieves' House, emboldened by their previous assault on the building, and seek Master Thief Krovas. They find Krovas strangled and his mistress, Ivlis, fleeing down a secret passageway with the skull. In the ensuing fracas as the defenders of Thieves' House pile in, the Grey Mouser escapes and Fafhrd becomes lost in the bowels of the huge building.

While the Mouser works to get the skull back from Ivlis, Fafhrd lurches around in the darkness and eventually stumbles into the Thieves' Sepulchre – the tomb of the Dead Master Thieves deep in the cellars of the Guild headquarters and forgotten by all thieves still living. Fafhrd is threatened by unseen voices; promised death if he does not return the skull of Omphal to its rightful resting place. Confused and unnerved in the extreme, Fafhrd flees from the cellars and is captured by Slevyas, the new Master Thief.

In a final confrontation, the Mouser disguises himself to steal the skull from Ivlis and makes his way to Thieves' House via the passageway, seeking Fafhrd. Fafhrd has revealed all he knows about the Dead Master Thieves, and demands the skull's return. His words chill the assembled thieves, excepting their leader. In the following battle, Slevyas gets hold of Omphal's skull, smashing it with his sword blade to rouse the suddenly superstitious thieves.

It has the opposite effect, and in the dusty darkness that follows, the Dead Master Thieves walk the rooms of Thieves' House, slaying any that stand in their way as they seek Slevyas. As the black-boned mummies strangle the Master Thief in revenge for his blasphemy, Fafhrd, Ivlis and the Mouser escape in the chaos.

Campaign Information: *Thieves' House* provides Games Master with the first look at how some of the guilds and orders of Lankhmar have deep, rich traditions that can delve into the unnerving, the dark, and the outright supernaturally malevolent. The Dead Master Thieves are a perfect example of the deathly secrets Lankhmarts either keep for lifetimes or forget, and which then rise up to harm those who lack the proper reverence. Lankhmar is a city of secrets and few of them are pleasant. This is an example of one of the worst.

Another aspect of the story worth noting is the scarcely-mentioned Temple of Votishal, whose priests stole the skull of a Dead Master Thief for no reason that is ever explained. Games Masters can use Votishal's cult in any way they see fit, defining it as an order of secretive rival thieves following their own thief god, or perhaps as a group of magicians that required the skull for a ritual centuries ago and never saw fit to return it.

Characters belonging to (or allied with) the Thieves' Guild might wish to find out just what else these priests of Votishal have in their crypts. The locks of incredible complexity and the guardian beast, whatever form each of these threats take, are bound to be significant dangers to an adventuring group, but the rewards for overcoming them are be grand indeed. If the Games Master decides that any plunder from the Votishal crypts comes with its own curse attached, much like the skull of Omphal, so be it. That could serve as a springboard for a further adventure, as players seek to rid themselves of the curse's effects and sell the artefact to another poor soul.

The Bleak Shore

'So you think a man can cheat death and outwit doom?' said the small, pale man, whose bulging forehead was shadowed by a black cowl.

— The Bleak Shore

On a night spent drinking, gambling and gaming in the Silver Eel, a small, slightly deformed man approaches Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, engaging them in conversation. The talk turns to the notion of death over and again as the little man returns to the topic repeatedly. By simply speaking the words 'the Beak Shore' three times, he enspells Fafhrd and the Mouser, putting them under a magical compulsion to sail the Outer Sea to find the rumoured western continent and walk its shore. The two heroes set out to do so at once, unable to refuse.

The passage across the Outer Sea takes many days, during which Fafhrd and the Mouser seem nothing at all like themselves. When they finally arrive at the Bleak Shore, they order their Mingol sailor-slaves to return to Lankhmar and abandon them, for they are sure they will not be returning. 'Do not follow. We are dead men,' the Mouser says, 'Return if you can.'

As the pair stumble across the shore and explore, they discover a large nest of strange, man-tall black eggs surrounded by hundreds of bones belonging to various animals such as boars, great cats and wolves, as well as at least one ribcage of a man or ape. The eggs begin to crack and split open, the heroes regain their senses.

The great reptilian humanoid beasts that rise from the eggs swing bladed claws at the duo, and both Fafhrd and the Mouser find themselves fighting defensively, in a desperate battle for their lives. One of the eggs draws the Mouser's eyes – a glossier and smaller one than the others. He cracks this open with his sword, spilling out the foul contents to the bone-strewn beach. Within the egg is the small man with the bulging forehead; here seeming half-embryonic as the Mouser slays him. At the moment of the creature's death, the lizard-like creatures keel over dead and the other eggs crumble to dust. The two companions are faced with a long journey home through unknown lands.

Campaign Information: This story highlights the dangerous supernatural compulsions that feature in some campaigns. It suffers when translated directly to a game session because the characters have so little free will until the very end. There are ways around this. Games Masters should probably refrain from massively powerful magical demands whenever possible, since few players will have any fun meekly nodding and agreeing for a few hours and having no influence over their own characters. Instead, in situations where the

Games Master has a story arc based around a supernatural compulsion, consider sweetening the deal by limiting the rigid effects of the demand and having some kind of reward on offer, perhaps named as a treasure in a local tale or something similar. If they have to go, make it worthwhile. Better yet, make the 'compulsion' more of a temptation, so they can decide for themselves if they want to make the trek in the first place. If the situation is compelling enough and the payoff sounds about right, they will most likely go of their own free will.

If the players resist the temptation to go where they are magically summoned, consider setting it up so that the effects of the summons will apply to them even if they remain where they are. The events of *The Bleak Shore* did not need to take place where they did – a Games Master could vary the setting by having the deformed man warn them that doom is in their future no matter where they go, and the next time they enter the Great Salt Marsh or wander through a forest, the eggs and bones are there waiting for them. A little variation can negate the need for heavy-handed Games Mastering.

The final battle highlights an interesting dilemma in combat scenes. For Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser (as well as *Lankhmar* characters in individual campaigns) the right answer when the blades swing and the blood flows is not always to fight to the bitter end. Sometimes flight is an option and sometimes victory is only really possible through wits and quick-thinking, such as smashing the central egg and killing the creepy malformed puppeteer behind the whole thing. Games Masters can make scenes increasingly interesting if players uncover more options and possible solutions as time passes. The risk is that such a scene can have a solution too difficult to discover in time, and the characters may be killed before they see the light. It can be a difficult balance.

A sensitive factor in the story is the presence of slavery. Heroes (even tarnished and conflicted heroes like Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser) still accept slavery as a part of everyday life, and for the most part the pair's Mingol slaves are well-treated subordinates, if not full companions. Players dealing with this will obviously form their own opinions (and that of their characters') regarding the practice of slavery, but the truth of the setting is that it does exist.

The Howling Tower

The sound was not loud, yet it seemed to fill the whole vast, darkening plain, and the palely luminous, hollow sky: a wailing and howling, so faint and monotonous that it might have been inaudible save for the pulsing rise and fall; an ancient, ominous sound that was somehow in harmony with the wild, sparsely vegetated landscape and the barbaric garb of the three men who sheltered in a little dip in the ground, lying close to a dying fire.

— The Howling Tower

On their long journey back to Lankhmar, Fafhrd, the Grey Mouser and their hired guide are seemingly stalked by the sounds of mournful wolf-hows, apparently emanating from a distant tower on the barren, rocky landscape. They make camp to avoid the bite of the bitter wind, though when the heroes awaken the following morning, the guide is nowhere to be seen. The very next morning, Fafhrd is gone when the Mouser rises. He eats a grim breakfast of cold meat and sets out for the howling tower.



Once there he finds a near-deserted tower and its courtyard, with muffled hound howls coming from somewhere nearby, yet no reek of caged or leashed animals. Exploring the rooms of the tower, he finally finds Fafhrd and the guide in a room resembling an apothecary's shop or a wizard's ingredient lab. Both are heavily bandaged for some reason, and while Fafhrd's bandages are clean and the big warrior seems to be asleep, the guide's are blood-smearred and he is quite dead.

Fafhrd cannot be roused. As the Mouser tries in vain, he hears footsteps descending the tower and coming into the room. He confronts the tower's owner, an old and cruel-faced man, who reveals that he is haunted by the ghosts of his family's hounds, which he locked in the cellar decades ago and allowed to starve. The dogs feasted on each other until only one remained, then finally none, but the mournful howling only grew louder. The old man knew he was being tortured by the howls of the dogs' spirits.

To silence their howls now, at least temporarily quiet them, the old man summons travellers to the tower by Black Magic and tricks them into drinking a potion that separates their souls from the bodies. Once the souls are free in some otherworldly realm, the ghosts of the starved hounds tear the traveller's spirit to pieces and feast. The old man confesses to having forced Fafhrd and the guide into drinking. The Mouser, with his sword at the ready, demands that the old man give him a dose of the potion so he can go to save Fafhrd, and forces the man to drink the purple, blood-flavoured and sickly potion as well. Both of their souls manifest in the ghostly realm, where the Mouser rushes to save Fafhrd.

On the vast, alien plain where Fafhrd battles the spectral hounds, the Mouser witnesses the pack flee from the barbarian and swarm after another pale, retreating form – that of the old man. When the vision of the otherworld fades and both heroes awaken, the old man's body remains lifeless. Fafhrd finally admits that he was ensorcelled when he came to the tower, believing the old man when he was told the potion would make him a god.

Campaign Information: *The Howling Tower* has some excellent elements for use in individual campaigns. In regards to the irresistible summons that calls to the guide and Fafhrd, it is hardly any effort to make resisting the spell a possibility, having the characters come across the tower in the course of their adventuring (perhaps seeking shelter) or simply altering it so that an Non-Player Character affiliated with the party cannot resist the summons and leaves his friends as he marches to the tower alone. In this last scenario the player characters obviously need to go after their friend and save him, which can be a decent setup for many adventures anyway and is especially appropriate here.

The deaths of the hounds and their unloving state as tortured spirits is a dark and eerie look into the supernatural of the *Lankhmar* setting. What if other animals, monsters or even people will come back from the dead as spirits purely to harm those that wronged them in life? Games Masters should note that the hounds were not just murdered – they were starved to death over weeks, even after they resorted to eating each other to stay alive. All the while, their master looked in on them every day and hoped they would all be dead. It is clear that a great deal of suffering and a torturous death is the victim's part in this ghostly rebirth, while the one responsible must be evil in a particularly cruel way to warrant such hate-filled after-death vengeance.

The old man is a relatively accomplished black magician but has no ability to save himself from the Mouser's threats and his eventual fate. This should be a guiding example in how weak such evil souls can be at times, especially when unprepared for resistance.

Lastly, the presence of the guide is notable. Nehwon is a dangerous place, especially when adventurers are hiking in unfamiliar territory. It can be hard on a group's coin-purses but hiring an experienced guide is never a waste of money. Games Masters might decide to play this up, having guideless and inexperienced groups running into more than their fair share of trouble while out in the wilds.

The Sunken Land

'My people, the legends say, went raiding against them one summer, and none of the boats returned save one, which came back after hope had been lost, its men almost dead from thirst. They told of sailing on and on, and never reaching Simorgya, never sighting its rocky coast and squat, many-windowed towers. Only the empty sea. More raiders went out the next summer and the next, yet none ever found Simorgya'.

— The Sunken Land

Having secured a ship from some unknown western continent port, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser embark on the return voyage across the Outer Sea and sail eastward home to Lankhmar. While on the voyage, Fafhrd guts a fish, and while preparing it for food discovers a gold ring in its belly – a ring marked with strange symbols and featuring a curious key atop it, as if it were destined to unlock something. Fafhrd is overjoyed. The Mouser is unsettled, as he feels it focuses an uncomfortable feeling he has been having for days.

The pair meet a dragon-prowed northerner ship, crewed by barbarians from the Cold Wastes. Fafhrd is taken aboard after falling into the water, while the Mouser sails on, seeking to pursue the northerner ship and recover his friend. On board the barbarian vessel, Fafhrd meets the captain, Lavas Laerk, who tells how he and his crew seek ancient Simorgya. Perhaps unbelievably, they find it – a portion of it, at least – risen from the seas and the crew makes landfall. Fafhrd is taken as an untrustworthy prisoner.

Exploring the island reveals a cliff face that could be an eroded castle, with a large door set in the front. Within are hallways and corridors, all decorated by slime-streaked and encrusted Simorgyan hieroglyphs. The rooms they walk through are all illuminated by sourceless yellow light that seems to come from all around and nowhere at the same time. Eventually they reach a treasure room, though the chests of gold are all mouldy and soft to the touch, and a great door dominates one of the walls, unerringly drawing Lavas Laerk's attention. He takes Fafhrd's ring, uses it to unlock the door...and Fafhrd sees no more, fleeing to quell the rising sense of panic setting in.

Running back to the beach, he spies the Mouser offshore and returns to his ship. The Mouser meanwhile sees what Fafhrd does not. The barbarians are attacked by cloak-like beasts; the hapless victims run across the beach and ultimately fail to fend off the smothering creatures. Once each northerner is enveloped in one of the creatures, the beasts all crawl slowly back inside the cliff-castle to devour their prey.

Campaign Information: Simorgya is the Atlantis of Nehwon. It is a legend to the people of the world, though the key difference is that a rare few people have walked the ground of Simorgya when parts of the ancient sunken island have risen up above the waves. These events are extremely rare but will provide an incredibly exotic location for one or more game sessions, especially if the Games Master wants to shake things up.

Adventuring in Simorgya is a difficult prospect. The parts of the island that rise do so for indeterminate amounts of time and are inhabited by strange, alien creatures that resemble nothing else on Nehwon. What treasures Simorgya has likely remain down in the deep, though the people of Rime Isle apparently lay claim to the most revered and valuable of the sunken city's artefacts. Perhaps rather than find themselves looting Simorgya's waterlogged ruins for forgotten gold, characters might even find themselves having to travel to Rime Isle and steal one of Simorgya's treasures in order to return it to some entity that dwells within the temporarily-risen city.

A good way to draw characters to Simorgya is to follow Fafhrd's example. He discovered something of Simorgyan origin – something clearly set as a trap to bait in curious and greedy souls. Adventurers are almost always a combination of both these traits, and the right bait will reel them in perfectly. Failing that, it will at least give them something interesting to sell to scholars back in Lankhmar.

The Seven Black Priests

Coming via the Outer Sea and across the Bones of the Old Ones, Fafhrd and the Mouser find themselves targeted by a small conclave of Kleshite holy men intent upon their destruction. Their first encounter with one of the black-clad priests ends in the man's death as he tumbles mid-fight into a chasm. Bemused and confused, the pair travel on.

Finally Fafhrd said, in a faint unnatural voice, 'The earth we walk on once lived – a great hot beast, breathing out fire and spewing molten rock. Its constant yearning was to spit red-hot stuff at the stars. This was before all men'.

'What's that?' the Mouser queried, stirring from his half-trance.

'Now men have come, the earth has gone to sleep,' Fafhrd continued in the same hollow voice, not looking at the Mouser. 'But in its dream it thinks of life, and stirs, and tries to shape itself into the form of men'.

— The Seven Black Priests

One mountain in particular draws their attention. It seems to have a masculine face, eyes, lips and all, with one great eye open and decorated by a shining jewel. Even the colour of the rock appears to reinforce the image; all pinkish stone and a reddish patch resembling lips, and the rock is hotter than the surrounding mountain range, for all snow has melted on and around the face.

Between a lack of caution and their general curiosity, the duo make their way to the mountaintop and prise the large, orb-shaped diamond from the open 'eye' of what they believe is a giant mountain idol. Kleshite hieroglyphs are in evidence around the socket where the diamond nestled. Drawing the jewel out reveals it to be half-covered in black, tarry ooze.

The priests take understandable offence at the violation of their idol and redouble their efforts to kill Fafhrd and the Mouser. Though the companions battle it out several times and reduce the numbers of the holy men at each meeting, Fafhrd becomes increasingly distant and odd as he carries the diamond eye-orb. He speaks to himself, mumbling and murmuring incessantly in his sleep of the ancient earth god Nehwon and his hatred for humanity. In these midnight mumblings, the Mouser hears Fafhrd explain that lava-blooded Nehwon is forming himself into the shape of a man in order to awaken and destroy humanity, wiping them clean from his body. The parallels between this legend and the stone face are frightening, especially when Fafhrd's night-speeches delve into the true believers worshipping Nehwon, helping him reform, and how the blood of heroes is required to mix in with Nehwon's lava blood, in order for the god to rise.

After the priests are finally slain, the diamond's corrupting influence on Fafhrd takes complete hold. Though the barbarian is still asleep, his body moves to attack the Mouser, speaking with eyes closed about how their blood is needed as sacrifice to Nehwon. Only when the Mouser shatters the diamond with his sword is the spell broken, and Fafhrd awakes as the stone face-mountain erupts in a burst of lava. As the companions flee, they remark that it seems all properties of life are now banished from the stone face and that it appears the god is bleeding to death.

Campaign Information: The Kleshite priests present an excellent antagonistic cult dedicated to bringing about the death of the characters through various ambushes in the wilderness. Better yet, they represent a group with a darkly mystical reason for their actions, becoming all the more sinister once their alien ideology is revealed. Enemies like these can be memorable and enjoyable antagonists in any campaign, highlighting the difference between the threats of civilisation and the still-human dangers that exist beyond the stone walls of Lankmar.

The imagery of the earth-god Nehwon seeking to shape itself into man form and rise up to cleanse his body of Man is a frightening one. Games Masters interested in



dealing with this storyline might be content to have the priests (or cultish agents of the priests) seek the blood of heroes as an ingredient for Nehwon's resurrection, or might go one step further and have the ritual succeed, letting the characters deal with the results. 'The blood of heroes' is an unspecific term; that blood could come from any hero and need not be a notable Player Character. If the priests acquire the blood they need from elsewhere, it will be up to any brave souls with the courage and skill necessary to destroy a stone giant with lava for blood. An adventure like that would be perfect for some groups and perhaps too epic for others. It is certainly not something beginning characters have much hope of emerging triumphant over without an unusual amount of cunning.

The diamond orb 'eye' of Nehwon exerts a powerful supernatural compulsion that even a strong-willed man like Fafhrd cannot resist. This, again, crosses the boundary of player choices, stealing any decision-making options and running roughshod over a character. Games Masters can combat this by adding a Resist (Persistence) roll to fight the compulsions, but this detracts from the artefact's power and will still be unsatisfying if the player fails the test.

The obvious answer is for the effects of the diamond to influence a Non-Player Character attached to the group rather than a Player Character. This allows the horror of the story to impact properly – stealing the reason of a close ally – without sacrificing freedom of choice among anyone sitting at the gaming table. Someone like a guide, an important character the Player Characters are supposed to be escorting and protecting, or a longstanding Non-Player Character friend are all interesting choices to have fall under this compulsion. If the Games Master allows it to take hold of a character with little attachment to the Player Characters, there is a strong risk of them simply killing the afflicted person rather than seeking to remove him or her from the orb's influence.

Characters that fall under the orb's sway might find themselves stripped of the eye-diamond by players with knowledge of the setting and source material. In this instance, a change of location and a focus object can work wonders. The cult could take the form of an Ilthmarish gutter-lurking thieves' guild seeking to draw heroes with an enchanted blade or valuable antique before taking them bound and gagged to the Parched Mountains or some other eastern mountain range. If a character is repeatedly separated from the orb, the Games Master can either have

the orb works its insidious magic on *all* of the characters carrying the diamond (after all, someone has to hold the thing) or have the Non-Player Character repeatedly steal the orb back, such as when the characters are asleep or their attentions are elsewhere. Failing that, it is perhaps even more worrying for the diamond to exert influence over a distance, 'choosing' a character and seducing him telepathically even without skin contact.

