

WARLOCK

9



THE WORLD TREE

WARLOCK

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FEAST HALLS OF THE NORTHLANDS

By Wolfgang Baur

Among all the northern folk, the feast halls and the long halls are a gathering place for entire jarldoms, families, and clans. The enormous shield-hung rafters, the roaring fire pits, and the long benches and tables are unlike the more genteel dining and drinking halls of Dornig or the south. Beyond their warmth and sense of community, they are places of boasting, song, and gossip—and quite frequently of challenges, table dances, and wild winter carousing when the snows are thick and there is little hope of travel until Freyr and Freya bring the spring.

Now then, a review of four famous halls: the **Golden Sky Hall** of the fire giants, the **Great Moss Hall** of the trollkin, **Järnhall** of the dwarves, and the **Ekollon Halle** of the ratatosk on the branches of Yggdrasil itself. While many claim to have drunk in the halls of Asgard with the valkyries, that is a tale for those whose travels have taken them beyond death to the glories of the afterlife and a struggle among the gods—that greatest hall deserves discussion another day.

Golden Sky Hall of the Fire Giants

Jotunheim and Thursrike are filled with many giantish settlements, from modest steadings to enormous cities built of stone and ancient timber. But sacred and beloved

among them is the Golden Sky Hall, a mountaintop hall that humans would never have thought to build and that dwarves would mock as indefensible by anyone other than giants. It stands on a mountaintop, built of a perfectly carved foundation of cyclopean stones in a white and pink granite, topped with beams of ironwood, ancient pine, and a roof of slate.

Within the hall, the fire giant jarl, Isen Brekssen, issues decrees and appoints his jarls and underlings to gather and strengthen the giant kingdoms. Loki is said to be a frequent visitor as is the fire giant wizard Auvindrias and many rune mages (including, perhaps surprisingly, some dwarves who are on good terms with the giants). The fire in the hearth is a peculiar one, called the First Flame and said to have been kept burning from the days when the blood and bones of Aurgelmir first made the world. This fire grants a powerful tempering to those who bathe in it, sometimes hardening their skin, sometimes granting visions or power over the runes, sometimes merely restoring health and a clear mind to the sick and the demented.

Naturally, the fire giants prefer to keep this fire to themselves, but often they pretend that the central bonfire is the First Flame and laugh uproariously when foolish visitors singe their hair and cloak by climbing into it. For the especially gullible, they then

offer a quaff of a fiery drink, a brandywine infused with flecks of gold to give it a fiery glitter; this, likewise, provides no magical benefit, but those who attempt to swallow the burning concoction do entertain the giants.

The First Flame is guarded at all times by a pack of hell hounds and is often protected by an **incinis elemental** as well (see *Creature Codex*), and only Jarl Isen the Proud grants his favored guards and close friends a fire bath. Non-giants who approach it are attacked; the giants enjoy showing their bit of primordial fire, but rarely do they allow any non-giant to touch it. Those who bathe in it for more than a minute grow reddish hair and beards and increase by a size category—in the most extreme cases, a humanoid who bathes in the First Flame is polymorphed into a fire giant of roughly similar features.

Great Moss Hall of the Trollkin

From the outside, the Great Moss Hall resembles an enormous boulder along the shore of a great fjord, covered with mosses, ferns, and a few scattered pines. However, it is also clearly a long hall in its overall shape, for it has three great pine doors bound with green copper and embellished with runes of remarkable power; all those who enter are profoundly moved to peace and goodwill, and any dueling, berserker rages, or even cutting insults are extremely rare within the hall (a DC 18 Wisdom save is required to attempt violence or insult within the hall). As a result, the moss hall is a popular



gathering place among the trollkin, even those who carry on ancient feuds or who have robbed, cheated, and lied their way into positions of power, for within the hall, they feel safe.

Originally built by trollkin shamans of Freyr and Freya, the Great Moss Hall is still a place of occasional ritual summonings, bindings, and great magical workings. The many shamans of the tribes and clans gather at summer solstice and at the spring and winter equinoxes to share their lore and to induct new members into their mysteries. On these rare nights, the Moss Hall also shows its remarkable acoustics; chants, songs, and invocations spoken within its stone walls echo and re-echo, gathering strength and (for those who know its secret workings) making permanent enchantments that might otherwise fade with the dawn.