Claws from the Night

Fear hovered in the moonlight over Lankhmar. Fear flowed like mist through the twisting thoroughfares and mazy alleyways, trickling even into that most intricately curved and crevice-like street where a sootily flickering lantern marked the doorway to the tavern of the Silver Eel.

It was a subtle fear, not the sort inspired by a besieging army, or warring nobles, or revolting slaves, or a mad overlord bent on wanton slaughter; or an enemy fleet sailing from the Inner Sea into the estuary of the Hlal. But it was none the less potent.

— Claws from the Night

During a year that later comes to be known as the Year of the Feathered Death, a horde of night-birds menace Lankhmar's womenfolk, swooping down and mutilating the faces of beautiful women and stealing jewellery from bedchambers and from women's flesh. The ladies and demoiselles of Lankhmar take to a new fashion – wearing silver-gilded cages around their heads in order to protect their faces. The thefts continue for some weeks, with more and more birds being reported stealing valuable jewellery. Priests of the Great God maintain that it is a divine rebuke for feminine vanity, predicting greater animal revolts to come. Considering the Rat Plague in *The Swords of Lankhmar*, this is some eerie foreshadowing for Games Masters to use if they are running a long chronological campaign based on the events in the stories.

During this time, Muulsh the Moneylender purchases a fist-sized ruby for his young wife Atya. As he is revealing the jewel to her, it is stolen by one of the ravens responsible for the thieving of Lankhmar's riches. On the rooftop, Fafhrd and the Mouser lay in wait. They had



planned a heist of their own, inventively using a fishing rod and Kooskra, Fafhrd's trained falcon. Once the raven is sighted clutching the jewel, Fafhrd releases Kooskra to hunt. The bird brings down the raven with ease, allowing the pair a moment of victory at acquiring what is surely the largest gem in Lankhmar – a gift fit for an empress.

Their jubilation lasts for several heartbeats until the jewel is stolen once more by another raven. The great black bird flies off to the tower of an abandoned temple in the waterfront district. Fafhrd's falcon tries to pursue but falls dead. Upon examination, it seems the ravens bear poisoned talons and Kooskra was slain merely by taking a scratch in the clash with the first raven he killed.

Following the raven, Fafhrd infiltrates the forbidden temple grounds while the Mouser waits and ponders his friend's fool's errand. While inside, Fafhrd sees the truth of the raven 'plague': an eyrie in the abandoned temple with many dozens of cawing black birds that have limited capacity for intelligent thought and croaky speech. He is attacked en masse by the avian marauders with their poisoned claws but manages to seal himself in an empty room. Until the Mouser arrives, he is forced to listen to the murderous cackling of the birds. His patience finally expires and he goes to confront the woman he sees at a nearby altar. It is Atya, the wife of Muulsh the Moneylender.

When the Grey Mouser does finally come looking for his companion, Fafhrd is already speaking with the woman who reveals herself to be Tyaa, goddess of the temple and a returned deity who wishes to see the women of Lankhmar pay tribute in penance for their vanity. Sacrifices of beautiful and expensive jewellery will be demanded once Tyaa fully returns to the city and becomes openly acknowledged among the populace.

Fafhrd and the Mouser (who has infiltrated this close to the goddess by posing as one of her falconer-servants) both leap to the attack, overwhelming Tyaa and forcing her to retreat. She leaps from high in the tower down into the River Hlal, though none see her hit the water. As the cloud of ravens flees the temple and makes for the Mountains of Darkness, both men believe they see a larger, almost human-sized black bird among the flyers.

Campaign Information: *Claws in the Night* reveals one thing immediately: if Tyaa's faith is anything to go by, it is easy to see why the priests of the Great God banished the ancient religions from Lankhmar. They are destructive and based on a culture of reverence through fear.

Games Masters can get a lot of mileage out of resurrecting these ancient cults in their campaigns. Lankhmar is littered with abandoned temples which entry is forbidden upon pain of death. Each of these was likely the source of some malicious (if not outright evil) religion that is now consigned to the history books and the hearts of secret cultists. Despite being abandoned by most Lankhmarts, it is quite believable that quiet rituals by unknown cults still take place in some of the temples. When one of these hidden orders feels they have the strength to make a resurgence in the city, the results can be chaotic and unpleasant for all. Tyaa's faith of sacrifice and penance for the sins of pride and vanity is unlikely to be the only dark cult of the elder days. Others might even also be based on the Seven Deadly Sins, if the Games Master enjoys the theme. Whatever fork the faith takes, some form of Black Magic is probably behind the cult's powers.

The Price of Pain-Ease

The grief of Vlana and Ivrian's murders still weighs heavily on the two heroes' hearts. Unthinkingly, they both move into the site where the Mouser's squat-home burned to the ground, purely because it seems convenient. This is achieved by stealing the wooden garden house of Duke Danius. Forty porters are hired and blindfolded to carry the smallish garden house to



the ashen lot behind the Silver Eel, and Fafhrd and the Mouser move immediately into their cosy, new, several-roomed home.

As the weeks pass, both men privately begin to dream of their lost loves, even hallucinating in their grief. They each secretly consult all manner of hedge magicians seeking some kind of solace but none is to be found. Finally, the Mouser wakes to find Fafhrd missing. He realises the only wise soul he has not yet consulted is Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, the mystical hermit of the Great Salt Marsh. Upon reaching this revelation, close to breaking point and very real madness, he finds a horse waiting for him outside the house. The boy hired to clean the privies reveals that Fafhrd left that morning on a horse of his own. The Mouser suspects that his friend, likewise at the edge of sanity, has also gone to see Sheelba.

Racing through the city and the Great Salt Marsh, the Mouser finally reaches Sheelba's hut. He pleads for some help in overcoming his grief or in forgetting Ivrian completely, to which Sheelba replies he can aid the Mouser if the Grey One concedes to serving the magician in one task now and for 'not more than three months out of every thirteen' in the future. The Mouser, offered little other option to escape his grief, agrees. The quest he is set is to travel to Death's realm, the Shadowland, and return Death's favourite mask to Sheelba. On the way, Sheelba insists the Mouser will encounter Ivrian and gain the solace he seeks.

In the caves of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes, Fafhrd is swearing the same oath for the same reward. Each magician warns his servant that Duke Danius, a man with a great fear of mortality, has entered the Shadowland in order to slay Death himself. Both heroes are forced to swear an additional oath to return the mask even if it means facing and killing anyone and anything that comes in their way. This, also, is agreed to.

Both heroes travel to the Shadowland from different directions, each encountering a black pavilion in the rainy and dark realm. These tents house the spirits of Vlana and Ivrian, each seeming pale and cold in death, and who both insist their still-living loves should leave at once and get over their grief.

The heroes, rattled by the appearance and demeanours of their dead loves, travel on to Death's castle, arriving at the same time. Death's mask lies on the throne, and

Coming one night half drunk by way of Plague Court and Bones Alley from the Golden Lamprey tavern at Cash and Whore to an inn of most merry yet most evil recollection called the Silver Eel – they spied behind it the still uncleared cinders and blackened, tumbled stones of the tenement where their first loves Ivrian and Vlana had, after many torments, been burned to white ashes, some atomies of whom they might even now be seeing by the murky moonlight.

— The Price of Pain-Ease

as each hero moves to take it for his sorcerous patron they realise that Sheelba and Ningauble have somehow arranged this confrontation between the two friends, who are now sworn to kill one another to do the magicians' bidding. As they face this haunting fact, Duke Danius arrives and neatly splits Death's mask in twain with a sword blow. Death himself manifests at this moment, casually strangling Danius while Fafhrd and the Mouser flee, each bearing a half of the shattered mask.

Displeased but unable to say either hero broke their oath, Sheelba and Ningauble still take out their petty anger at only possessing half of Death's mask each. They destroy the stolen home that Fafhrd and the Mouser were using behind the Silver Eel. This sits well with the companions who, after seeing their dead loves in a new and different light, are able to put the bulk of their grief behind them and move on to affairs with new loves.

Campaign Information: This story represents the moment Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser bind themselves to Sheelba and Ningauble. Games Masters interested in having a similar event take place in their own campaigns should consult Of Sheel and Ning on page 153 for further information. Notably, the story highlights how petty the wizards can be when they do not get their way to the exact letter.

The Price of Pain-Ease also deals with the Shadowland for the first time. This haunting realm overseen is dealt with in detail in *The Nehwon Gazetteer*. Any Games Masters planning a campaign that takes the characters to Death's dark country are dealing with some of the bleakest imagery in the setting. Here they might meet the

shades of relatives and loved ones long-dead, and such meetings can either help a character come to terms with loss or unnerve him beyond anything he has ever suffered before. If the deceased thinks well of the still-living character, the meeting is likely to be a bittersweet one. If on the other hand the dead soul harbours loathing even past death – or death has changed him into a hateful being – the character could be in for some emotional torture, if he even manages to leave the Shadowland alive.

Therein lies the second problem. Death is a supernatural entity even above the gods, answering only to the Three Powers unknown to mortals: Chance, Necessity and Fate. If Death takes an interest in killing a character, he merely needs to wish it so and the character will expire. Games Masters should take note of Death's love of drama and thrilling deaths where heroes are concerned. Unless the characters make real nuisances of themselves, he might appear and speak with them but rare is the occasion that would ever bring him to slay them out of hand.

Bazaar of the Bizarre

'The Devourers menace Lankhmar!' Sheelba rapped out in a voice as harsh as a tree cracking and so suddenly that Fafhrd almost started – and for all we know, Ningauble, too.

Fafhrd waited a moment to avoid giving false impressions and then switched his gaze to Sheelba. His eyes had been growing more accustomed to the darkness and he saw much more than he had seen at the alley's mouth, yet he still saw not one jot more than absolute blackness inside Sheelba's cowl.

'Who are the Devourers?' he asked.

— Bazaar of the Bizarre

Sheelba and Ningauble rarely leave their respective homes in the Great Salt Marsh and the distant caves unless the need is dire. When a new shop opens in the Plaza of Dark Delights, openly defying the tradition of dim lighting in favour of bright torches and illuminated windows, the

need is apparently dire enough to force both magicians out of their seclusion. Fafhrd and the Mouser receive separate notes from their sorcerous mentors, each asking for a meeting at the Spire of Rhan come midnight.

The Mouser arrives early. Stricken by curiosity of the new, brightly-lit shop, he ventures inside and discovers wonders of the like he had barely imagined previously. He browses through books that contain the private lives of devils, the secret histories of murderous cults, as well as lore on the erotic techniques of lamias and succubi. Peering through brass and bronze tubes reveals glimpses into the treasure rooms of dead kings and the bedchambers of young queens. Almost all he sees is on sale for mere Tiks.

Fafhrd arrives outside on time and is summoned to the side of the plaza by two cowed figures in an unnaturally dark alleyway. Sheelba and Ningauble retreat further from the light, eventually explaining to Fafhrd what evil is unwinding just across the way. The 'Bazaar of the Bizarre' is actually the haven of planar-travelling beings called the Devourers. These beings sell illusionary wares (which are really no more than worthless trash) and believe that mindless, servile beings are the best worshippers for all gods. To this end, they entice the most intelligent and curious souls into spending their wealth on worthless pursuits, finally capturing them when their minds are dizzied by the riches around them. Once the world's foremost minds and bravest souls are snared and out of the way, the merchants open the way for greater worldwide trade and take the wealth of all nations in return for trash, leaving the world ruined and worthless in their wake.

Fafhrd is nervous about dealing with these mighty illusionists alone. Sheelba and Ningauble both offer gifts to bolster his skills and courage in this endeavour. The former hands over the Blindfold of True Seeing; the latter lends the Cloak of Invisibility. Sheelba's present resembles a cobweb to be laid over the eyes and reveals all illusions as they truly are. Ningauble's gift is a small and worn rag which when wrapped around the shoulders renders the wearer invisible, provided he does not bleed or cross the path of a master sorcerer. So equipped, Fafhrd enters the Bazaar in order to save the Mouser and somehow destroy this outpost of the Devourers.

Once inside, Fafhrd sees blank-paged books instead of tomes filled with secrets, telescopes displaying images of agonising hells, and cages containing not sweet, comely young girls but woman-sized giant spiders clicking their mandibles. At the very end of the store is the Black Wall, which the Mouser perceives as a liquid surface which he can plunge into and which turns his skin flawless in the black water. Fafhrd sees his friend immersed and appearing as a silver skeleton beneath a vertical wall of water.

Fafhrd drops his sword and pulls the Mouser from the wall, who then promptly stumbles almost drunkenly into a nearby black coffin. A man-sized black statue bearing a two-handed sword storms in from its pedestal outside the Bazaar, eyes Fafhrd's sword Greywand where it lays on the floor, and begins swiping left and right with its blade, suspecting some invisible intruder, which is entirely the case. The Mouser, still duped by the illusions all around, sees the black statue as a serving slave and addresses him repeatedly in attempts to purchase various 'treasures' in the shop. Meanwhile Fafhrd sweeps up his blade (which turns invisible in his hands, again falling under the spell of the Cloak) and rushes to attack the statue. The statue reaches for a strange trumpet and blows into it, but instead of an alarm sound being raised, white powder explodes outward all over Fafhrd, rendering him at least partially visible as if coated in flour.

The Mouser finds this all in the greatest heights of comedy, yelling encouragement to the 'slave boy' who 'mock-fights' a flour-covered Fafhrd with a 'broom.' Fafhrd on the other hand is battling for his life, notching his sword each time he parries a blow from the black iron blade wielded by the statue. Every strike he makes is blocked or dodged, and even a thrown hand-axe comes flying back at him, reversed by some unseen sorcery on the statue's part.

Wounded and tiring, unable to hurt the iron statue, Fafhrd tosses his axe to the deluded Mouser and jovially invites him to join in the mummery with the axe as his 'slapstick'. Grinning inanely, the Mouser slaps his 'stick' against the slave's head. Fafhrd sees the truth of it, relieved as the Mouser splits the statue's head open from behind with the axe.

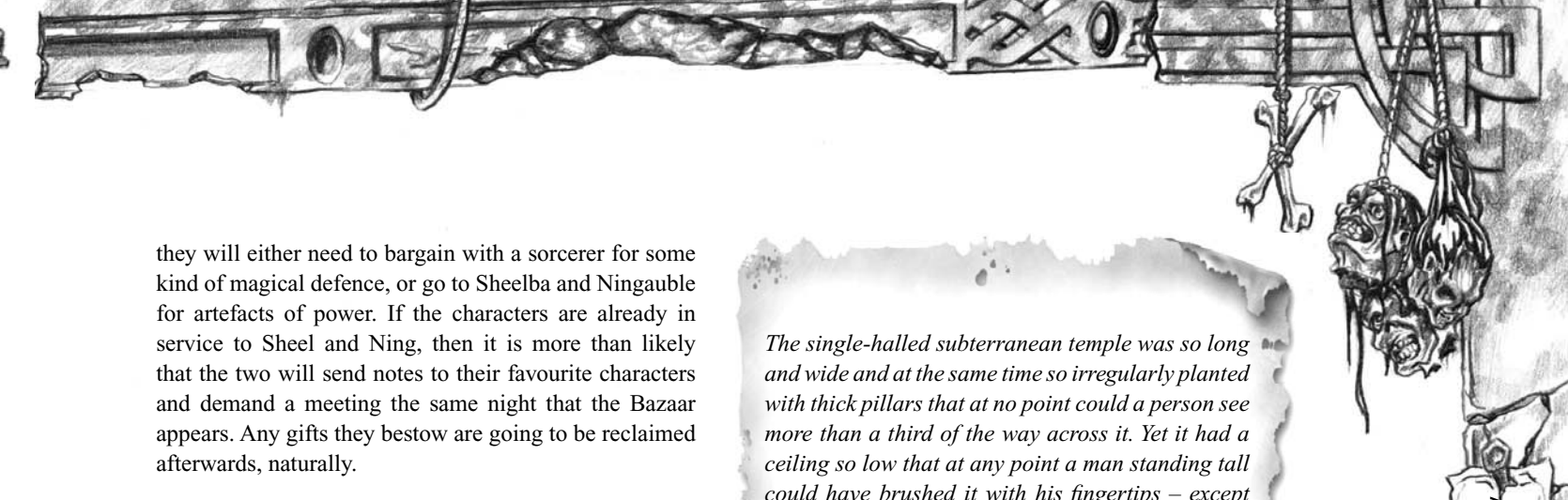
With the statue's death, the shop rumbles and shakes, and flashes of light whirring around. The companions flee, one eagerly and the other with great reluctance, before the Bazaar of the Bizarre vanishes from its spot



in the Plaza. As Fafhrd catches his breath, his thoughts turn to the future deeds he will perform with the Cloak and Blindfold. Just as his imaginings reach their most ambitious point, Sheelba and Ningauble reach down from a low roof behind him and whisk their gifts back with twin chuckles.

Campaign Information: *The Bazaar of the Bizarre* is one of the best-loved of Leiber's tales and Games Masters will find it contains a wealth of information regarding Sheelba and Ningauble as well as the city of Lankhmar. Probably the greatest temptation where this tale is concerned is to use the Bazaar of the Bizarre in individual campaigns, perhaps having it appear in Lankhmar again. Maybe even in the very same spot in the Plaza of Dark Delights.

Games Masters employing this storyline will almost certainly need to have the characters equipped much as Fafhrd was before they enter the shop. The Devourers' wares will appear remarkable and wondrous to any character and a Resist (Persistence) roll is simply not going to cut through the aura of wealth and worth surrounding the wares. If characters are to have any protection at all,



they will either need to bargain with a sorcerer for some kind of magical defence, or go to Sheelba and Ningauble for artefacts of power. If the characters are already in service to Sheel and Ning, then it is more than likely that the two will send notes to their favourite characters and demand a meeting the same night that the Bazaar appears. Any gifts they bestow are going to be reclaimed afterwards, naturally.

The key to destroying the Bazaar might not necessarily be to kill the black iron sword-bearing statue. Games Masters might prefer to have characters examine the store for potential sources of power that somehow 'anchor' the Bazaar to Nehwon. It could be that banishing the store will only be possible if the giant spiders are killed, or the Black Wall is somehow smashed. Literally any wondrous object in the store could be the lynchpin.

Swords in the Mist

The Cloud of Hate

Peace has ruled over Lankmar for some time and hatred with no outlet has built up among the residents. The capstone to this welling of dark emotion is the nobility celebrating in decadence the betrothal of the overlord's daughter to the Prince of Ilthmar, leaving the peasantry to seethe with bitterness.

In a subterranean hall large enough to house thousands of worshippers, the Archpriest of the Hates leads many Lankmarts, all masked to conceal their identities, in a sermon of hatred. This ritual is the magical way of dispelling the rising levels of hatred flowing through the city. As the chants continue into the night, white fog-like tentacles reach out from the underground temple and begin to flow through the streets of Lankmar, only distinguishable from natural fog by the occasional reddish glints within.

This fog has a purpose. It stalks a beggar girl, killing her and shoving her body around, almost like a beast nosing at her, before moving on. She was not the kind of life the hate-mist was seeking.

Fafhd and the Grey Mouser are hired for the night as gate guards near the Rainbow Palace, two of many mercenaries employed to make sure the betrothal celebrations are not interrupted by commoners. Fafhd senses a change in the air, a taint in the fog tonight, though the Mouser

The single-halled subterranean temple was so long and wide and at the same time so irregularly planted with thick pillars that at no point could a person see more than a third of the way across it. Yet it had a ceiling so low that at any point a man standing tall could have brushed it with his fingertips – except that all here groveled. The air was swooningly fetid. The dark bent backs of the hate-ensorcelled worshippers made a kind of hummocky dark ground, from which the nitre-crusted stone pillars rose like grey tree trunks.