As dawn approaches, a narrow bridge to the afterlife opens for ghosts, the walls of reality being somewhat thinned by the echoing chants. In the course of a night, several ghosts of famous trollkin may appear if their names are invoked and echoed by their descendants. More frequently, a banquet is laid out for one or more recently departed trollkin. Sometimes these spirits come to bid a final farewell to their clan, children, or spouse; sometimes, the offering remains undisturbed, and no spirit answers the call.

Rumor has it that a fourth entrance to the Great Moss Hall exists, either in the rafters and out through a hollow tree or down below the pebbled floor, through some trick of light and illusion into the nearby forests or to a narrow slip where a small ship can easily be moored for a quick escape. This is a place of ritual and yearly feasts led by trollkin shaman.

Järnhall of the Dwarves

A heaven for the dwarves and a place that heroes can tunnel to, though the greedy, the lazy, and the foolish will never find their way to it. Most days, the Järnhall is a place of ordinary meals and pleasant company among the dwarves of Stannasgard, but that changes on Volundag, the one day each week devoted to Volund, god of smiths and fire. On that feast night, the dwarves summon **keg golems** and toast their ancestors, sing songs of new deeds and old ballads, until midnight when the priest of Volund strikes the anvil in the closing rhythm. Then he calls out in the cadence of the Old High Dwarvish the name of one living person in the hall (almost always a full-grown dwarf but on rare occasions a child, a human, or even on one memorable night, a trollkin in deep disguise). That person's name is echoed by those feasting in the hall, and that person may ask one

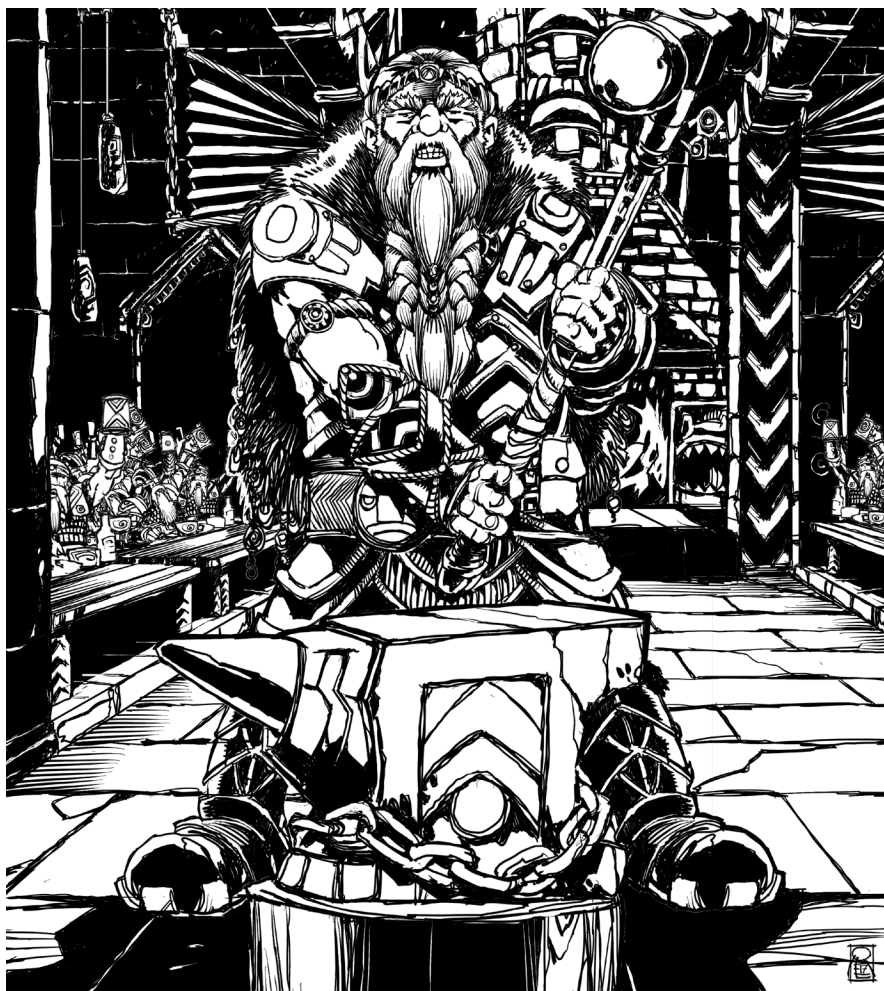
question of the Grindstone Oracle.