The masked Archpriest of the Hates lifted a skinny finger. Parchment-thin iron cymbals began to clash in unison with the drums and the furnace-red flickerings, wringing to an unendurable pitch the malices and envies of the blackly enraptured communicants.

— The Cloud of Hate

continues to speak of all the reasons they should be rich, crossing each off in turn by citing the many ways the pair spend the wealth earned by their heroism.

Meanwhile, the tainted fog drifts through the streets, seeking the most hateful and violent souls it can find. Killers called Gnarlrag of the Two Swords, Gis the cutthroat, Kreshmar and Skel – assassins and alley-bashers, all become possessed and enraged by the power of the hate-mist. The fog thins to a single tiny cord of silver and red lading from the Temple of the Hates to the four killers, fuelling them with the hatred of the worshippers. These men, enslaved by their heightened malice and anger, slaughter several black-clad constables during their measured march to the Rainbow Palace.

The stalking four meet Fafhd and the Mouser on guard duty. The hate-mist fails to influence the heroes (though it comes close to winning over the Mouser) and directs the four killers to attack the two companions. In a brief battle where Fafhd wields a brazier in his free hand to burn his attackers and make them flinch back from the flames at telling moments, the two fighters make short work of their opponents.

As they congratulate themselves and indulge in their standard friendly bickering of who performed the best in the battle, the mist spreads out, somehow picking up the blades of the fallen killers. A red eye-disc forms in the fog at the centre of the weapon-clutching mist, which the Mouser pierces with his blade immediately, apparently blinding the hate-cloud. As Fafhrd parries and dodges the small army of randomly flailing weapons, the Mouser spies the pinkish silver thread stretching out from the back of the cloud and severs it with a sword strike. In a burst of stench, the mist dissolves into ectoplasm that splatters the ground and instantly drops the blades to the cobblestones.

In the Temple of the Hates, five thousand worshippers rise up with groans, each feeling a few ounces lighter than when they began their chants. Whatever hate-leaching effects the cloud possessed seem to have worked.

Campaign Information: Whenever hatred builds within Lankhmar's populace during a campaign, the Archpriest of the Hates could go to work in order to 'bleed out' some of the rising fury and loathing. In a sick and twisted way, this ritual is actually a benefit to the people of the city, allowing them to vent their hates for a time. At least, that is one way of looking at it. Another would be through a darker lens; seeing thousands of worshippers so driven by their hatred that they seek the death of those they envy as the only outlet for their negativity.

Games Masters have a powerful antagonist in the cult of Hate and one that will remain interesting since it acts only rarely. One instance might have the characters foiling the plot as Fafhrd and the Mouser did, but failing to track the mist back to its source. In another year, they might have more luck trailing the silver thread and come some way to solving the mystery of where the cult is based. Perhaps the next time involves a confrontation with the Archpriest of the Hates himself, and the cult scatters to perform its rituals in isolated areas throughout the city from that point on. A slight variation on the theme can change the entire plotline's flavour enough to throw veteran Leiber fans off the scent, at least for a while.

The Cloud of Hate also hammers home just how the night-smog and coastal fogs of Lankhmar really permeate (sometimes even choke) the city. They are

part of everyday life, yet often contain hidden dangers both mundane in the form of thieves and killers and supernatural in the form of sorcery spells based on mist, which feature several times in the *Swords* stories and are a favourite enchantment of Lankhmar's magicians.

Lean Times in Lankhmar

Once upon a time in Lankhmar, City of the Black Toga, in the world of Nehwon, two years after the Year of the Feathered Death, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser parted their ways.

Exactly what caused the tall brawling barbarian and the slim elusive Prince of Thieves to fall out, and the mighty adventuring partnership to be broken, is uncertainly known and was at the time the subject of much speculation. Some said they had quarrelled over a girl. Others maintained, with even greater unlikelihood, that they had disagreed over the proper division of a loot of jewels raped from Muulsh the Moneylender. Srith of the Scrolls suggests that their mutual cooling off was largely the reflection of a supernatural enmity existing at the time between Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, the Mouser's demonic mentor, and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes, Fafhrd's alien and multi-serpentine patron.

The likeliest explanation, which runs directly counter to the Muulsh Hypothesis, is simply that times were hard in Lankhmar; adventures few and uninviting, and that the two heroes had reached that point in life when hard-pressed men desire to admix even the rarest quests and pleasurings with certain prudent activities, leading either to financial or to spiritual security, though seldom if ever to both.

— Lean Times in Lankhmar

During a time when adventures were few and far between, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser temporarily went their separate ways. Fafhrd found religion, breaking his sword over his knee and serving as the destitute acolyte of Bwardews, the one and only priest of the largely-ignored god Issek of the Jug. The Mouser meanwhile worked as a lieutenant of Pulg, one of the extortionists that preyed upon the Street of the Gods.

With Fafhrd's charisma, barbarian size and his singing voice serving as a draw for crowds, Issek's faith moved fast westward up the Street of the Gods. It soon came time for the Mouser and his bullies to extort Fafhrd's religion, and despite their distance this was not something the Grey One relished attending to. Not least of all was the worry that Fafhrd would resist violently and things get out of hand. The Mouser decides to get Fafhrd drunk elsewhere while his bullies do the extorting. The plan is partially successful.

Fafhrd does indeed fall unconscious through drink. The Mouser's plot is interrupted by Pulg making an appearance to judge his lieutenant's performance, and in a fit of meanness shaves the unconscious Fafhrd bald and removes his eyebrows. The Mouser heads out to do his work, taking Pulg and his bullies with him. With comically appropriate timing, as the crowd demand evidence of Issek (having lost faith with the disappearance of the charismatic acolyte) Fafhrd, hairless and strapped to a table, manages to stand up, move into the street and – still in need of alcohol – shouts for his jug. The crowd abase themselves at this apparition of Issek's 'avatar' and Issekianity takes off massively thereafter.

In the interests of keeping a low profile for the immediate future, Fafhrd and the Mouser leave the city on their sloop, *Black Treasurer*.

Campaign Information: This is another of Leiber's most renowned tales of Lankhmar. A great many variations and story ideas based on *Lean Times in Lankhmar* can be found in the Street of the Gods section of City of the Black Toga.

Their Mistress, the Sea

Straight out of Lankhmar harbour, the pair fall ill to seasick and the *Black Treasurer* is briefly captained by their ageing slave, Ourph the Mingol. When they recover their sea legs, the companions indulge in a spot of piracy. The first target turns out to be a Lankhmar bait-ship specifically designed to lure pirates so the Overlord's Navy can put them out of their illegal business. The second attempt is more successful, involving a mild plunder of a small ship crewed by five Mingol witches. The companions take what they need and a few things that catch their eyes, but hardly leave the women destitute.

Nights they would lazily talk for hours, feeling nearest then to the stars, the sea and each other. They argued as to whether the stars had existed forever or had been launched by the gods from Nehwon's highest mountain – or whether, as current metaphysics asserted, the stars were vast firelit gems set in islands at the opposite end of the great bubble (in the waters of eternity) that was Nehwon. They disputed as to who was the world's worst warlock: Fafhrd's Ningauble, the Mouser's Sheelba or – barely conceivably – some other sorcerer.

— *Their Mistress the Sea*

Campaign Information: Piracy in the Inner Sea is big, big business. Characters of any background and profession might find themselves open for a patch of buccaneering when all else seems bleak and unprofitable. After all, characters need to eat.

Games Masters without campaigns dedicated to freelance roguery on the high seas should always bear in mind that piracy is a common and legitimate option when traditional adventures have hit a dry spell. For every cut-purse and burglar there is an equivalent 'thief of the sea' looking to make some coin at the expense of others. Principally, this is noteworthy because it makes any travel across the Inner Sea a risky prospect once out of sight of Lankhmar's Navy. The upside to this fact is that it means characters in need of some plunder can take to the piratical life themselves without too much risk of capture and facing justice.

Swords Against Wizardry

In the Witch's Tent

In this short tale, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are travelling through Illik-Ving of the Eight Cities when they decide to consult a tent-dwelling crone rumoured to have the power of true prophecy. They seek the words of a seer before they make the final leg of their northern travels and attempt to climb Stardock.

Fafhrd remarked, 'It's unfortunate the old lady was interrupted just when she was about to tell us something important.'

The Mouser snorted. 'She'd already sung her song, the sum of which was zero'.

— In the Witch's Tent

The hag's warnings dwell on dangers faced and threats overcome, which Fafhrd takes very seriously indeed and the Mouser takes with a pinch of salt.

Campaign Information: Prophecy can be tricky for any Games Master to manage. Done well, it can resonate throughout a campaign and add a great deal to the atmosphere and player immersion. Done badly and it breaks the suspension of disbelief as firmly as anything can.

The hag's prophecy in *The Witch's Tent* shows a good example of how to do prophecy the right way, whether the Games Master is sure of what will come next in the campaign or not. The key is to be vague but interesting – hints should be clear enough that players can at least attempt to guess the truth behind them, but doubtful as to which one of many possibilities they could refer to.

The hag speaks of enemies dogging the characters' heels, foreshadowing the pursuit up Stardock by Fafhrd and Mouser's violent rivals, Kranarch and Gnarfi. She also reveals that they are headed north, though as the Mouser readily points out, she could have attained that information from any gossipy mouth before performing their reading.

Prophecy is unreliable. That can make it fun and certainly keeps it true to the setting, but it can also make it annoying if the Games Master uses it as a method to tease the players, overuses it in the storyline, or sets out a destiny that cannot be changed no matter how the characters act.

Stardock

Fafhrd said dreamily, 'They say the gods once dwelt and had their smithies on Stardock and from thence, amid jetting fire and showering sparks, launched all the stars; hence her name. They say diamonds, rubies, smaragds – all great gems – are the tiny pilot models the gods made of the stars...and then threw carelessly across the world when their great work was done'.

— Stardock

Following a parchment with a written rhyme (which resembles a myth from Fafhrd's youth about making love to the daughters of the Snow King and finding jewels atop Stardock), the eager barbarian and a somewhat less-excited Grey Mouser set out to scale the unscalable peaks of the Mountains of the Giants. Their rivals in this challenge are two burly killers from Illik-Ving by the name of Kranarch and Grafli, each of whom own a trained bear making the climb alongside them. Fafhrd and the reluctant Mouser are accompanied by Hrissa, an ice cat about the size and shape of a cheetah, only white-furred and skilled at rock-climbing.

The climb takes many days, with the pair making consistent progress despite bone-aching weariness. They move from the face of one mountain to another, travelling wherever the climbing is easiest on the treacherous peaks. On the ascent they are menaced by snow serpents, ambushes sent by their rivals from Illik-Ving, as well as invisible attackers that strike out from the backs of unseen steeds. All the while, both Fafhrd and the Mouser infrequently 'hallucinate' that Stardock has a beautiful female face and they both hear occasional bursts of girlish laughter.

Climbing difficulties force the pair to split up close to the peak of Stardock. Both are captured separately by packs of Ice Gnomes and taken through tunnels and caverns within the mountain to the respective bedchambers of Hirriwi and Keyaira, the Princesses of the Invisibles. These women remain in darkness or cover themselves in cosmetics in order to be seen by the men. Both heroes enjoy a night of passion in accordance with the legend



from Fafhrd's youth, though when morning comes the princesses ask that the heroes descend immediately and call off their quest to reach the summit.

The invisible attackers that preyed upon them as they ascended the mountain are revealed to be Prince Faroomfar, the brother of the princesses and the son of King Oomforafor. The girls are certain Faroomfar and some of their cousins allied with him will take out their petty anger on the duo for sleeping with the princesses, despite the fact it is apparently essential. The Invisible race is dying out, the heroes are told. The seed of outsiders – the potent seed of heroes – is desired to breed the next generation.

Fafhrd and the Mouser wake the next morning, find one another and unite in their refusal to quit this close to the peak of Stardock. At the top, finding Kranarch and Grafli slain and mutilated, the Mouser recalls Keyaira's words that in other instances Oomforafor has taken a man's seed by gorier methods than those employed by his daughters. After a final stalemate battle with Prince Faroomfar atop his flying invisible manta ray, Fafhrd and the Mouser are saved by the princesses and flown to safety.

A pouch of invisible gemstones is further reward for their efforts, pressed into the Mouser's hands at the last moment by one of the girls. It transpires that the jewels only glow at night, appearing completely invisible at all other times.

Campaign Information: Adventures taking place out here in the most desolate and isolated parts of the natural world are far removed from the themes and atmosphere of Lankhmar City. This is pure wilderness, where strange monsters may exist in equal numbers to the scattered and rare humans of the region, and feral beasts far outnumber both.

Adventures in these regions so far removed from civilisation will often be based around the folklore and mythology of the nearby cultures, or driven by exploration and a curiosity to verify the garbled tales of other travellers. Few adventuring groups will find themselves employed to come this far north, though campaigns focused on barbarians in their native Cold Wastes will obviously fit well in the region.

The Invisibles are human in all important ways except for their appearance. Their dealings with any characters are likely to be based on any groups that manage to ascend the summit of Stardock, and the flavour of the interactions will depend entirely on which members of the family the characters happen to meet. Sexual encounters are likely if the princesses are involved. Attempted disembowelling and castration is the intent of King Oomforafor and his guards. Petty battles for the sake of killing intruders are Prince Faroomfar's habit.

For more detail on running adventures in the Cold Wastes and the Mountains of the Giants, see *The Nehwon Gazetteer*.

The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar

This story sees Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser getting royally fleeced upon their return from Stardock. They go to deal with two separate fences, having spent too much time with one another and grown somewhat tired of each other's company for the time being. The Mouser takes his share of the invisible jewels to Ogo the Blind, while next door Fafhrd deals with Nemias of the Dusk. The fences are not as they appear, as explained in *City*



'Coal,' Fafhrd said.

The Mouser clawed his hands over his faintly twinkling box, as if about to pick it up and hurl it through the wall and across the Inner Sea. Instead he unclawed his hands and hung them decorously at his sides.

'I'm going away,' he announced quietly, but very clearly, and did so.

— The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar

of the Black Toga. Through great cunning and sleight of hand, the jewels are exchanged for worthless replicas and Fafhrd and the Mouser are duped completely.

Hours later, as they reminisce in the Silver Eel, they discover the deception. Fafhrd's jewel pouch turns out to be filled with small lumps of coal. The Mouser's box is no longer filled with faintly glowing gems but with small glowing insects tied down with fine silver wire.

Unwilling to stalk back to the shops and slaughter two women, yet unable to remain in Lankhmar after being cheated so thoroughly out of a fortune in mystical gems, The Grey Mouser announces his intention to leave the city immediately. To that end, he finds work as a mercenary in distant Quarmall. Fafhrd remains behind for a time, freeing the glow-bugs and burning his coal pieces in the table brazier. Then he too makes plans to leave the city, also taking employment in far-off Quarmall without realising the Mouser is likewise bound there.

Campaign Information: Overconfidence is a dangerous trait in any character. In Lankhmar, there is almost always a cut-throat a blade's width more deadly than he who claims himself the best, and a thief more capable in thievery than the self-proclaimed best of burglars. *The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar* highlights this truth of the underworld perfectly. Despite coming back from a grand adventure with more profit than ever before in their lives, Fafhrd and the Mouser are fleeced by thieves even more skilled than they.

This shows the danger of falling foul of equally-immoral criminals as well as the worries of operating independently; Ogo and Nemia would rarely rip off

the Thieves' Guild like this, but loners like Fafhrd and the Mouser are prime targets. Best of all, it shows that no character (or his coin-purse) is ever really safe in Lankhmar. The City of Thieves has a hundred and more ways of taking a character's money – not all thieves are unsubtle stalkers that leap out from the mouths of alleyways.

Oftentimes, the richest pickings are the ones that draw the most scavengers. Characters will need to learn to be very careful about whom they deal with when they have goods to fence or black market items to sell.

The Lords of Quarmall

The room was dim, almost maddeningly dim to one who loved sharp detail and burning sun. The few wall-set torches that provided the sole illumination flamed palely and thinly, more like will-o'-the-wisps than true fire, although they released a pleasant incense. One got the feeling that the dwellers of this region resented light and only tolerated a thin mist of it for the benefit of strangers.

— The Lords of Quarmall

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser find themselves in the centre of a sorcery-heightened civil war between sibling princes. Gwaay and Hajarl of subterranean Quarmall each seek to inherit the throne of their father, Quarmal. To this end they maintain groups of sorcerers chanting spells at all hours of day and night, with Hasjarl's magicians seeking to infect Gwaay with a dozen diseases and Gwaay's magicians concentrating on deflecting the harmful energies away from him.

Fafhrd and the Mouser are the sword-champions of Hasjarl and Gwaay respectively, and each hero finds his employer generally unpleasant to be around. Quarmall itself is a dim and dreary place, with eerie aspects that unsettle the nerves after a while. Slaves work air-treadmills their entire lives, pushing fresh air into the stifling lower tunnels, while nobles relax and play games of chess, moving the pieces across the board with their minds. Neither protagonist is comfortable in Quarmall; both find they wish to leave sooner rather than later.

Dalliances with slave girls aside (who Fafhrd and the Mouser free from their masters) the heroes impassively witness the progression of the sibling rivalry. The stalemate ends with the apparent death of Quarmal and the decision by Hasjarl to escalate the war tenfold in order to seize the vacant throne. The Mouser, in seeking to aid his employer Gwaay, uses his single spell – written on a scroll given to him by Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. It is his intent to slay the so-called ‘Second Rank’ magicians in Hasjarl’s service, stopping the disease magic and allowing Gwaay’s ‘First Rank’ magicians to act on the offensive. Instead, whether through Sheelba’s deception or the Mouser’s incorrect reading, Gwaay’s sorcerers are slain by the spell, becoming small piles of grey dust where they once sat. Gwaay is immediately stricken with a dozen lethal diseases that rot his body in moments.

That night, at a pre-arranged meeting, the diseaseracked and near-death Gwaay meets Hasjarl in front of Quarmal’s population. The Mouser and Fafhrd, as appointed sword-champions, meet in battle before the

wide audience – a mock battle filled with good-natured insults and flawless theatrics the moment the heroes recognise one another. All the while, Gwaay’s restless ghost looks on from above and Hasjarl considers his victory certain.

Both brothers die at the climax of the fight, as Gwaay’s out-of-body spirit magically pulls a ceiling stone down, crushing his already-ruined body as well as Hasjarl’s, in the moment his brother moves to stab him. As the hall resonates with the crash, the ruse of Quarmal is finally revealed. The King never died – he merely wanted his sons out of the way for fear they would arrange his death and take the throne. His next child, growing in the belly of a concubine, shall inherit Quarmall instead of his slain sons.

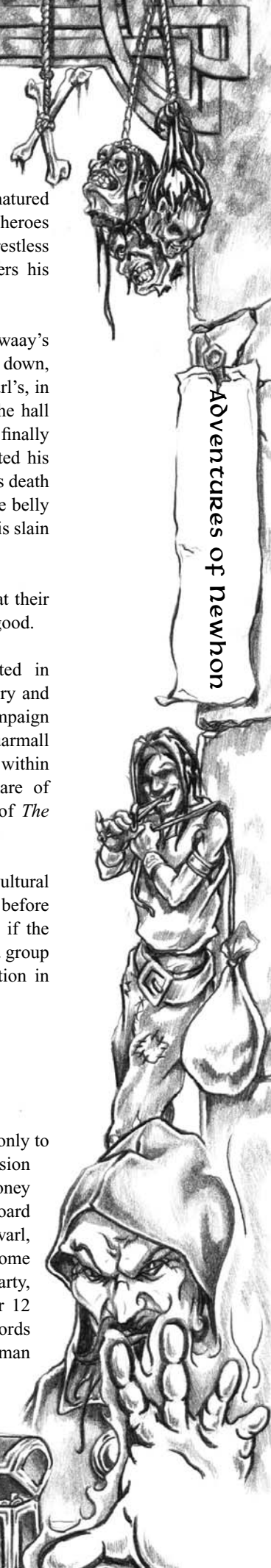
With the ruler’s thanks and the freed slave girls at their sides, Fafhrd and the Mouser leave Quarmall for good.