The oracle itself is a stone said to have been brought to the Järnhall by Volund himself, a bit of sandstone brought up from beneath the ocean, which speaks answers to questions once each day when it is turned by the priestess Marda Longfinger. The questions themselves reflect all of the aspirations, fears, and hopes of the Stannasgard dwarves: "Does Igrim still live?" or "Where have the ogres of the Greencap band gone?" or even "Why does my journeyman blade never keep its edge?" or "Who put a hole in my longship last winter?" The other priests and the clan elders are called about as often as the miners, smelters, cooks, and bellows-pumpers; the results are sometimes trite and sometimes momentous, but in all cases, the feast hall closes as soon as the answer is given, and any recriminations and consequences take place in just a few minutes after midnight.

The following day, the dwarves return to work to assist their siblings and their children, teaching the songs of the dwarves, passing on the lore of iron and the secrets of gold and silver, and weaving ring magic to give as gifts to various friends and cousins and elders of their halls. They dream of the next feast night, and the mysteries or trivialities that the Grindstone Oracle may next reveal, and the young dream of adventure while the elderly dream of days long past and the day that the anvil-priest called their name. For the custom of the Järnhall is that each dwarf who lives in Stannasgard is called by the oracle at least once in their lifetime, though none know if that call comes in youth or old age.

Ekkollon Halle

Clarahekkarina, the queen of the ratatosk of Yggdrasil, is the hostess and lady of one of the strangest feast halls of the planes, the



Ekollon Halle, which is literally cradled in the branches of Yggdrasil at the heart of the Great Branching where five major segments of the World Tree join together and where the ratatosk have their largest settlement—the planar town of Grenstad, home to more than 4,000 ratatosk and smaller numbers of aasimar, tieflings, ravenfolk, and planar humans. The feast hall there is a woven one with rafters and roof that use both living branches of Yggdrasil and bright green-and-silver leaves in its roof as well as its doors, benches, and some walls of carved

wood. The whole place smells of greenery and life, and the fires are enchanted ones of blue and yellow flames, unable to ignite wood or leaves but entirely hot enough to toast nuts, warm cider, and cook the richly flavored gryta (a stew) that the ratatosk eat with such abandon.

Most feasts at Ekollon Halle are held according to a lunar calendar, though seeing the moon through the branches of Yggdrasil requires a bit of arcane gift; ratatosk and many druids have no trouble with it, though most warriors and certain

non-planar creatures do not find the lunar orb to be at all obvious. In any case, three times per month, the hall resonates with large crowds of ratatosk chattering as well as the songs and accents of many friends, allies, merchants, and travelers—for Queen Clarahekkarina permits all creatures to attend so long as they fit through the (relatively modest) eight-foot-tall doors.

The feasts themselves are festivals of gossip, of mercantile excess with chests of gold and bolts of fine cloth and spices and jewelry and the finest nut flour all changing hands amid the crowd. The love of bargaining seems to consume some of them, for the ratatosk are nothing if not a gregarious, freewheeling bunch at the feasts. Trading for any item

of novelty can be quite fierce—but their curiosity and love of new things is quite short-lived. Any item brought to Ekollon in great amounts is seen as interesting but no longer worthy of swift pursuit.

The end of a feast at Ekollon arrives when the queen retires to her chambers with a group of favored maidservants and courtiers. Other ratatosk take this as a sign that matters are concluded; no more deals or bargains may be struck. The entire hall usually empties in an eyeblink, and aasimar and tieflings are sometimes bemused to find themselves suddenly in an empty hall with rattling bowls of cold gryta and a scattering of harried human servants. ☞