Campaign Information: Quarmall as presented in this tale is a nest of political conflict, eerie sorcery and treachery on all sides. Setting a long-lasting campaign there would be a challenge since the people of Quarmall are so insular, but adventurers coming to the ‘city within a mountain’ will find more than their fair share of excitement if the political climate matches that of *The Lords of Quarmall*.

Players portraying characters with the slave cultural background might have escaped from Quarmall before the campaign starts. It can be interesting to see if the character’s return, armed and armoured amongst a group of professional adventurers, sparks any recollection in the eyes of his previous owners.

The Swords of Lankhmar

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser return to Lankhmar, only to find themselves beset by creditors. In a quick decision to flee the city before anyone else they owe money decides to come collecting, the duo take ship aboard a grain ship carrying a diplomatic offering to Movarl, Overlord of the Eight Cities. Aboard this ship are some of the curious entertainments for the Overlord’s party, chief of which is the Demoiselle Hisvet and her 12 performing white rats, who wear capes, carry swords and perform acrobatic tricks as well as mimic human



Ningauble shrugged his cloaked, bulbous shoulders. 'I thought you were a brave man, addicted to deeds of derring-do'.

Fafhrd cursed sardonically, then demanded, 'But even if I should go clang those rusty bells, how can Lankhmar hold out until then with her walls breached and the odds fifty to one against her?'

'I'd like to know that myself,' Ningauble assured him.

'And how do I get to the temple when the streets are crammed with warfare?'

Ningauble shrugged again. 'You're a hero. You should know'.

— The Swords of Lankhmar

behaviour. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are both smitten with Hisvet, though the barbarian also takes a shine to Frix, Hisvet's dark-skinned maidservant. Dogging Fafhrd's heels for much of the journey is a small black kitten, the ship's cat, who seems to loathe the rats intensely.

During the voyage, several ships in the grain fleet come under mysterious attack and sink, with hordes of rats seen leaving each as it goes down. One witness reports seeing a white rat at the head of one such horde and Hisvet is accused of being a beast-talking witch responsible for the disasters. While Fafhrd and the Mouser (who defended her honour thoroughly) dine in her cabin, they succumb to food drugged by the ship's crew. The intended targets of the sleeping drug, Hisvet and Frix, have not eaten enough to be affected.

The white rats, aided by a legion of their mundane brethren, storm the ship and try to kill the crew. Hisvet and her father Hisvin, a famous grain merchant travelling on another ship, are revealed as the leaders behind this rodent uprising. Due to the actions of Karl Treuherz, a time-travelling, reality-crossing German riding a dragon (no, really) the rats are driven from the ship. During the battle, one of the rats fires its tiny crossbow at the Mouser and strikes him in the temple with a near-painless

miniature bolt, which tingles with the presence of magic. At the end of the voyage, the Mouser decides to return to Lankhmar and apprise Overlord Glipkerio personally of the events that took place. Fafhrd remains in leafy Kvarch Nar.

In the Blue Audience Chamber of Overlord Glipkerio, the Mouser is stunned to find Hisvin and Hisvet meeting with Lankhmar's ruler. As he tries to inform Glipkerio of their great treachery and beast-talker magic, the tiny needle in his temple floods his body with pleasantly tingling magic and he finds himself unable to speak against Hisvet. Meanwhile, Hisvin is lamenting over the apparent Rat Plague Lankhmar is suffering through and insists that he alone has the magic to end it. He vows to do so when the stars are right.

As the days pass, the Rat Plague intensifies. The vermin are no longer merely seen everywhere, now they are attacking and killing Lankhmarts by night. The populace lock themselves in their homes and pray for a solution to the problem. The overlord pressures Hisvin to end the Plague but the merchant continues to insist the time is not right for his spell.

The Mouser's supernatural allegiance (and natural attraction) is for Hisvet, not her father. He takes it into his own hands to stop the Rat Plague and seeks out Sheelba of the Eyeless face for some kind of magical solution to the problem. The wizard hands over a potion that shrinks the drinker to rat-size, and with a disguise pilfered from a murdered member of the Supreme Thirteen white rats, the Grey Mouser infiltrates Lankhmar Below and learns of their invasion plans. He also learns that Hisvin is truly Lord Null, a member of the rat council.

Sheelba sends a warning note to Fafhrd, who is dallying with the ghoulish woman Kreeshkra and trying to stay out of a three-way war between the Mingols, the ghouls and the Eight Cities. Along with the note is the advice: do not lose the whistle, relating to a tin whistle Fafhrd found in his travels. He leaves the ghoulish woman and rides hard for Ningauble's caverns, where his own sorcerous mentor informs him that Lankhmar is gravely threatened and perhaps the only way to save it is to ring the bells atop the Black Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar. He believes the tin whistle will summon the War Cats – the 13 greatest members of the feline race, just as the white rats are the greatest rodents.

Fafhrd meets Sheelba in the Great Salt Marsh and the wizard uses his walking to hut to give Fafhrd a ride to a stone's throw from the walls of the Imperishable City. Once inside, the barbarian makes his way to the Black Temple and rings the ancient bells in the tower. The swarms of rats and human-sized rodent warriors (who have drunk the growth potion) are temporarily beaten back by the march of the black skeleton Gods of Lankhmar. Every rat they strike with their staves dies instantly. The citizenry also flee at the sight of their deities walking, which is understandable.

The rat archers use fire arrows against the Gods of Lankhmar and while the mummies are not destroyed or permanently harmed, they are eventually driven back inside their temple. Further reinforcements for Lankhmar arrive in the form of Kreeshkra and a small army of ghouls that slay the rats in the streets. The little kitten from the ship comes to Fafhrd at this point, reminding him of a whistle he carries with him. Fafhrd blows the whistle, amazed at the sound produced being more a lion's roar than a metallic whistling.

The 'military aristocracy' of the feline races attack the rats en masse with the ghouls and ordinary Lankhmarts, making short work of the rodent legions. The Mouser meanwhile appears in the Rainbow Palace again, reverting back to normal size and duelling human-sized rat swordsmen through the halls of the citadel. Fafhrd arrives just in time to lend a much-needed blade to proceedings. Hisvet and Hisvin flee to Lankhmar Below along with the rodent survivors of the ill-fated invasion.

Campaign Information: *The Swords of Lankhmar* contains by far the largest gathering of information on Lankhmar and Nehwon, as well as featuring Sheelba and Ningauble more than once and displaying magic spells, underground kingdoms and the apparent 'aristocracy' of the animal races. Games Masters will find the novel an absolute treasure trove of ideas and information.

For campaign planners uninterested in matters of the Rat Plague and Lankhmar Below, the story still has some very serious elements that can heighten any plot arc. The scene is perfect for a high-society Throne War game, with the reigning Overlord Glipekero backed by many members of the social elite and his cousin, the scholarly Radomix Kistomercus-Null, backed by another faction. Characters would be immersed in a time of great scheming behind the rising panic in the streets, with Glipekero's backers

trying to prevent his suicide and keep control over Lankhmar, and Radomix's supporters trying to convince the ambitionless scholar to take the throne and rule with a wiser demeanour than his cousin.

When the time comes, Glipekero's agents sent to kill Radomix might be the characters themselves, though ultimately if the Games Master is sticking to the established canonical timeline, these assassins will fail. Likewise, the characters within Radomix's faction could be the ones to help him flee the Rainbow Palace to the relative safety of hiding in the slums. High society characters might be engaged with trying to talk Glipekero out of having Radomix murdered, working against the clock to convince the overlord to call off the assassins. Meanwhile any lowborn characters could be guarding Radomix with their blades and their lives, killing any assassins that come for the overlord's cousin. House-to-house and room-by-room combat would be dangerous and deadly as the characters fight for Radomix's life, moving him from one safehouse to another as they are breached one by one.

The chaos at the height of the Rat Plague also makes for some incredible combat scenes. Ghouls are rampaging through Lankhmar's streets – and though they appear to be killing the rats more often than not, ghouls are well-known flesh-eaters and sackers of cities. Characters could have to deal with ghouls taking out their bloodlust on Lankhmarts instead of the rats, and fight the strange humanoids to save the residents of the city. It almost goes without saying that any characters wanting to bleed the ranks of the rats will be spoilt for choice at the height of the siege.

Concurrent with the invasion of the Imperishable City in *The Swords of Lankhmar* is another important event in Nehwon: the siege of Klelg Nar and Sarheenmar of the Eight Cities by the Mingol hordes. Sarheenmar is savagely burned and suffers terribly in the assault, while Klelg Nar is the scene of bitter fighting in the streets, perhaps even more vicious than the butchery occurring in Lankhmar. Characters in the Land of the Eight Cities will be unlikely to care about Lankhmar one way or the other – they have their own problems to deal with. Mingol characters might find themselves attacking the Eight Cities, while other Player Characters become involved in the defence or flee with the refugees.

Swords and Ice Magic

Trapped in the Shadowland

Death writhed his thin, smiling lips and moved his bony fingertips in tiny, cabalistic curves, as he worked a small but difficult magic. His incantation done, he noted with approval that on the map a southern tongue of the Shadowland was visibly extending itself in pursuit of the dazzling speck that was victims.

— Trapped in the Shadowland

Death's personal grudge against the (literally) death-defying heroes reaches as close to a fever pitch as can be used when referring to the lord of the cold Shadowland realm. In the past he has magiced berserkers and assassin-women into their bedchambers and done all he can to arrange grand and poetic death scenes for the duos. Now his patience begins to run out and he uses his power to extend the rainy, dark borders of the Shadowland, trapping them within his realm.

As Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser return to Lankhmar after twin failed attempts to find their latest loves, they find that no matter which direction they travel, the ground of the Shadowland stretches from horizon to horizon in every direction. Rain scythes down onto them and they encounter battle-mad northern berserkers, whom they defeat soundly, spoiling for a fight.

The Shadowland stretches south across Nehwon, past the city of Ilthmar whose resident population are gladdened to see the dark ground stretching past them, even if they are apprehensive at seeing it at all. Finally, at the gates of Lankhmar, Ningauble and Sheelba stand waiting as Fafhrd and the Mouser arrive. Through powerful yet imperceptible will-worked magic, the two archimages cause the Shadowland to retreat once more and berate the two heroes for taking so long in their travels when there is questing to be done. In the final moments of the tale, the two wizards use their magic to send the lusty heroes into the arms of two previous lovers, Hisvet and Frix, knowing full well that by doing so Fafhrd and the Mouser will be further obligated to them in the future.

Campaign Information: Games Masters using *Death* in their campaigns will find teasing hints of the being's power in this story. The Shadowland is a grim and awful place to be lost, though it is unclear what else Death hoped to achieve by trapping the heroes within its borders. Maybe after magicing warriors and killers into the duo's bedchambers, this symbolic threat was something he simply enjoyed. More likely there was some dark trick waiting to be unleashed and it was interrupted by the two sorcerous patrons. The story illustrates just how far Death is willing to go in his petty feuds with characters – even to the point of extending his realm over a quarter of Nehwon.

Death's great love for the dramatic deaths of heroes seems to lead him down irrational and overemotional paths at times. He is ruthlessly dedicated to his duty as laid down by the Lords of Necessity: Chance, Necessity and Fate – watching over the souls of Nehwon and choosing their moments and methods of mortal expiration. However, he also spends a great deal of time ruminating on various ways to kill great heroes and not always succeeding. Rather than treat it as a game and a challenge, he becomes increasingly frustrated at his failures. Yet not once does he simply end the lives of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser out of pique even though to do so would take mere milliseconds.

The crux of the story comes in the final 'favour' done by the wizards, seemingly out of a need to keep the heroes indebted to the sorcerers. Games Masters should be aware that any favours done by Sheelba and Ningauble will require service in return, most likely of a painfully difficult and arduous type.

For more information on the demands made by Sheel and Ning, see page 153.

Under the Thumbs of the Gods

Kos, Issek and Mog are steadily losing worshippers as the years pass. Two of their favourite followers – Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser – have not called upon them or even taken their holy names in vain, in several years. Kos, the northern god of dooms, has rarely heard Fafhrd curse by his name since the barbarian left the Cold Wastes. Issek has heard little in the way of worship from Fafhrd since his time as an acolyte (and apparently an avatar) under Bwadres. The Mouser only worshipped Mog for a few weeks as a means of humouring Ivrian at the time.

After a while the Mouser said, 'By Mog, this is more like it'. Fafhrd agreed. 'By Issek, yes. Kos damn all spooked adventures'.

The three gods, hearing their names were taken in vain as they rested in paradise from their toils, were content.

— Under the Thumbs of the Gods

The three deities decide to visit a touch of divine displeasure on their wayward worshippers in the hopes that cursing them will drive the heroes back to their faiths. To this end they arrange for a special confrontation as the pair leaves a night of revelry at the Silver Eel. For reasons unknown to either Fafhrd or the Mouser, they find themselves leaving by the back door in the kitchen, and bribing the cook into brooking no complaints as Fafhrd kicks the bolted door down.

Out the back of the Silver Eel, they find the door opens into a long corridor lit by torches, rather than the burned ashes of their old home as they had been expecting. Believing this to be yet another new temple or cultists' hangout sprung up overnight, the two go walking from room to room.

In each room, the men find their past loves, *all* of their past loves, and each is uniformly cold and callous, refusing to make love and generally being catty and waspish. Initially the heroes take this with bemused smiles, which angers the gods who feel their work is failing. The stream of lovers grows colder and more spiteful – Vlana even spits in Fafhrd's face – and the heroes walk on, becoming unnerved and increasingly upset. Yet they do not curse or ask their forgotten gods for comfort, no matter how many times ex-lovers curse them by the names Mog, Issek and Kos.

Finally, when Issek and Kos have given up, Mog works his one last miracle. The Eyes of Ogo and Nemias of the Dusk, both impoverished and miserable from dry spells in their careers, open a door in their apartment to see Fafhrd and the Mouser, just as miserable as they, coming into the room from the other side. The women jokingly order the men into acts of petty servility, such as foot-washing and cooking. Fafhrd and the Mouser are so grateful simply being acknowledged that they comply.

Finally at the end of the evening, the two couples who were bitterest enemies for some time now make peace in the spirit of misery loving company – any company. After their ordeal is over, Fafhrd and the Mouser swear heartily using the gods' names in vain. The gods rest, satisfied.

Campaign Information: The gods of Nehwon are petty beings, reminiscent of the personalities that make up the Greek and Roman pantheons but lacking much of their supposed power. When the gods curse their followers, in jest or in spiteful seriousness, the curses are rarely life-threatening and more inconveniences than anything serious. The gods are like omnipresent mortals with their own petty urges and emotions rather than anything approaching divine perfection.

Games Masters wishing to involve the gods of Nehwon in their campaigns can do so easily enough. A lapsed worshipper makes a promising target for a minor curse or a supernaturally-forced habit, such as stargazing or collecting trash, which the character cannot resist from doing every free moment he gets. More direct intervention such as in *Under the Thumbs of Gods* necessitates a temporary removal of the worshippers from their current location to some 'other realm' where they come face to face with various visions designed to teach them a lesson. It is unlikely the characters can be truly harmed in these encounters – at least not physically.

A potentially interesting story arc could grow around a god that begins to resent a character calling on him too much, perhaps by continued use of Divine Intervention. The god might even take plans to have the character find another deity, a near-forgotten one who *needs* the worship. A cult based around the god might begin to confront or threaten the character, citing that his constant demands for attention are lessening the god's presence for other worshippers.

Whatever the story, Games Masters are advised to lay off the gods where beginning characters are concerned. Though the deities of Nehwon are not overtly powerful by the standards of, say, Sheelba and Ningauble, their presence generally goes unnoticed by the majority of Nehwonians and highlighting them from the beginning of a campaign can cause new players to lose perspective, seeing the deities as a major part of day-to-day life – a false fact in the lives of all but the holiest preachers on the Street of the Gods.

Fafhrd 'Beast-Slayer'

Cultural Background: Barbarian (Cold Wastes)

Profession: Bard

These statistics represent Fafhrd at his physical peak during the events of *The Swords of Lankmar*. Games Masters wishing to present an ageing Fafhrd after the loss of his left hand or a youthful Fafhrd before he attains his status as a legend of Lankmar should modify these statistics accordingly.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 21
CON 21
DEX 17
SIZ 17
INT 14
POW 17
CHA 18

BASIC SKILLS

Acrobatics 37% (21%)
Athletics 130% (124%)
Boating 61%
Dodge 75% (69%)
Driving 27%
Evaluate 44%
First Aid 24%
Influence 88%
Lore (Animal) 34%
Lore (Plant) 14%
Lore (World) 104%
Perception 71%
Persistence 57%
Resilience 78%
Riding 54% (48%)
Sing 130%
Sleight 22% (16%)
Stealth 25% (19%)
Throwing 57% (51%)
Unarmed 85% (79%)

Advanced Skills

Language (Low Lankmarese) 94%
Lore (Cold Wastes) 64%
Language (High Lankmarese) 84%
Lore (Lankmar) 70%
Survival 61%



Dance 17%
Disguise 28%
Shiphandling 52%
Streetwise 50%
Tracking 34%

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bastard sword	170% (164%)	1D8+1+1D6
Hatchet	140% (134%)	1D6+1+1D6
Show bow	125% (119%)	1D8

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Damage Modifier: +1D6

Strike Rank: +16

Movement: 4m

Typical Armour: Heavy leather hauberk, leather treads
(-6% skill penalty)

Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	1/8
4-6	Left Leg	1/8
7-9	Abdomen	2/9
10-12	Chest	2/10
13-15	Right Arm	0/7
16-18	Left Arm	0/7
19-20	Head	0/8

The Grey Mouser

Cultural Background: Freeman

Profession: Thief

These statistics represent the Grey Mouser at his physical peak during the events of *The Swords of Lankmar*. Games Masters wishing to present an ageing Mouser or the youthful 'Mouse' should modify these statistics accordingly.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 15
CON 20
DEX 21
SIZ 10
INT 20
POW 17
CHA 18

BASIC SKILLS

Acrobatics 90% (86%)
Athletics 125% (121%)
Boating 50%
Dodge 140% (136%)
Driving 27%
Evaluate 60%
First Aid 25%
Influence 90%
Lore (Animal) 30%
Lore (Plant) 20%
Lore (World) 105%
Perception 80%
Persistence 65%
Resilience 58%
Riding 50% (46%)
Sing 20%
Sleight 100% (19%)
Stealth 80% (76%)
Throwing 60% (56%)
Unarmed 40% (36%)

ADVANCED SKILLS

Language (Low Lankhmarese) 94%
Lore (Lankmar) 80%
Language (High Lankhmarese) 84%
Survival 40%
Dance 39%
Disguise 60%
Shiphandling 44%



Streetwise 70%
Tracking 28%

WEAPONS

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Dagger	140% (136%)	1D4+1
Rapier	170% (166%)	1D8
Sling	48% (44%)	1D6