Feast Hall NPCs and Rumors

D20 RESULT

- 1 Strangers are rarely welcome at this hall; visitors are given shoddy food and weak ale, snubbed, and ignored unless they can earn respect with a round of poetry or a display of wit and riddling.
- 2 A contest of boasting and bragging (see flytting in the *Midgard Worldbook*) is underway. Any character of high Status in the party or any bard is invited to join in.
- 3 An enormous wolf or giant eagle enters the feast hall at speed, steals an huge roast from the high table, and leaves before anyone can stop it. The lady of the hall offers a reward to anyone who brings her the animal's head (but it may be a shapeshifter).
- 4 All the menfolk of the hall fall asleep as the women of the hall have put a sleeping draught in their cups. While the men sleep, the women perform a ritual involving a mystery of Boreas and the Snow Queen, summoning winter's power to themselves.
- 5 The lord of the hall proclaims his wish for a display of magic and sorcerous power—without harm coming to anyone in the hall. Is there an arcane caster who wishes a boon from the ruler? Then the performance had best be wondrous and memorable.
- 6 Several of the male warriors of the hall are harassing one of the younger serving wenches. A shieldmaiden with a single eye calls them pigs, and the whole feast seems about to turn into a violent brawl. Can a gentle word dissuade the drunken warriors, or must the heroes find a way to end a full-blown melee?
- 7 One of the lord's housecarls is in love with the lady of the hall, and the two are making no secret of it while the lord himself is away. Several of the lord's friends in the feast hall are deeply offended and storm out.
- 8 Two drunks begin insulting each other and decide to pick on one of the PCs. The more creatures that get involved, the angrier the lord of the hall becomes; those who wound or kill another guest are arrested and judged for breaking the laws of hospitality.

- 9 The food at the feast is suddenly filled with maggots and flies, and the drinks all turn to foul sludge. A necromancer or void mage has drawn all the life energy from the meal, infusing the substance with necrotic energies instead. Those who ate of it are sickened and nauseous, moving half speed and with disadvantage on all checks until they take a long rest.
- 10 A tiny **eridna** comes to the hall with a message, but it can barely be seen or heard among the larger folk. It asks for one of the PCs to deliver a scroll of very bad news to the lord or lady at the high table and departs before anyone questions it.
- 11 A guest at the feast is poisoned; he sat next to one of the PCs, who immediately falls under suspicion as a stranger and (perhaps) a person of low character, known for slaughtering monsters and civilized folk alike.
- 12 The fire in the hearth speaks with an elemental's voice, delivering a prophecy of doom and danger to all those in the hall. It speaks Draconic or another language that only one of the PCs understands; all others are simply frightened and confused.
- 13 An **alehouse drake** settles itself on one of the feast hall tables and claims a toll of food or drink from anyone seating themselves at the same table. This is charming at first, but the drake seems to grow in size far more quickly than anyone would expect, and in time, its weight cracks the table beneath it, its color shifts to a flame dragon orange, and it demands gold and jewels before leaving.
- 14 A band of trollkin raiders arrives, still bloody and in high spirits from robbing travelers on a nearby road. They share tales and bits of loot with the lord or lady of the hall in exchange for food and drink.
- 15 A valkyrie comes into the feast hall, her saddlebag bulging with chosen souls. She does not speak to anyone unless she is addressed with respect; the servants and housecarls give her meat and mead and leave her alone. Anyone pestering her with questions must pass a DC 15 Charisma check or be given a baleful glare and a warning. Those who do not heed her warning are struck by her spear and suffer a permanent loss of 1d8 hp as their fate is darkened by the valkyrie's dark touch.
- 16 A ravenfolk doom croaker comes and offers to read the wyrd of anyone who asks for a modest fee (3 gp). Those who accept gain advantage on their next roll if they are described as "victorious and blessed," or they gain a curse that haunts them for a week as their fate closes in on them in dreams and visions.
- 17 The lord and lady of the hall seem unusually agitated, and when the feast is half done, they call for a toast: "To the Immortal Void and all the powers of blood and darkness! Drink with us or be doomed to die this very night!" Their housecarls are alarmed, their priest is horrified, and everyone tries to figure out how and why they are possessed. (Doppelgangers have taken their place.)
- 18 A hill giant comes to the feast hall with a gift: an enormous salmon the size of a pony. The giant offers it for sale to the chef in exchange for a barrel of ale.
- 19 Two elves enter the hall, walk through it, and open a previously invisible doorway or portal at the far end. They step through and leave the door a tiny bit ajar. Will anyone dare to follow them to some mysterious road?
- 20 Loki is a visitor at the hall, and he seeks to convince the adventurers to help him in an act of mischief or petty thievery.

SKALDHOLM SHADOWSINGERS

by Sarah Madsen

The many skalds from Skaldholm form a loose network of informants for the Master of Thyles, but there are whispers of a secret organization within the schools: skalds that are as proficient in the art of espionage as they are in poetry and song. Known as shadowsingers, their primary medium is information and secrets, but they are known to slip a dagger between ribs when necessary. They report to the Master of Thyles himself, keeping him abreast of the events (both public and private) from around the Northlands and beyond.

Masters of insight and manipulation, the shadowsingers use every tool at their disposal in pursuit of their goals. Whether it's leveraging their position as skald to gain access to an exclusive event, singing the praises of their chosen courtiers to curry favor (or damning the reputation of those that displease them), or stealing into private royal chambers after a particularly rousing night of drunken revelry, they can convince their target to give up essential information, thank them for their patronage, and disappear into the shadows before anyone is the wiser.

Shadowsingers owe no loyalty to anyone but the Master of Thyles—not even to each other. Obviously, it's considered bad form to undermine a fellow shadowsinger (as they all serve the same master and pursue

the same goal), but they swear no oath of allegiance to one another, and there's no distinct chain of command. While some shadowsingers find a second family within the ranks, others hold no love for the other skalds and feel no duty to aid anyone other than their personal allies. This can lead to clashes within the organization, and members that are too disruptive or antagonistic to their fellow shadowsingers find themselves shunned—or they simply vanish altogether.

Shadowsinger Goals

The shadowsingers have only one codified objective: find the answer to the Riddle of the Forgotten Thing. Whereas other skalds relay rumors they hear during their travels, the shadowsingers seek out knowledge, following the slightest lead, tugging on delicate threads of information until they find the source. Their quest takes them the far corners of the Northlands and even farther into the other kingdoms of Midgard in an effort to uncover what was lost.

Beyond this primary goal, shadowsingers desire knowledge above all else. The more buried a secret, the deeper a Shadowsinger delves to uncover it. Knowledge is power; it can cement empires or topple dynasties. Other than delivering vital knowledge to the

Master of Thyles, what each Shadowsinger does with the information they discover is up to the individual—some use it for personal ends while others disseminate pertinent details to the masses—and there are factions within the organization that disagree with their role to play in that regard. Some whisper that this dispute will eventually erupt into a full-fledged schism while others claim the Master of Thyles will step in long before that happens.

Shadowsinger Ideals

All knowledge is worth having. Never let an opportunity to gather a secret or learn a story pass you by.

Make friends in high and low places. Nobility is only as powerful as its people.

Your mind is your greatest weapon. Wield your wits, words, and art as ruthlessly as your blade.

Notable Individuals

Brand Thundershield (Chaotic Good): A stout dwarf storyteller, Brand is boisterous and amiable, making friends in every long hall in the north. His booming laugh and broad smile hide a ruthless efficiency however. With a few rounds of mead and a stirring tale, he can whip a tavern into a raucous celebration or a roiling mob. He chafes at the mistreatment of others and the inequality in the classes and will often be found slipping a large amount of gold into a beggar's bowl or entertaining street urchins with no reward other than their smile.

Fira Wolfsdottir (Neutral Good): A Northlander, Fira defied expectations and became a skald rather than a warrior. Showing great skill with both lute and blade as a young woman, she spent her time wandering and adventuring before returning to Skaldholm to perfect her art: spinning epic poetry and song. Though the shadowsingers have no official leader, Fira (now in her early forties) is honored and respected by many, often mentoring younger members and offering wisdom to those who seek her out. Her once-fierce temper has mellowed to a low burn but will nonetheless flare when her ideals (or her protégés) are threatened.



Jenner Mirin (Neutral Evil): Jenner is a tiefling thespian and a master at lies and subterfuge. They use their charm and wiles to weasel their way into the confidences—and beds—of commoners and nobles alike. Jenner’s desire to find the answer to the Riddle is motivated purely by self-interest, and they happily claim any perks that come with being a beloved skald, accepting gifts of coin, ale, and adoration in equal measure. No altruism is found within Jenner—every action is calculated to reap the greatest reward, though occasionally that means doing “selfless” good in order to make the right impression on the right person.

Notable Locations

Baldur’s Barrel: Within the heart of Skaldholm is a tavern, unremarkable by most standards. The placard above the door features a simple mug overflowing with mead and foam. Despite its benign appearance, the Barrel is owned by Oda, a former Shadowsinger, and is a safe haven for any skalds who need a meal, lodging, or a quiet place to broker a deal. Every night, a talented performer can be found on its small stage, entralling the packed room, and every performer is given the lion’s share of tips for the evening, as Oda is well aware of why her patrons frequent her tables.