SPECIAL RULES

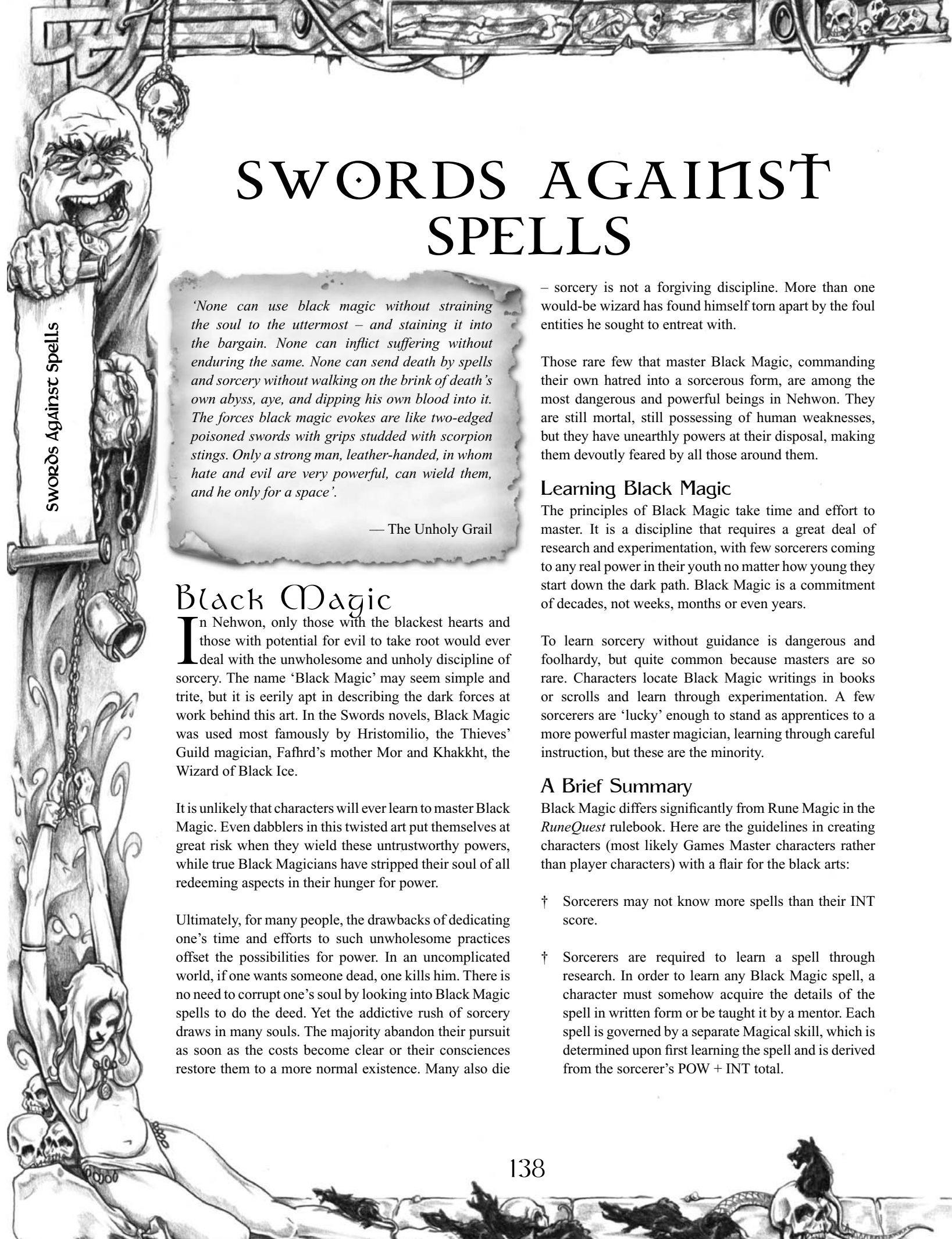
Combat Actions: Four
Damage Modifier: +0
Strike Rank: +20
Movement: 4m
Typical Armour: Leather shirt (−4% skill penalty)

HIT LOCATIONS

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–3	Right Leg	0/7
4–6	Left Leg	0/7
7–9	Abdomen	1/8
10–12	Chest	1/9
13–15	Right Arm	1/6
16–18	Left Arm	1/6
19–20	Head	0/7

Adventures of Newbon





SWORDS AGAINST SPELLS

'None can use black magic without straining the soul to the uttermost – and staining it into the bargain. None can inflict suffering without enduring the same. None can send death by spells and sorcery without walking on the brink of death's own abyss, aye, and dipping his own blood into it. The forces black magic evokes are like two-edged poisoned swords with grips studded with scorpion stings. Only a strong man, leather-handed, in whom hate and evil are very powerful, can wield them, and he only for a space'.

— The Unholy Grail

Black Magic

In Nehwon, only those with the blackest hearts and those with potential for evil to take root would ever deal with the unwholesome and unholy discipline of sorcery. The name 'Black Magic' may seem simple and trite, but it is eerily apt in describing the dark forces at work behind this art. In the Swords novels, Black Magic was used most famously by Hristomilio, the Thieves' Guild magician, Fafhrd's mother Mor and Khakkht, the Wizard of Black Ice.

It is unlikely that characters will ever learn to master Black Magic. Even dabblers in this twisted art put themselves at great risk when they wield these untrustworthy powers, while true Black Magicians have stripped their soul of all redeeming aspects in their hunger for power.

Ultimately, for many people, the drawbacks of dedicating one's time and efforts to such unwholesome practices offset the possibilities for power. In an uncomplicated world, if one wants someone dead, one kills him. There is no need to corrupt one's soul by looking into Black Magic spells to do the deed. Yet the addictive rush of sorcery draws in many souls. The majority abandon their pursuit as soon as the costs become clear or their consciences restore them to a more normal existence. Many also die

– sorcery is not a forgiving discipline. More than one would-be wizard has found himself torn apart by the foul entities he sought to entreat with.

Those rare few that master Black Magic, commanding their own hatred into a sorcerous form, are among the most dangerous and powerful beings in Nehwon. They are still mortal, still possessing of human weaknesses, but they have unearthly powers at their disposal, making them devoutly feared by all those around them.

Learning Black Magic

The principles of Black Magic take time and effort to master. It is a discipline that requires a great deal of research and experimentation, with few sorcerers coming to any real power in their youth no matter how young they start down the dark path. Black Magic is a commitment of decades, not weeks, months or even years.

To learn sorcery without guidance is dangerous and foolhardy, but quite common because masters are so rare. Characters locate Black Magic writings in books or scrolls and learn through experimentation. A few sorcerers are 'lucky' enough to stand as apprentices to a more powerful master magician, learning through careful instruction, but these are the minority.

A Brief Summary

Black Magic differs significantly from Rune Magic in the *RuneQuest* rulebook. Here are the guidelines in creating characters (most likely Games Master characters rather than player characters) with a flair for the black arts:

- † Sorcerers may not know more spells than their INT score.
- † Sorcerers are required to learn a spell through research. In order to learn any Black Magic spell, a character must somehow acquire the details of the spell in written form or be taught it by a mentor. Each spell is governed by a separate Magical skill, which is determined upon first learning the spell and is derived from the sorcerer's POW + INT total.

† When casting any Black Magic spell, the character must pass the appropriate Magical skill. If the test succeeds, the spell's effects take place and the caster deducts the requisite number of Magic Points based on how much Manipulation is involved. If the roll fails, the spell fails. In this case, the caster subtracts only one Magic Point.

† The manipulation of Black Magic spells is the most frighteningly versatile aspect to this unpredictable art. Sorcerers can use the five Manipulate skills: Manipulate (Magnitude), Manipulate (Range), Manipulate (Duration), Manipulate Target) and Manipulate (Combine).

† Three factors further affect Black Magic castings: the concept of magical Sympathy between wizard and victim, the Agony that the caster suffers as he casts the spell and the magician's own Hatred. These are dealt with according to the Situational Modifier table below.

† Magic is a slow and tiring process. The only way to cast spells quickly (such as in battle) is to have a *focus*, such as a wand already charged with a spell or a scroll with the words of a spell written down.

† There can be no power without cost: Characters who use Black Magic are subject to spiritual and physical deterioration as the unholy energies flow through them. This is represented by the Corruption train.

New Black Magic spells are treated as Advanced skills that must be learned, as detailed on page 17 of *RuneQuest*. Once learnt, the sorcerer gains the specific spell skill, such as Black Magic (Beast Speech). These spell skills are increased as normal, through practice or research.

Important Note: As noted in the summary, a sorcerer may only know a number of Sorcery spells equal to his INT score. *For example, Hristomilio has INT 17 and can know 17 spells before he needs to think about increasing his Intelligence score.*

Unlike other forms of magic in *RuneQuest*, Black Magic spells are not graded by their varying Magnitudes. All Black Magic spells share the same traits before the caster manipulates them in casting:

† Magnitude 1

† Duration equal to the sorcerer's POW in minutes

† Range equal to the sorcerer's POW in metres

† Spells will only affect a single Target

Casting Black Magic

A list of spells useable by practitioners of Black Magic starts below. Games Masters are free to create their own based on the ebb and flow of their campaigns, or to convert magic spells from other *RuneQuest* sourcebooks as they see fit.

Unless he is using a focus (see below), a character must be able to gesture with his hands and be able to chant in order to cast a spell. This represents the sorcerer tracing arcane symbols in the air and forming his lips into the curses necessary to bring forth the hatred-driven magic.

Any Black Magic spellcasting produces sights and sounds detectable by people nearby. The exact effects of the sorcery depend on the spell being cast, though the effects will be seen or heard (or both) up to 10 metres times the Magnitude of the spell.

If the sorcerer is unhindered and able to cast his spell, the player makes the appropriate spell skill roll. A successful test means the spell is cast. A failed test means the magic fails to manifest. Multiple Black Magic spells being cast at once with the Manipulation (Combine) skill infer a -10% penalty per spell roll.

Any of the following spellcasting modifiers apply to individual spell skills as well as Manipulation skills being used.

Magic Points

Black Magic spells cast without caster manipulation do not cost any Magic Points. However, each Manipulation effect applied to a spell costs one Magic Point to apply. Characters will automatically regain Magic Points equal to their POW every day.

Swords Against Spells

Black Magic Situational Modifiers

Situation	Skill Modifier ¹
Spellcaster is gagged or silenced	-40%
Spellcaster is restrained	-30%
Spellcaster is prone	-20%
Spellcaster is on unstable ground	-20%
Partially obscured target	-20% ²
Heavily obscured target	-40% ²
Totally obscured target	-60% ²
Agony, Hatred and Sympathy	Special ³

¹ These modifiers are cumulative – a prone spellcaster casting at a partially obscured target decreases his Runecasting skill by -40%.

² These modifiers only apply if the spell has a target other than the spellcaster, his immediate location, his carried possessions or a touched object/individual.

³ See *Thematic Manipulations* below.

Critical Success & Fumbles

A critical success on the spell skill test means that the caster has managed to channel and control his sorcerous sending particularly effectively. Any attempts to resist or counter the spell suffer a -10% penalty.

A critical success on any Manipulation test also reflects unusually precise mastery over the dark energies being summoned. The Magic Point cost for applying that particular Manipulation effect is ignored and not deducted from the caster's total.

If a Black Magic spellcasting test is fumbled, the spell fails and the sorcerer deducts an additional 1D6 Magic Points on top of the Magic Point loss for any Manipulation effects. He also suffers from the rules for Corruption, as detailed below.

Casting Time

The rules for Casting Time mirror those of Rune Magic, though they are almost always significantly longer for Black Magic. Sorcery is not a fast art – even wizards using foci must spend a long time preparing them in advance.

Dismissing Black Magic Spells

The rules for dismissing magic are the same as those for Rune Magic. As a single Combat Action, a caster can dismiss any Permanent spell(s) he has cast. Ceasing to cast a Concentration spell is immediate and not a Combat Action.

Overcharging Black Magic Sorcery Spells

Overcharging Black Magic works differently than other *RuneQuest* magic. It is a matter of Sympathy, Hatred and Agony rather than standard magical manipulation. See *Thematic Manipulations* below.

The Four Manipulation (Magical) Skills

These are the four Magical skills a sorcerer must have to perform more than the most rudimentary spellwork. *RuneQuest* veterans will note the absence of the fifth skill, Manipulate (Combine). Such feats of sorcery are unrelated to the laborious rituals and dark handiwork of Nehwon's magicians.

† Manipulation (Magnitude) (INT+POW)

All casting modifiers that apply to the spell's casting test are applied to this skill too. The casting test's D100 result is also compared to this modified Manipulation (Magnitude) score. As long as this also results in a success, the spell's Magnitude is increased. The maximum Magnitude to which the spell can be increased to is noted in the Manipulating Black Magic Spells table.

It costs one Magic Point to apply this effect to a Black Magic spell, whether or not the final spell is successful and regardless of the final Magnitude of the spell.

† Manipulation (Duration) (INT+POW)

This skill allows the sorcerer to increase the Duration of a Black Magic spell. Apply all casting modifiers that are applied to the spell's casting test to this skill too. The casting test's D100 result is also compared to this modified Manipulation (Duration) score. As long as this also results in a success, the spell's Duration is increased. The maximum Duration to which the spell can be increased to is noted in the Manipulating Black Magic Spells table.

It costs one Magic Point to apply this effect to a Black Magic spell, whether or not the final spell is successful and regardless of the final Duration of the spell.

† Manipulation (Range) (INT+POW)

This skill allows the sorcerer to increase the Range of a Black Magic spell. Apply all casting modifiers that are applied to the spell's casting test to this skill too. The casting test's D100 result is also compared to this

modified Manipulation (Range) score. As long as this also results in a success, the spell's Range is increased. The maximum Range to which the spell can be increased is noted in the Manipulating Black Magic Spells table.

It costs one Magic Point to apply this effect to a Black Magic spell, whether or not the final spell is successful and regardless of the final Range of the spell.

† Manipulation (Targets) (INT+POW)

This skill allows the sorcerer to increase the number of subjects targeted by a spell. The casting test's D100 result is also compared to this modified Manipulation score. As long as this also results in a success, the spell has targeted the additional subjects. The number of targets that can be affected is noted in the Manipulating Black Magic Spells table.

If the character is able to affect five, 10, 15 or 20 targets, the caster may choose instead to affect a 5m, 10m, 15m or 20m radius, respectively, instead of selecting specific targets.

It costs one Magic Point to apply this effect to a Black Magic spell, whether or not the final spell is successful and regardless of the final Targets of the spell.

Manipulating Black Magic Spells

Manipulation Score	Magnitude	Duration (in minutes)	Range (in metres)	Targets
1% to 10%	1	POW	POW	1
11% to 20%	2	POW x 2	POW x 2	2
21% to 30%	3	POW x 3	POW x 3	3
31% to 40%	4	POW x 4	POW x 4	4
41% to 50%	5	POW x 5	POW x 5	5 or 5m radius
51% to 60%	6	POW x 6	POW x 6	6
61% to 70%	7	POW x 7	POW x 7	7
71% to 80%	8	POW x 8	POW x 8	8
81% to 90%	9	POW x 9	POW x 9	9
91% to 100%	10	POW x 10	POW x 10	10 or 10m radius
101% to 110%	11	POW x 11	POW x 11	11
111% to 120%	12	POW x 12	POW x 12	12
121% to 130%	13	POW x 13	POW x 13	13
131% to 140%	14	POW x 14	POW x 14	14
141% to 150%	15	POW x 15	POW x 15	15 or 15m radius
151% to 160%	16	POW x 16	POW x 16	16
161% to 170%	17	POW x 17	POW x 17	17
171% to 180%	18	POW x 18	POW x 18	18
181% to 190%	19	POW x 19	POW x 19	19
191% to 200%	20	POW x 20	POW x 20	20 or 20m radius

Thematic Manipulations

Three additional factors manipulate the Black Magic of Nehwon; three aspects of spellcasting stand apart from conventional sorcery rules and can amplify a spell's potency tenfold or reduce a wizard to a withered husk of a man. These three principles are Agony, Hatred and Sympathy. Each potentially applies a modifier to both the final spell roll and the preceding skill rolls.

Important Note: Games Masters who wish to stick with the generic *RuneQuest* rules for Sorcery and ignore these alterations are welcome to do so. The Thematic Manipulations are presented as an additional way of flavouring the dark magic of *Lankhmar* campaigns.

For Games masters who are worried it will complicate things, it is worth considering that these additional modifiers are simple and easy to apply, and that Black Magic is rare enough in-game that the modifiers are unlikely to be used more than a few times in any given story arc.

Those who do ignore the following manipulations should alter the Corruption rule to make sure every Black Magic spell regardless of target or effect causes Corruption.

Swords Against Spells

Agony

Black Magic steals from those who wield it carelessly, leeching their life force to fuel its own dark power. Sorcerers have the option of sacrificing Hit Points from a chosen location (healed in the natural manner) and adding +5% to their Black Magic spellcasting roll and Manipulation skill rolls.

This represents a spell eating away at the caster's body and soul, fuelling itself on his life before breaking free with greater potency than conventional sendings. For each Hit Point sacrificed in this manner, the spellcasting roll gains +5%. Hit Locations cannot be reduced below one Hit Point in this manner. Once a caster reaches one Hit Point in all his locations (and he still wishes to sacrifice more to gain power) he can choose to sacrifice one STR, DEX, CON or INT *permanently*, and gain +30% to the casting roll for each point sacrificed.

Using Agony to manipulate a spell is hideously painful in ways normal pain cannot approach. It is the spiritual rotting and atrophying of muscle and mind in the span of a heartbeat, and as such is rarely used unless deemed absolutely necessary. Sorcerers bound or gagged yet still desperate to fling their foul magic at foes are the likeliest users of Agony, though wizards with little care for their bodies will allow the sorcery to eat at their flesh from time to time.

Alternately, magicians can amplify their spells with the pain they are currently suffering because of an injury or disease. For every Hit Point lost in the *previous* turn, the

sorcerer may use Agony as if he had expended the Hit Point himself. Few wizards survive such a spellcasting, with a magician likely using it only as a last resort to slay a foe before the moment of his own death.

Use of Agony in either form always adds to Corruption – see below.

Hatred

The foundations of Black Magic are bound in the caster's hatred of others. No-one without the potential for malice and evil can ever wield sorcery, and Black Magic always best serves those whose minds and hearts are saturated by their loathing for other beings. Black Magicians use their own loathing for other life forms to enhance and shape their spells, creating foul sendings and summonings based around the strength of their hatred.

The principle of Hatred allows sorcerers to increase the potency of their spells, in addition to other factors. It is easier to magically harm one's hated enemies than it is one's friends and family, because the overriding loathing for the former enhances the effects of the spell.

Spells which cause direct harm to victims potentially receive a damage bonus which is added to the final total. All spells potentially receive a bonus to the spellcasting roll. The following bonuses and penalties apply to any Black Magician casting a spell.

Hatred Modifiers

Target	Example	Damage Modifier ¹	Spellcasting roll ²
Target is a loved one ³	Family member; lover; life-long companion	-5	-20%
Target is a friend ³	Adventuring companion; close ally	-3	-10%
No emotional attachment to target	Stranger; fellow bar patron; shopkeeper	0	0%
Target is disliked ³	Target is inconvenient, annoying and occasionally troublesome	+3	+15%
Target is loathed ³	Long-time or serious enemy; target repeatedly attempts to hinder or kill caster, or presents an immediate lethal threat	+6	+30%
Target is hated ³	Murderer of caster's friends and family	+12	+60%

¹ Apply this modifier to all damage inflicted by the spell.

² Apply this modifier to all spellcasting rolls, including the preceding Magical skill tests.

³ Any spells directed at these targets always add to Corruption – see below.

Sympathy

The final principle in Thematic Manipulation is that of Sympathy. Sympathy relates to how well a caster knows the target of the spell, how tightly-bound the magician, the spell and the victim are in this evil chain of power. It is not based on emotion for the target – that is the function of Hatred. Instead it is based on how familiar the magician is with the person he seeks to harm and what, if any, items of the victim he has to increase the potency of the spell.

Sympathy is rated from one to five, depending on familiarity. For each point of Sympathy between magician and victim, the spell gains a bonus to all Manipulation skill tests.

- The caster has no relation to the victim whatsoever. This confers a -20% penalty to all Manipulate tests.

- The caster knows the victim's name, knows many details of the victim's life, recognises his face and/or possesses an item once touched by the victim (coins, a stool and so on) This adds a +5 bonus to all Manipulation rolls.

- The caster has met the victim on several occasions and/or possesses one of the target's personal items (a weapon, a lock of hair, a favourite shirt.) This adds a +10 bonus to all Manipulate tests.

- The caster is intimately familiar with the victim and knows him well. Alternatively, he possesses some of the victim's saliva or tears, or the blood or body parts of a relative of the victim. This adds +20% bonus to any Manipulate tests and one to the spell's final Magnitude (if applicable).

- The caster knows the victim almost as well as he knows himself. Alternatively, he possesses some of the victim's blood or a body part (such as an eyeball or a finger). This kind of cursing can be savagely effective, adding a +30% bonus to all Manipulate rolls and two to the spell's Magnitude (if applicable).

Corruption

Characters dealing with Black Magic, whether dabbling or immersing themselves in it, are putting their bodies and souls at risk. Channelling evil forces in order to harm others takes its toll on a magician day by day and night by night. The following actions provoke a Corruption test.

- † Any time the magician learns a new Black Magic spell

- † Any time the character casts a Black Magic spell

- † Any time he kills someone with Black Magic. In the case of this last action, *two* Corruption tests are necessary – one for the casting, one for the killing.

When determining Corruption after each of these actions, the character makes a single D100 roll. If the number is above 50%, the caster has passed and remains unCorrupted. If the number is 50% or below, the roll has failed. The wizard suffers the withering effects of dealing with this sinister branch of the occult and must roll on the Corruption list below.

The following modifiers impose penalties on Corruption rolls:

1. For each 5% gained by use of Agony in spellcasting, the Corruption roll has a 5% penalty subtracted from the total rolled.
2. Any time Hatred is used in a spellcasting (which is practically always) the Black Magician suffers a further 5% penalty for each level of Magnitude that was the spell was cast.

Effects of Corruption

Corruption can be subtle or overt, but it is always horrific. A D100 roll reveals what changes take place within the character's mind and body in the event of a failed Corruption test. This list is not exhaustive – Games Masters should feel free to create their own interesting magical warpings, especially when creating characters as memorable and important as Black Magicians. The 50 examples provided here are for reference and guideline use, rather than a specific list a Games Master should feel bound to.

An important note to remember is that none of these mutations should be beneficial in any way. They need not all be significantly crippling – some are merely inconvenient or distressing for the magician.

No Black Magician may ever heal Corruption traits. Characters cannot develop the same Corruption twice. A re-roll is required in instances of number repetition.

SWORDS AGAINST SPELLS

01-02: **Club Hands** – The character's hands become compact and stunted, a mess of knuckles and tiny fingerbones with limited capacity for motion. All actions involving manual dexterity (including holding weapons in combat) suffer a –20% penalty. Spellcasting suffers a –10% penalty.

03-04: **Partial Blindness** – The character's eyes milk over with a whitish or yellowish film that hampers his vision. From this point on, the character is treated as if acting in Partial Darkness, with a –20% penalty to all vision-based Perception tests.

05-06: **Hideous Veins** – The character's veins darken and swell under his skin, becoming visible – blackened and bunched – on his cheeks, neck and elsewhere on his body. The character suffers a –25% penalty to all Influence tests.

07-08: **Hair Loss** – The wizard's hair, eyebrows and facial hair fall out in clumps over the course of a few days, leaving scraggly tufts in random spots.

09-10: **Partial Deafness** – The character's sense of hearing fades and he hears everything as if it were muffled or in the distance. The magician suffers a –20% penalty to all hearing-based Perception tests.

11-12: **Black Tongue** – The sorcerer's tongue turns black and loses all sensation. The character suffers a –10% penalty on all Influence tests due to the strange appearance of his tongue and the minor difficulties he has when speaking.

13-14: **Teeth Rot** – The sorcerer's teeth turn rotten in his gums and most fall out in the course of a week. He suffers a –10% penalty to all Influence tests due to his appearance and a –20% penalty to all spellcasting rolls.

15-16: **Hunchback** – The character's spine arches unnaturally, creating a permanent hunch and an awkward gait and reducing his SIZ by one.

17-18: **Repel Animals** – The magician causes nearby animals to hiss, spit, bark or flee from his presence. He suffers a –30% penalty on all rolls involving taming, controlling or riding animals.

19-20: **Bleeding Gums** – The character's gums bleed a great deal at the slightest pressure: when he grits his teeth, yawns or shouts, for example. It looks grotesque but inflicts no penalties.

21-22: **Bleeding Lips** – The character's lips crack and bleed at the slightest pressure, such as when he smiles, speaks or shouts. It looks unnerving and is clearly painful but inflicts no penalties.

23-24: **Palsy** – The character's muscles betray him much of the time, inflicting palsy-like tremors whenever he moves. The magician permanently suffers –1 to STR and –1 to DEX. Anything in his hands shakes noticeably in his tremulous grip.

25-26: **Bleeding Eyes** – The aqueous and vitreous fluids in the magician's eye sockets become bloody and pinkish. His eyeballs have a pinkish hue to them and during any Moderate or Heavy Activity, tears of bloody fluid run down his cheeks uncontrollably. The overall appearance of his eyes imposes a –5% penalty to all Influence tests, and is doubled when he weeps.

27-28: **Club Foot** – One of the magician's feet becomes warped and stunted, resembling a lump of malformed flesh and bone. The character subtracts –2 from his DEX, –20% penalty to Athletics rolls and suddenly finds it difficult to acquire shoes.

29-30: **Twisted Leg** – The character's legs twist and bend, giving the sorcerer a noticeable hitch in his stride. He loses –2 to DEX and –30% penalty to Athletics rolls.

31-32: **Locked Spine** – The vertebrae in the magician's spine become stiff and resistant to movement, causing –3 to DEX and –20% penalty to all Athletics tests.

33-34: **Eternal Flu** – The magician falls victim to a continuous flu, forever coughing and sneezing and suffering frequent headaches and continual nose drips.

35-36: **Bruises** – The character develops painful purple, yellow and bluish bruises across his body. They ache but inflict no further penalty.

37-38: **Cysts** – The magician develops swollen, small sacs of bloody fluid under his skin at various points on his body. These can be burst and drained to relieve the pain, though they tend to become infected sores.

39-40: **Crooked Teeth** – The character's teeth become twisted and crooked in his gums, looking ugly and reducing his CHA by one.

41-42: **Infertility** – The magician can no longer father or carry children. A male sorcerer's seed is too weak and female magicians are unable to carry a child to term, always losing the child in miscarriage D4+1 months into the pregnancy.

43-44: **Bleeding Ears** – In the presence of any loud noises or when performing Moderate and Heavy Activity, the sorcerer's ears trickle blood down his jaw and neck.

45-46: **Facial Tic** – The character suffers a repetitive facial spasm several times every minute, involving a sudden contracting of some of the facial muscles. Sudden gritting of the teeth or clenching the eyes closed are common examples. Depending on what the character is doing, the Games Master may wish to apply minor penalties to the magician's rolls, such as when he is firing a bow or making a speech. The severity of the tics varies constantly and not all are face-wrenching spasms.

47-48: **Allergic to Water** – The character suffers a painful, itchy rash which breaks out on his flesh every time he touches water. Depending on how much water he touches, the penalties can be from –5% to all rolls (in the event of a wet arm) to –30% (if he is fully submerged.) The rash lasts 1D4+2 hours each time it manifests.

49-50: **Sensitive to Sunlight** – The brightness of the sun causes great pain to the character's eyes, forcing him to work in darker conditions or become nocturnal. The magician suffers a –30% penalty to all vision-based Perception rolls and Combat Actions when in the sunlight.

51-52: **Dehydrated** – The magician's body no longer metabolises water effectively. The character suffers the effects of chronic thirst (as detailed on page 87 of *RuneQuest*) after only CON hours. His mouth and eyes are constantly dry and aching.

53-54: **Impotence** – The character can no longer function sexually. Both males and females can suffer this Corruption, with the bodies of characters of either gender rendered unable to become sexually stimulated in any way. The character also loses his or her sex drive.

55-56: **Burbling Breath** – The character speaks with a burbling, rasping tone as his throat and sinuses are often filled with thick mucous. The magician suffers –10% penalty to all Influence tests.

57-58: **Rotting Fingernails** – The magician's fingernails blacken and fall off, leaving bruised and swollen fingertips that are intensely sensitive. Any pressure at all causes pain, though the character suffers no penalties.

59-60: **Stench** – The character exudes a cloying scent of decay, as if he were several days dead and starting to rot. No amount of perfume or clothing can mask this nauseating stench, which imposes a –20% penalty to all Influence tests and any attempts to remain hidden or move unseen.

61-62: **Vilely Corpulent** – The character's flesh fattens and expands over the course of a week until he is morbidly obese, with rolls of fat hanging off his torso, arms and legs. Even his ankles become swollen and fat. Strangely, the weight does not affect his movement as much as natural fat would, imposing only a –4 penalty to DEX. It is clear that characters with this Corruption are more than naturally fat, they are frighteningly obese.

63-64: **Walking Skeleton** – The magician loses almost all his body fat and comes to resemble a painfully-thin, emaciated creature of bones and sallow flesh. He suffers a –4 to STR, but remains relatively healthy despite his unnatural appearance. It is clear that characters with this Corruption are more than chronically underweight – the fact they are still alive is no less than amazing.

65-66: **Curdling Touch** – the character's touch spoils wine, curdles milk and turns beer foul. Only water remains drinkable in the character's hands, and even this tastes tainted, salty and foul.

67-68: **Weakness** – The magician's muscles are supernaturally atrophied. Although he looks normal, even the simplest actions he undertakes are considered Moderate Activity.

69-70: **Phobia** – The character suffers a powerful fear of one specific animal or situation, doing all he can to avoid ever confronting his fear. In the presence of his phobia, he takes a –20% penalty to all rolls except fleeing.

71-72: **Rasping Voice** – The magician's voice becomes hoarse, whispery and generally unpleasant to hear. The magician suffers a –5% penalty to all Influence tests.

73-74: **Bloody Cough** – The character coughs at even the slightest exertion, and the saliva from his hacking coughs is often flecked with blood. He loses –1 to CON because of his suffering lungs.

75-76: **Drooling** – The magician drools every few minutes because his overactive saliva ducts are continually at work. It is an embarrassing problem but imposes no social penalties unless the Games Master deems the character is disgusting other characters in his presence.

77-78: **Stutter** – The character develops a very serious stutter, suffering –20% penalty on all rolls involving speech and counting as gagged when casting spells.

79-80: **Vermin Lord** – The character attracts vermin; most notably bugs, rats and stray urban animals. Though this condition imposes no penalty, it can obviously make the character's life difficult in certain situations.

81-82: **Ugliness** – The magician's features warp and twist, becoming uglier as he loses 1D6 CHA points. Sloping brows, overbites, piggy eyes and long, hooked noses are common.

83-84: **Sadistic Pleasure** – The character finds the pain and suffering of others to be hilarious and stimulating. He might not go out of his way any more than usual to cause harm to other people, but he cannot help but laugh and feel sexual arousal at others suffering extreme pain such as torture or rape.

85-86: **Creaking Joints** – The magician's joints creak audibly and cause him pain when he moves. All rolls to remain silent while hidden suffer a –10% penalty.

87-88: **Braying Laugh** – The character's laughter becomes a raucous and goatish bray. No penalty is incurred but it is unnerving and eerie to hear.

89-90: **Pyromania** – The sorcerer develops a powerful love for naked flame, seeking to create it (by means both mundane and magical) whenever he gets the opportunity. This becomes an obsession that affects much of the character's life but does not override his survival instincts.

91-92: **Voices in the Head** – The character hears various voices (often of long-dead companions or relatives) in his mind. Though they can be ignored, most magicians are unsure whether the voices are a true haunting or a sign of insanity. Proof can be understandably hard to come by.

93-94: **Insomnia** – The character sleeps only an hour or so each night and is always exhausted as a result. He is considered permanently Winded, as described on page 87 of *RuneQuest*, suffering –10% penalty on all skill tests.

95-96: **Rage** – The character is constantly angry, literally fuelled by his wrath. It becomes his overriding emotion at all times but reduces all Hatred damage bonuses by two because the character's fury is supernatural in origin, rather than true loathing for life.

97-98: **Bloodshot Eyes** – The magician's eyes are always bloodshot and sensitive to bright light. In the presence of any light source greater than Partial Darkness, the character suffers –10% penalty to all rolls.

99-100: **Yellow Ague** – The magician permanently develops an incurable disease which turns his flesh slightly yellowish and weakens his spirit. Use the rules for Yellow Ague on page 93 of *RuneQuest* to represent the illness.



Foci

The *Swords* tales make infrequent mention of wands and scrolls used as aids for spellcasting. These tools allow a magician to cast a spell almost instantaneously, without the long chants and time-consuming ritual work necessary to manipulate sorcery. In game mechanical terms, scrolls and wands are known as 'Foci.' These tools have been infused with the Black Magic spell of the creator's choice, ready to be unleashed with a moment's thought.

CREATING FOCI

To create a Focus takes even more effort and time than simply casting the spell would normally, though the magician no doubt expects his diligence and foresight to pay off when he needs to cast a spell in a hurry. In terms of game mechanics, creating a Focus is achieved by doubling the Casting Time and the Magic Point expenditure of the spell that is to be bound into the item, then casting the spell with the waiting Focus as

Swords Against Spells

the target. Once this is complete, the Focus is good for 1D3 uses before it expires. Sorcery is a shifting, warping science based on principles of negative emotion. Wands run out of energy if overused and the magic feels stunted and sluggish. The words on scrolls no longer convey the caster's hateful intent as perfectly as they initially did, since the ebb and flow of his emotion changes.

The Magic Point expenditure and increased Casting Time are simple enough, but the in-game effects are not as straightforward as the magician simply casting the spell at the potential focus. While the sorcerer is spending the Magic Points and 'casting the spell,' he is actually feverishly writing a litany of hate onto scroll using blood as ink, imprinting the sensations of his hate as they feel at that very moment. Once the Casting Time is complete and the Magic Points are spent, the blood-ink on the scroll dries and the magician has a spell ready to read and cast the moment his lips start to mouth the first sentence. Likewise, the ritual for charging a staff or wand involves bathing the tool in sacred, unholy fluids and coating the wood in rare powders and spell components. Any Manipulate skills must be used at the time of imprinting the focus – they may not be applied later when the spell is cast from the scroll or wand.

Creating a Focus counts as casting the appropriate spell – all the usual rules for Corruption apply.

Using Foci

Using a Focus is the easy part. The magician is able to use spell within the scroll or wand a total of three times, each at the Magnitude he initially cast the spell at, and with a Casting Time of one. He may apply the laws of Hatred, Agony and Sympathy as normal in order to manipulate the spell further. No other manipulation is possible.

The magician is not aware of a Focus being drained until he attempts to use it again. Once the 1D3 charges are used, he must either recharge or remake the wand or write a new scroll from scratch.

Foci can be used by others beside the magicians that created them. In these cases the wielder may not be aware of what the item does but can choose to cast the stored spell by reading the scroll or 'willing' the wand to discharge its energy.

Corruption is never gained when activating a Focus *unless* the caster also uses Hatred, Agony or Sympathy.

Silver

Pure silver makes for weak blades that are ill-suited for extended combat. Where the metal excels beyond all other elements is as the bane of Black Magic. For reasons unknown to all but the most enlightened alchemists and mystically-educated metalworkers, silver penetrates and nullifies some of the sorcery spells it touches. In the *Swords* novels, a thrown silver dagger slices through a Web of Night-Smog spell and never once meets the misty resistance encountered by all mundane weapons.

The presence of silver is a matter of Games Master discretion. Adventurers carrying around silver weapons on the off-chance they run afoul of a sorcerer are bordering on metagame thinking. Counter the stereotype by making some spells (perhaps over a certain Magnitude or investment of Agony and Hatred) proof against the presence of silver. In other instances, a silver amulet or bracelet worn as jewellery might act as a sudden and unforeseen protection against a lethal spell. Do not punish players for thinking ahead and being prepared, but at the same time remember that Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser encounter many magicians in their adventures and only once does the presence of silver make any obvious and intentional difference.

Black Magic Spells

The face seemed inhuman – more a green mask of torment than anything alive. The cheeks were drawn in; the eyes were unnaturally wild; it was very pale, and dripping with cold sweat induced by intense inward effort. There was much suffering in it, but also much power – power to control the thick twisting shadows that seemed to crowd around the green flame, power to master the forces of hate that were being marshalled. At regular intervals the cracked lips moved and the arms and hands made set gestures.

— The Unholy Grail

The following section lists several spells used by sorcerers in their selfish quests to achieve their own ends through dark powers. These are the enchantments sent forth by Nehwon's black-hearted wizards, the same powers that adventurers must face and foil if they wish to survive the encounter. Allowing player characters access to these foul magics is not recommended.

Games Masters wishing to concert spells from other *RuneQuest* sourcebooks should feel free to do so within the framework of the Nehwon setting and their own campaigns. Casting Times are always increased in Black Magic spells, with the minimum time to cast a spell (without a pre-prepared Focus) of between five and 20, depending on the spell in question. High ritual works such as the Cloud of Hate are significantly more time-consuming than others.

Every Black Magic spell is defined by a series of traits that tells one what kind of spell it is and how it is used in the game. A description then follows describing the spell's precise effects. The traits used by spells are detailed below.

Casting Time: The spell takes the indicated number of Combat Actions to cast. Black Magic is intensely dangerous in combat but rarely a fast-casting process.

Concentration: The spell's effects will remain in place so long as the character concentrates on the spell. Concentrating on a spell is functionally identical to casting the spell, requiring the spellcaster to continue to gesture or chant and ignore distractions. This trait overrides the normal Sorcery spell default Duration.

Instant: The spell's effects take place instantly. The spell itself then disappears. This trait overrides the normal Sorcery spell default Duration.

Permanent: The spell's effects remain in place until they are dispelled or dismissed. This trait overrides the normal Sorcery spell default Duration.

Resist (Dodge/Persistence/Resilience/Special): The spell's effects do not take effect automatically. The target may make a Dodge, Persistence or Resilience test (as specified by the spell) in order to avoid the effect of the spell entirely. Note that Resist (Dodge) spells require the target to be able to use Reactions in order to dodge. In the case of Area spells, the Resist (Dodge) trait requires the target to dive (see page 52 of *RuneQuest*) in order to avoid the spell's effect. Some spells feature a unique way of defending against them; these are described in the spell listing where appropriate.

Touch: Touch spells require a character to actually touch his target for the spell to take effect. The spellcaster must remain in physical contact with the target for the entire casting. This trait overrides the normal Sorcery spell default Range.

Trigger: The spell will lie dormant until an event stated in the description takes place. The spell then takes effect and is expended.

The wizard in the star-symboled robe howled like a wolf, and lifting his arms high above his head, threw them toward the small man with such a force that one expected his hands to come off and fly through the air. They didn't, but a bolt of bluish fire, wraithlike in the sunlight, streamed from his out-flung fingers.

— The Swords of Lankhmar

Swords Against spells

Death Spell: Wraith-Fire

Casting Time five, Instant, Resist (Dodge/Special)

This spell conjures a small bolt of magical fire that causes horrendous burns to a target. For each two levels of Magnitude, the spell does 1D10 Hit Points of fire damage, which counts as magical for all fire-resistant conditions.

A little-known but certainly tried and tested defence against such Death Spells is to somehow *ground* a metal weapon and take the incoming sorcerous bolt on the blade. The Grey Mouser performs this feat perfectly by using a thin metal wire, tied to the pommel of his sword, which was given to him by Sheelba of the Eyeless face. When a magician casts a Death Spell at the Grey Mouser, the energy strikes the blade and tingles his hand as it flows through the weapon, along the wire and into the earth.

Performing a similar feat is possible with the right materials and a successful combat attack roll in order to strike or catch the bolt dead on. Games Masters should watch out for players who overuse such defences. This is not proof against all Death Spells, merely the spell which summons bluish flames.

Web of Night-Smog

Casting Time eight, Concentration

With a bellow of rage Fafhrd began slashing at the black barrier, but the ropes were replaced from the cucurbit heads as swiftly as he sliced them, while the cut ends, instead of drooping slackly, began to strain hungrily toward him like constrictive snakes or strangle-vines.

He suddenly shifted Graywand to his left hand, drew his long knife and hurled it at the sorcerer. Flashing toward its mark, it cut through three strands, was deflected and slowed by a fourth and fifth, almost halted by a sixth and ended hanging futilely in the curled grip of a seventh.

— Ill Met In Lankmar

This spell takes an existing source of smoke or fog and twists it into hateful, killing tendrils of black smoke. The manifesting tendrils number 1D4–1 per point of the spell's Magnitude. Each tendril is capable of either entangling and strangling an opponent or defending the caster, as directed. Each strand, no matter how it is used, has six Hit Points. Upon each strand being severed, the Games Master should make a D100 test. If the result is 25% or less, the strand reforms with two Hit Points and continues to perform its directed duty.

For each turn the sorcerer maintains his Concentration, he can restore 1D2 destroyed tendrils at no extra cost.

Strangulation

Each tendril set to attack a foe will inflict a –5% penalty to all Combat Actions, which are cumulative modifiers representing the web of smoke-vines gripping at a character's limbs and preventing his movement. One tendril per victim can be directed to strangle a character. These attack with an Unarmed Skill of 40%. A successful test means the victim takes no immediate Hit Point damage but is subject to the rules for suffocation as detailed on page 90 of *RuneQuest*.



Defensive Uleó

Each tendril set to defend the spellcaster works to give him a Parry action. Striking the defending webs inflicts the weapon's damage against them and is likely to destroy them.

The Cloud of Hate

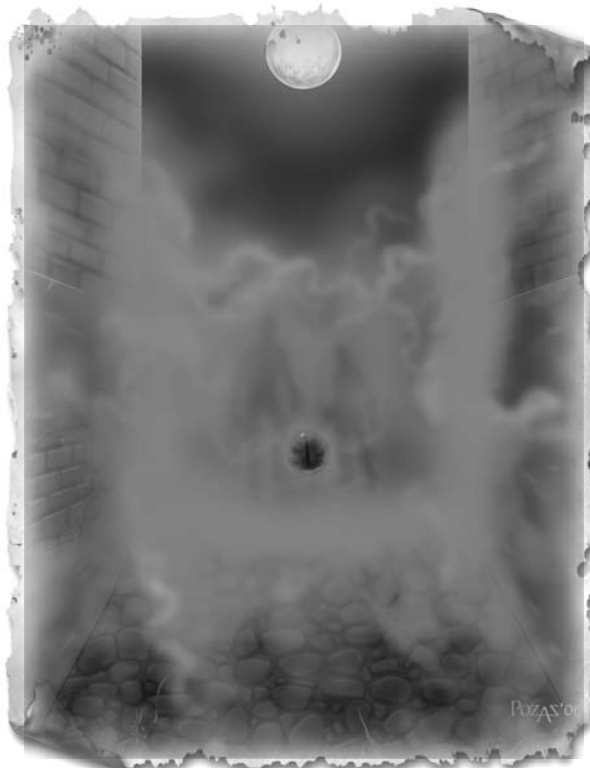
Casting Time 30, Duration: Special

The white serpents coiled past the pillars, brushed the low ceiling, moistly caressed the backs of their devotees and source and then in turn coalesced to pour up the curving black hole of a narrow spiral stairway, the stone steps of which were worn almost to chute-like smoothness – a sinuously billowing white cylinder in which a redness lurked.

— The Cloud of Hate

Mechanically, the Cloud of Hate functions the same as Web of Night-Smog, with the following exceptions:

- † The mist is white, like unpolluted coastal fog.
- † Up to 2D4 tendrils can manipulate weapons as if in the Cloud's arms. The weapons must be destroyed to disarm the Cloud of Hate – striking the tendrils does no damage.
- † The Cloud 'sees' by a reddish eye in the centre of the mist. Dealing a single Hit Point of damage to this eye renders the Cloud of Hate blind, and any attacks it makes suffer penalties as if it were fighting in pitch darkness.
- † **Duration:** For every worshipper at the Temple of the Hates chanting along with the Archpriest, the spell lasts a single turn. Seeing as *thousands* of devotees are usually present, this means the spell can usually last as long as it needs to, unless it is severed.
- † A Perception test reveals a pinkish-silver line threading back from the fog tendrils to the Temple of the Hates. This can be severed by inflicting a single Hit Point of damage, which dissolves the Cloud of Hate in a burst of clear, foul-smelling slush.
- † **Possession:** The Cloud of Hate can heighten the negative emotions of any truly hateful, selfish and immoral soul. Those that the Games Master considers potential victims of the fog make take a Persistence test at a penalty of –10% to –80% depending on the strength of their inner evil. Gnarlrag of the Two Swords, a violent mercenary who relishes in murder, would rate at a –70% penalty. The Grey Mouser, a hateful and envious man at times but with a core of goodness and many heroic deeds behind him, would rate at –10%. Characters that fail the roll are considered possessed until the Cloud of Hate disperses or is destroyed. They act out the express malicious desires of the Archpriest of the Hates, who usually desires naught but death to leach the hate of his worshippers.



SWORDS AGAINST SPELLS



Cause Disease

Casting Time eight, Concentration

Then he saw that its neck was collared by grey fungus, its right cheek crimson, its left black, its eye dripping green ichor and its nose spattering clear drops. As the loathy creature took a last great stride into the chamber, its left leg went boneless like a pillar of jelly and its right leg, striking down stiffly with a heel splash, broke in midshin and the jagged bones thrust through the flesh. Its yellow-crust, red-cracked scurfy hands snatched futilely at the air for support and its right arm brushing its head carried away half the hair on that side.

— The Lords of Quarmall

This spell varies by Magnitude, with any sickness or plague imaginable falling within its bounds. This spell does not infect a victim with a disease; instead it applies the suffering and the symptoms of the illness to the target as long as the spell is kept active. Once cast, the effects of the disease affect the target for every turn that the caster maintains his Concentration. After the spell ends, if the character is still alive, he takes no further damage but will only heal at the natural rate. The previous effects of the diseases (such as Hit Point loss) do not magically heal when the spell ceases, though the character is no longer considered infected.

In instances where several sorcerers are casting different Cause Disease spells, the effects on the victim can be horrifying to behold. Games Masters should feel free to convert mundane or magical diseases from other *RuneQuest* sourcebooks or invent their own. Technically the only limits to this spell are those imposed by the sorcerer's own imagination.

Nose Drip: For each turn the spell applies, the character is at -5% to all rolls. His nose runs and itches, while his eyes tear up and his skull pounds with a dull headache. This disease is never fatal.

Slow Rot: The victim's muscles ache and twitch in repeated minor tics as they magically decay over time. For every day the spell is in effect, the victim suffers -10%

to all rolls (to a maximum of -90% after nine days) and loses one Hit Point from a randomly determined location. When a Hit Location is reduced to zero Hit Points, it is considered rotted to the point of uselessness. Arms and legs must be amputated. Abdomens, chests and heads reaching zero result in the character's death.

Green Rot: The victim's skin turns an unhealthy green as corruption spreads through his blood and organs. The effects mimic those of Slow Rot, though the Hit Point loss affects two Hit Locations a day and the character suffers double the penalty on all rolls involving CHA as his skin appears gangrenous in many places.


Boneless Death: The victim's bones become holed and eroded in a short space of time with this magical disease. For every minute the disease is active, the victim suffers a cumulative -1% to all rolls. With each -10% suffered, the character takes 1D4-1 damage to a random location. When a Hit Location is reduced to zero Hit Points, the bones are eroded to the point of uselessness. Arms and legs must be amputated. Abdomens, chests and heads reaching zero result in the character's death.

Red Plague: The victim's skin breaks out in pus-filled sores and infections all over. His skin begins to slough off in chunks. For every turn the disease wreaks through his body, the character suffers 1D4 damage to three random Hit Locations. When a Hit Location is reduced to zero Hit Points, the skin is completely sloughed off, revealing bare, bloody tissue underneath. Arms and legs must be amputated. Abdomens, chests and heads reaching zero result in the character's death.

Black Plague: The effects of the Black Plague mimic those of the Red Plague, except the sores are black and stinking with rot, inflicting 1D6 to four random Hit Locations per turn.

Cause Disease

Magnitude	Example Disease
1-2	Nose Drip
3-4	Slow Rot
5-6	Green Rot
7-8	Boneless Death
9-10	Red Plague
11+	Black Plague



OF SHEEL & NING

Ten arm lengths behind him, in the mouth of an alleyway darker than the Dark Plaza would have been without its new commercial moon, Fafhrd dimly made out two robed and deeply cowed figures poised side by side.

One cowl held darkness absolute. Even the face of a Negro from Klesh might have been expected to shoot ghostly bronze gleams. But here there were none.

In the other cowl there nested seven very faint pale greenish glows. They moved restlessly, sometimes circling each other, swinging mazily. Sometimes one of the seven horizontally oval gleams would glow a little brighter, seemingly as it moved forward toward the mouth of the cowl – or a little darker, as it drew back.

— Bazaar of the Bizarre

Sheelba and Ningauble

Many of Nehwon's inhuman denizens defy conventional explanation. Principal among this confusing list of creatures and beasts are the two sentient and intelligent, inordinately powerful, apparently alien sorcerers that go by the eerie titles Sheelba of the Eyeless face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

These wizards serve as the occasional patrons of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, summoning them to perform specific and strange tasks. In return, they serve as sometime advisors, though neither wizard is known for a forthcoming and forthright nature.

Dealing with the Magicians

Games Masters will probably wish to use Ningauble and Sheelba in similar roles to the ones they performed in the *Swords* stories. After an initial period of mysterious warnings and riddles, the magicians could become

patrons, even mentors, upon which many adventures can be founded. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser have agreed to serve their respective wizardly mentors for three months of every year, in return for guidance, wisdom and the occasional magical assistance.

A similar arrangement could work wonders for any campaign, especially if the players are fans of the source material and enjoy the chance to interact with the enigmatic and strange magician duo. The relationship between Sheel, Ning and an adventuring group is likely to begin one of two ways. Firstly, the characters could stumble on one of the wizards by chance – though they were probably 'allowed' to stumble on the wizard in question, since both Sheelba and Ningauble have the power to remain hidden easily enough. In this case, the characters have not been summoned, but the magicians have allowed themselves to be seen in order to speak with the adventurers.

The second possibility is that which Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser faced. Both Sheelba and Ningauble appear to the characters separately, clearly marking their interest in the adventurers and predicting future meetings.

Whichever way the Games Master chooses, the opportunity is there to deliver confusing riddles or eerie prophecies that will come true in the future, perhaps in some unpredictable form.

The Deal

To truly become the wards (of sorts) of these magicians, the characters will first need to agree to a deal. This deal will almost certainly involve service in return for help in something notable and unusual that plagues the characters. Enemies that cannot be defeated, problems of the soul, the sorrow over a dead lover – characters going to Sheelba and Ningauble with problems of this magnitude are ripe for recruitment into service. The price to be paid is several months of service each year.

Fafhrd and the Mouser were given directions to the Shadowland in order to speak with their slain loves, Ivrian and Vlana, in return for their service. They were

of sheel and ning

GAMES MASTER NOTE: Sheelba's Pronoun

Sheelba of the Eyeless Face is described alternately as male and female, with his or her actual gender being up for some debate among Leiber's fans and readers. Proof of either assumption is understandably impossible to come by without seeing underneath the wizard's robe, though it is known that Sheelba possesses a deep and gruff voice which is the only outward suggestion of gender.

This book goes with the assumption that both Ningauble and Sheelba are male. In the majority of the *Swords* tales where the two wizards turn up, Sheelba is referred to as 'he' and on several occasions described thusly by Ningauble himself, who is likelier than anyone on Nehwon to know the answer to such a question. Although Sheelba is described as a sorceress at a couple of points in the saga, in *The Price of Pain-Ease*, *Bazaar of the Bizarre* and *The Swords of Lankmar* (which feature the overwhelming majority of the two patrons' involvement in the saga) Sheelba is always referred to as male.

Ultimately it is down to Games Masters to decide which sex they prefer the great wizard to be, and perhaps down to players to decide which gender they perceive when they deal with Sheelba. In truth, it hardly matters which gender this marsh-dwelling warlock is. It never makes the cowed being any less abruptly spoken or more tolerant of foolishness.

tasked with bringing back Death's favourite mask while in the Shadowland, which they achieved – from a certain point of view.

A truly memorable and binding deal will seal the characters to Sheelba and Ningauble once and forever, allowing Games Masters to bring in these powerful characters as occasional givers of advice, loaners of magical artefacts and immensely useful Non-Player Characters that are capable of forwarding the plot like no others.

Ningauble of the Seven Eyes

A towering figure in a black robe and raised cowl, the Seven-Eyed One is an unnerving sight. Ningauble is tall, unnaturally so, reaching nine feet in height. He is massively broad-shouldered, with what appears to be a large (swollen?) paunch blooming out against the inside of his robe. Everything about this enigmatic being's appearance suggests an alien vastness concealed by mundane black cloth. He seems to prefer sitting to standing, when he receives visitors within his extensive network of caves, he is almost always found sitting either cross-legged, cross-tentacled, or in some other way hidden by the folds of his cloak.

Ningauble is either no fully longer human or never was in the first place. Though nothing of his body is ever revealed beyond his seven glowing eyes on their stalk-tentacles, those are evidence enough, coupled with the wizard's size and body shape, to make it obvious that something inhuman is under Ningauble's robe. The only outward aspect of humanity in Ningauble's demeanour is his voice, which is smooth, dripping with sincerity and sympathy, and something the great magician is clearly on of hearing, given the amount he talks.

The movement ceased under the cloak. Then out of the top of it sinuously writhed something that seemed to be a serpent, only in place of a head it bore an opalescent jewel with a dark central speck. Nevertheless, one might finally have judged it a serpent, were it not that it also resembled a thick-stalked exotic bloom. It restlessly turned this way and that until it pointed at the two strangers. Then it went rigid and the bulbous extremity seemed to glow more brightly. There came a low purring and five similar stalks twisted rapidly from under the hood and aligned themselves with their companion. Then the six black pupils dilated.

— Adept's Gambit

A Gift for Eloquence

'Oh My Gentle Son,' Ningauble responded, the piety in his voice now tinged with a certain clement disappointment, 'you force me once again to resort to hypothecating. Let us return to the supposition of this brave man whose whole universe is directly menaced and who counts his life a trifle and to the related supposition of this brave man's wise uncle, whose advice the brave man invariably follows—'

'The Devourers have set up shop in the Plaza of Dark Delights!' Sheelba interjected so abruptly and in such iron-harsh syllables that this time Fafhrd actually did start.

— Bazaar of the Bizarre

Ningauble rarely says anything in a hurry unless he is annoyed or pressed for time, and even these events are not usually enough for the Seven-Eyed One to limit his vocabulary by any noticeable measures. Usually, his discussions and recitations will go on for some time, hindered only by the interruptions of impatient listeners.

Much of the time, Ningauble speaks very kindly and with a fatherly tone. He refers to those he advises and employs as 'my children' and 'my sons.' Fafhrd, clearly a favourite of Ningauble, was often referred to as his 'Gentle Son.' Whether out of genuine respect or ironic admiration, Fafhrd and the Mouser occasionally referred to wise, ragged-robed Ningauble as 'Father' which seemed to please the strange wizard. The short form of his name, Ning, is often used by Fafhrd when talking of his wizardly mentor.

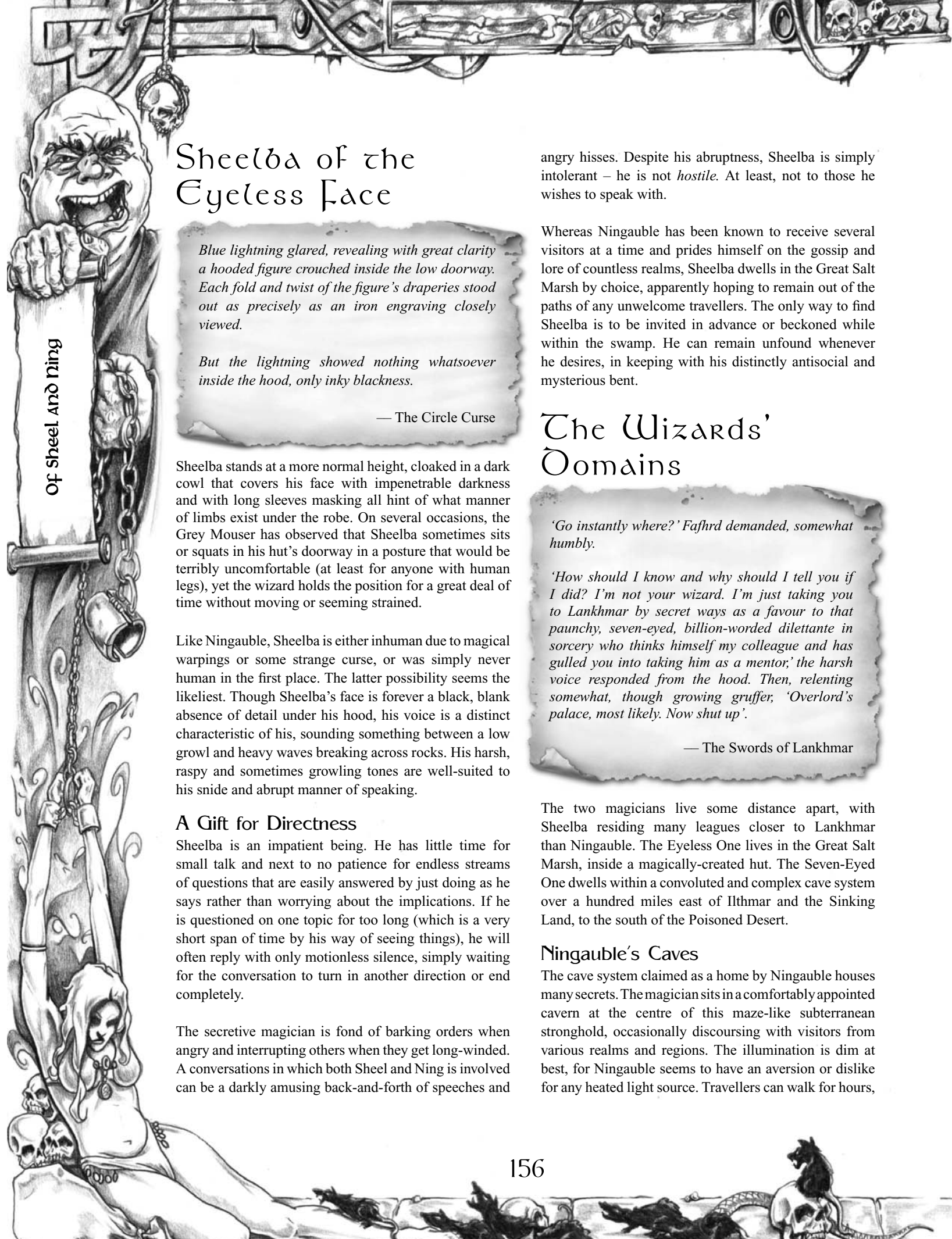
The magician endures good-natured (and less pleasant) jests made about his long-windedness with friendly sarcasm, often feigning an air of offence for his own humorous purposes. On more than one occasion when interrupted by Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, Ningauble has referred to them as 'Tramplers of Beautiful Phrases' and 'Mutilators of Rhetoric.' Admittedly, in instances such as these when Ningauble finds himself repeatedly

interrupted, it can be difficult to determine whether he is truly and subtly vexed or merely being gently mocking. His garrulousness is unsurprising in one nicknamed the 'Gossiper of the Gods.' Ningauble makes a point of seeking information from across Nehwon, whether it seems important to others or not. More than this, the wizard keeps abreast of the goings-on in many other planes of existence as well. While Ning is very fond of Nehwon, perhaps even considering it is favourite world, it is clear to any that know him that Ningauble knows the lore of other realities the way mere mortals know of cities and nations that are foreign to them. It is this eerie ability to delve into the truths of other worlds with such a casual attitude that adds to Ningauble's mystery and frightening air of power. Even if the being himself is charming, his power is intimidating to any who stop to consider it.



of sheel and ning





Sheelba of the Eyeless Face

Blue lightning glared, revealing with great clarity a hooded figure crouched inside the low doorway. Each fold and twist of the figure's draperies stood out as precisely as an iron engraving closely viewed.

But the lightning showed nothing whatsoever inside the hood, only inky blackness.

— The Circle Curse

Sheelba stands at a more normal height, cloaked in a dark cowl that covers his face with impenetrable darkness and with long sleeves masking all hint of what manner of limbs exist under the robe. On several occasions, the Grey Mouser has observed that Sheelba sometimes sits or squats in his hut's doorway in a posture that would be terribly uncomfortable (at least for anyone with human legs), yet the wizard holds the position for a great deal of time without moving or seeming strained.

Like Ningauble, Sheelba is either inhuman due to magical warpings or some strange curse, or was simply never human in the first place. The latter possibility seems the likeliest. Though Sheelba's face is forever a black, blank absence of detail under his hood, his voice is a distinct characteristic of his, sounding something between a low growl and heavy waves breaking across rocks. His harsh, raspy and sometimes growling tones are well-suited to his snide and abrupt manner of speaking.

A Gift for Directness

Sheelba is an impatient being. He has little time for small talk and next to no patience for endless streams of questions that are easily answered by just doing as he says rather than worrying about the implications. If he is questioned on one topic for too long (which is a very short span of time by his way of seeing things), he will often reply with only motionless silence, simply waiting for the conversation to turn in another direction or end completely.

The secretive magician is fond of barking orders when angry and interrupting others when they get long-winded. A conversations in which both Sheel and Ning is involved can be a darkly amusing back-and-forth of speeches and

angry hisses. Despite his abruptness, Sheelba is simply intolerant – he is not *hostile*. At least, not to those he wishes to speak with.

Whereas Ningauble has been known to receive several visitors at a time and prides himself on the gossip and lore of countless realms, Sheelba dwells in the Great Salt Marsh by choice, apparently hoping to remain out of the paths of any unwelcome travellers. The only way to find Sheelba is to be invited in advance or beckoned while within the swamp. He can remain unfound whenever he desires, in keeping with his distinctly antisocial and mysterious bent.

The Wizards' Domains

'Go instantly where?' Fafhrd demanded, somewhat humbly.

'How should I know and why should I tell you if I did? I'm not your wizard. I'm just taking you to Lankhmar by secret ways as a favour to that paunchy, seven-eyed, billion-worded dilettante in sorcery who thinks himself my colleague and has gulled you into taking him as a mentor,' the harsh voice responded from the hood. Then, relenting somewhat, though growing gruffer, 'Overlord's palace, most likely. Now shut up'.

— The Swords of Lankhmar

The two magicians live some distance apart, with Sheelba residing many leagues closer to Lankhmar than Ningauble. The Eyeless One lives in the Great Salt Marsh, inside a magically-created hut. The Seven-Eyed One dwells within a convoluted and complex cave system over a hundred miles east of Ilthmar and the Sinking Land, to the south of the Poisoned Desert.

Ningauble's Caves

The cave system claimed as a home by Ningauble houses many secrets. The magician sits in a comfortably appointed cavern at the centre of this maze-like subterranean stronghold, occasionally discoursing with visitors from various realms and regions. The illumination is dim at best, for Ningauble seems to have an aversion or dislike for any heated light source. Travellers can walk for hours,

The coolth of the hidden-mouthed rocky tunnel leading to Ningauble's deep abode was most welcome to men weary, dry and powdered with fine sand. Fafhrd, being the more knowledgeable of Ningauble and his mazy lair, led the way, hands groping above and before him for stalactites and sharp rock edges which might inflict grievous head-bashings and other wounds. Ningauble did not approve the use by others of torch or candle in his realm.

— The Wrong Branch

even days, in the pitch darkness and still never find anything or anyone more noteworthy than empty tunnels and silent rock formations. If Ningauble wishes to be found, those entering his caves will eventually find him. If he wishes to remain unseen, intruders will either find themselves back outside after a long walk underground or will simply never leave at all.

The great wizard has collected many ancient magical treasures in his unnaturally long life, all of which he stores close by in his caves. However, even mythic artefacts like the Cloak of Invisibility are lesser wonders within Ning's caves. The real noteworthy power of the wizard's lair resides in the myriad tunnels that lead off into the stony bowels of Nehwon...and beyond.

Dozens or hundreds, perhaps thousands or tens of thousands of the passageways in Ningauble's dark caves wind deeper into the earth and end in magical gateways. These portals are subtle things, not marked by flashing sorcery or obvious magical energies. A traveller may follow a tunnel to its conclusion, finally emerging back into the outside world to find he is no longer in Nehwon. The caves lead to an unknown number of other worlds. In the *Swords* story *Adept's Gambit*, Fafhrd and the Mouser take the wrong branch of a tunnel and walked out of the caves in our own world, only a century after Alexander the Great's conquest of most of the known world.

More than simple travel routes, it seems the journey alters the minds of travellers (at least, those unguarded by powerful sorcerous means) and reshapes their knowledge, memories, even their comprehension of language, to match the local norms. All recollection of Nehwon becomes a hazy dream-memory, while memories of living in the new world become utterly real.

It is believed that Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser embarked on many of these cross-realm journeys, adventuring in dozens of realms over the course of their lives. Only one is detailed in the *Swords* saga: their travels in Tyre deep in the history of our own world, in the story *The Adept's Gambit*. It is said that although Nehwon faded from their waking memories, it was always still their homeland and always drew them back.

A Word of Caution

Games Masters are presented with an incredible opportunity here, though it will not be to every player's taste or to every campaign's theme. Ningauble's caves have the potential to open up endless other worlds in which to explore and find adventure, with tunnels terminating in any fantasy or historical setting the Games Master desires. Obviously, this can be an excellent way to have *Lankhmar* characters interact with characters, plots, places and monsters of other *RuneQuest* settings.

This can be tricky to plan out and get right. To have a character journey to other realms is a noted (if rare) aspect of the source material and provides a great deal of variety and new challenges. Ultimately, however, the *Swords* tales are not a guide to *Sword & Sorcery* inter-planar explorers. Games Masters wishing to focus on the thematic aspects of the setting should take a word of caution regarding keeping reality-hopping through Ningauble's caves a rare occurrence. If something as magnificent and mind-straining as *this* becomes mundane, little else in Nehwon is likely to impress the players.

Still, all that said, maybe a few years of adventures in Ancient Egypt, Medieval Europe or even *Glorantha* will be a great deal of fun for some groups. As always, the trick is to find a balance between what the different players want before altering the campaign in hugely-significant ways. If the players have turned up to enjoy a gritty low-magic romp through Leiber's world, fighting their way through hordes of beastmen in *Glorantha* might clash with their expectations.

Another potential use for Ningauble's caves is the appearance of people or beings from other realities, which need either helping back to their own realm or destroying before they can do any more damage to the characters in Nehwon. Extraplanar creatures are absolutely part of the *Swords* tales, and both Ningauble and Sheelba enlist mortal aids to help drive the intruders from Nehwon. The story arc potential

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for characters returning a lost person to his own realm or banishing an unknown monster back to its home plane can be extremely rewarding. Ningauble might even require the characters to venture to the other world themselves, seeking artefacts or components required for demon-exorcism or monster-banishing.

Sheelba's Hut

Sheelba's hut was a black dome about as big as the closet-tree bower in which the Mouser had last evening endured ecstasy and attempted assignation. It stood above the Marsh on five crooked poles or legs, four spaced evenly around its rim, the fifth central. Each leg was footed with a round plate as big as a cutlassman's shield, concave upward, and apparently envenomed, for ringing each was a small collection of corpses of the Marsh's deadly fauna.

— The Swords of Lankmar

The possibility of getting lost in the surroundings of Sheelba's home is even likelier than it is stumbling around in Ningauble's caves. The Great Salt Marsh presents an incredible ward around the swamp-wizard's hut, while the house itself is not without defences.

Sheelba's hut stands on five wooden pole-legs, which have the unnerving ability to walk (at a wobbling, bone-jarringly speedy rate of knots) on the wizard's command. Each of these pole-legs, which feature knee-bends halfway down, is coated in some kind of invisible – and probably magical – poison. Games Masters can draw up stats for this enchanted venom to see if it can be resisted by characters, but the pile of dead animals at the bottom and common sense dictates that if Sheelba wants something or someone dead, it will probably end up dead. The poison is lethal on contact and woe betide any character foolish enough to examine the hut's legs and dead animals up close. If Sheelba is fond of a character or finds him useful as a servant, the magician is likely to warn the adventurer to be careful. If the character holds no particular place in Sheelba's regard, a warning is unlikely. The arch-wizard will probably emit a throaty, harsh chuckle as the character dies, too.

In most aspects, the two magicians seem equal in power. In regards to their homes, an apparent imbalance is evident. Ningauble's caves offer transportation to other



worlds, while Sheelba's marsh hut has only the ability to walk through the swamp and eliminate any being that touches its pole-legs. However, Sheelba does possess his own magic artefacts, gathered over countless decades, with a collection that almost certainly rivals his counterpart's. The Blindfold of True Seeing is the most famous example of this.

If an adventuring group is in a position to deal with both magicians, Games Masters might find that characters prefer to go to Ningauble over Sheelba because Ningauble is friendlier and his domain seems to hold wonders of more impressive power – at least when compared to a hut on stilts in a swamp. There are three ways to combat this, if Games Masters prefer to have characters pay both wizards equal respect.

The first is to remember that Sheelba and Ningauble both offer similar advice of similar insight and accuracy and rewards for tasks performed. Sheelba might take only a few minutes to explain in a cracked voice what latest event has befallen the characters, and Ningauble might use a hundred metaphors and take several hours, but at the end of the meeting, the information gleaned should be roughly the same, or at least of the same value. Despite his humbler home, Sheelba is not stupider than Ningauble.

The second way is to engineer a situation where both wizards reveal half of what the players need to know. It is likely that neither archimage does this purely for his own amusement, though that can never be ruled out with either of these two, especially if they are trying to teach the characters a lesson. However, such a situation is probably a matter of each magician only knowing half of the answer to a problem. Ningauble is likely to sling flowery prose and many 'Gentle Sons' at the characters when making his point. Sheelba will just tell them what they need to know, perhaps mildly berating them for not realising it themselves. Either way, the characters have to visit both wizards for the full story and will have probably encountered some excitement on the way.

The third and final solution is the easiest and probably the most obvious. Sheelba, dwelling in the Great Salt Marsh, lives right next to Lankhmar. Ningauble lives about a week's ride away, through or around the Marsh, over the unpredictable Sinking Land and several days to the east. If the characters need an answer fast, they are likely to head for the closest of their two mentors, even if he is a crotchety and waspish being at times.

Questing for Sheelba and Ningauble

When Sheel and Ning wish to contact their 'allies' the characters, they will rarely appear in the flesh. Ningauble especially is reluctant to leave his caves for anything less than world-dire reasons, though Sheelba is hardly a keen traveller either. This means that their primary method of initial communication takes the form of notes which appear to the characters through magical means: delivered by bat or bird or simply appearing on the table of inn-rooms while a character sleeps. Sheelba's notes are usually short and to the point, naming a meeting place and a time to be there. These are signed by a blank oval – Sheelba's sigil. Ningauble's often feature a riddle that a character must solve just to work out where or when he is supposed to meet his loquacious patron. These are signed by a seven-armed swastika – one of Ningauble's personal runes.

On the rare occasions that either magician ventures away from his home to meet the characters, it is because a great threat looms over the characters themselves or over

all of Nehwon. Neither wizard seems to care overmuch about any particular nation or city, but the fate of the world concerns them a great deal, as do the lives of their servants.

Whether the characters are summoned or met in person, the results are likely to be the same: the magicians want something done, and as per the initial agreement, the characters are oath-bound to do it.

Demands

The demands made by both Sheelba and Ningauble are key ingredients in a campaign that features the wizards as mentors. The above quotation gives a good indication of the kinds of tasks the magicians set for their adventurous companions, while the *Swords* stories themselves deal with Fafhrd and the Mouser returning Death's mask to the magicians, and destroying the market shops of illusionist merchants that threaten all Nehwon with their magical wares.

Games Masters will be aware from these descriptions that few quests given out by Ningauble or Sheelba are straightforward. None are easy. Even the simple-sounding adventures will have hidden dangers that the magicians may or may not warn the characters about, depending on each sorcerer's mood at the time the quest is given. When setting tasks, Ning and Sheel will often require items that the characters will simply have no idea why a world-shakingly powerful magician could ever want. Most of the time, both magicians will not answer questions as to their reasoning, or will deflect them with questions of their own. If either wizard ever feels inclined to explain exactly why he wants (for example) 'three pearls collected from three separate seas, all under the light of the moon,' then it will likely be a simple and glib answer related to magic. Even with all his 'Gentle Sonning,' Ningauble can be a patronising character at the best of times. Sheelba rarely even hides it, which can be refreshing or plain sinister.

Mythology and folklore are excellent places to find inspiration for a Ning- or Sheelba-set adventure. These are relatively obvious, however, and may not appeal to some players. However, slaying dragons and rescuing princesses can seem like heavy-handed clichés for some groups. In this case, it can be a cunning idea to shake things up and make the expected outcome into something more...darkly humoured.

of sheel and ning

The 'dragon' could end up being The Dragon – a gladiator in Illik-Ving. If the princess part of the story bears truth, it could be that the gladiator won a Mingol slave as reward for his recent bouts, and the slave-girl is the captured daughter of a Mingol tribal chieftan. Turning things on their heads and surprising characters is part and parcel of surviving adventures in Nehwon. Players will need to get used to expecting the unexpected, especially where Ningauble and Sheelba are concerned.

A memorable adventure with few preconceived notions and endless variations is the quest for apparent 'spell components' required by either magician. Here the Mouser's examples in the quotation make for potential inspiration. Esoteric, odd and downright disgusting ingredients are all possibilities, with the hardest to obtain and most unusual being the components the longest adventures are framed around.

Loans

In the most dangerous quests the characters undertake on behalf of Sheel or Ning, either or both of the wizards might offer a magical artefact as a temporary gift to aid in the completion of the task. These are almost always incredibly powerful and useful magic items that would unbalance the game significantly if the characters held onto them after their current adventure.

For this reason, as well as reasons of the magicians' own, Games Masters should probably always make sure that the items return to Ningauble and Sheelba one way or the other. They stole the Blindfold of True Seeing and the Cloak of Invisibility right off Fafhrd as he stood planning the life he would lead with his new powers. It can be bitterly amusing to let characters believe they get to keep the artefacts, though ultimately they most likely will not. Games Masters should try not to be overly mean, at least.

Here are the two magic artefacts offered by the magicians in the *Swords* stories. Games Masters are obviously free to create their own. It is recommended that these items always 'beat' any other magical powers in terms of potency. They are the tokens of the most powerful magicians in the world, after all.

The Cloak of Invisibility

This magic item is little more than a long shred of rag, apparently worn and threadbare from many uses. The character drapes it around his neck or shoulders to activate its power.

System: Characters wearing the Cloak fall under its power without need of any roll. Any clothing and items in the character's hands are also invisible until the character drops or removes them. Picking anything back up once again renders it invisible. The character is perfectly visible to himself at all times.

Two circumstances mitigate the Cloak's effects. A sorcerer casting any detection spell capable of piercing invisibility will be able to see the character normally, as long as the spell reaches Magnitude 10 or higher. Secondly, any blood from an injury incurred while wearing the Cloak of Invisibility is visible. Allow any nearby people to take a Perception test at -30% in order to notice the strange appearance of blood drops.

The Blindfold of True Seeing

This artefact appears as a gossamer cobweb. It must be laid over the eyes like a true blindfold in order to activate it.

System: Characters wearing the Blindfold automatically pierce any magical illusion, no matter the Magnitude of the spell or the type of magic. The item even overrides the concealing power of the Cloak of Invisibility and other wondrous artefacts.

On the Outs

Lastly, it is well-known to those acquainted with Sheelba, Ningauble or both that the two wizards are often 'on the outs' with one another, to use their exact words. At the best of times, Sheel and Ning maintain a friendly rivalry where they trade insults through their servants but stay in contact with each other. On the whole it seems each of the wizards respects his distant counterpart.

Frequently it is not the best of times for Sheel and Ning. On these occasions, they ignore each other apart from relaying waspish criticisms to their PC agents – at least on the surface. Games Masters could weave a compelling campaign based on an adventuring group split by the sorcerous civil war, with all members unsure which side to take. Perhaps Sheelba and Ningauble actively work against one another during such times when the hate flows bitterest between them.

Fritz Leiber's **Lankhmar**

Dominating the Land of Lankhmar and crouching at the silty mouth of the River Hlal in a secure corner between the grainfields, the Great Salt Marsh and the Inner Sea is the massive-walled and mazy-alleyed metropolis of Lankhmar, thick with thieves and shaven priests, lean-framed magicians and fat-bellied merchants – Lankhmar the Imperishable, the City of the Black Toga.

– Introduction, *Swords Against Deviltry*

City of Thieves. City of Adventure. City of the Black Bones. City of Seven-Score Thousand Smokes. The Imperishable City.

Lankhmar. It is here that the dynamic heroes of Fritz Leiber's tales, Fafhrd and Gray Mouser, plied their trade and used as a base for their many adventures. Now you too can experience the thrill of adventure in a world populated by thieves, madmen and evil sorcerers.

Lankhmar provides everything you need to explore the world of Nehwon. Contained within are rules covering character creation, the unique creatures of the world and for black magic, against which the heroes Fafhrd and Grey Mouser were often in conflict. Packed full of detail it covers the city in detail with its major factions and individuals plus many of the locations found within the stories. The rest of the world is not neglected, from the frigid barrens of the Cold Waste to the grim, underground domain of Quarmall, the neighbouring lands are all covered allowing new heroes (or scoundrels) to seek their fortunes and create new legends beyond the city itself.

Follow in the footsteps of the two heroes and track down the fabulous treasures of half-forgotten myths and legends!

Welcome to Lankhmar!



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