The Retreat: A lodge nestled along the coast with beautiful views and clusters of relaxing hot springs, the Retreat has become a favored vacationing spot for scholars and nobles of Skaldholm alike. The perfect place to rub elbows with the elite, debate with master orators, and (of course) watch and listen for any rumors, the Retreat features suites of rooms for rent (at exorbitant prices, naturally), delicious meals, and top-shelf drink to be

enjoyed in their spacious dining hall or while lounging in the healing waters of the springs. The Retreat is spoken of by the lower classes with a mix of derision and longing—many consider it frivolous and wastefully overpriced, though few would turn down the chance to take advantage of its amenities.

The Skaldic Schools: There are numerous schools within Skaldholm that dedicate themselves to the study of the arts and scholarship. Each believes, of course, that their skalds are the most talented, their scholars the wisest, and their methods the truest, and the resulting feuds between them would fill a bard’s book with legends and keep the washerwomen gossiping through the cold of winter. Shadowsingers often start their studies at one of the schools and are scouted by another shadowsinger who sees their potential. Once a student is marked as a possible recruit, the shadowsinger cultivates their new apprentice under the guise of legitimate mentorship within one of said schools. Only the teacher and the student—and possibly other shadowsingers—know the truth of what is being taught.

Character Options

The following options are available for shadowsingers PCs.

SHADOWSINGER APPRENTICE (BACKGROUND OPTION)

For those players interested in playing a shadowsinger, we suggest using the Entertainer background or the Criminal (Spy variant) and substituting the traits from the charts below as needed.

Shadowsingers are more than just entertainers, and their personality traits and motivations reflect that. Their demeanors are as varied and unpredictable as a

D8 PERSONALITY TRAIT

- 1 I'm warm and friendly; I've never met anyone I couldn't charm or encountered any conflict I couldn't talk my way out of.
- 2 I'm extremely competitive; I crave attention and praise and take it as a personal slight when others outmatch me.
- 3 Predictability and stagnation are the death of relevance, so I'm constantly seeking out new routines to add to my repertoire.
- 4 Subtlety is the key to manipulation; I like to leave my marks unaware of the damage I've done to their purse or their reputation until I'm safely out of town.
- 5 I have an insatiable curiosity and desire for knowledge, which often gets me in trouble.
- 6 I'm the best at what I do and cannot be convinced otherwise.
- 7 I enjoy a good verbal sparring. Matching wits with another is more exhilarating than any battle.
- 8 I assume personalities as easily as I change hats and become whatever is best suited for each situation. No one knows the true me, and I like it that way.

D6 IDEAL

- 1 **Equality** Knowledge is the great equalizer; the uniformed are easily oppressed and the ignorant easily manipulated. I do what I do to help those less fortunate than me. (**Good**)
- 2 **Loyalty** I answer to my betters. Any knowledge I gather is for them to use as they see fit. (**Lawful**)
- 3 **Change** Power structures are meant to be challenged, and with the knowledge I gather, I can shake society to its very foundation and make way for something new. (**Chaotic**)
- 4 **Personal Gain** I will search out the answer to the Riddle of the Forgotten Thing, but anything else I learn during my travels is fair game, and I'll gladly sell it to the highest bidder. (**Evil**)
- 5 **Knowledge** Information is neither good nor evil but is just another form of power. I am the only one I trust to wield it. (**Neutral**)
- 6 **Influence** The more sway I have within society, high or low, the easier it is to accomplish my goals without getting my own hands dirty. (**Any**)



D6 BOND

- 1 I have an unwavering loyalty to the Master of Thyles and my fellow shadowsingers and will answer their call anytime, regardless of my own goals.
- 2 Intrigue and espionage are the world's greatest game, and I live to play.
- 3 My friends who stand by my side are more valuable than any secret.
- 4 The Riddle of the Forgotten Thing drives me in everything I do. I'm determined to be the one to find the answer and secure my place in history.
- 5 A fellow shadowsinger poached a valuable secret out from under me, and now I'm intent on seeing them brought low.
- 6 I missed a vital piece of information that led to the death of someone I loved. I'm terrified of making the same mistake again.

D6 FLAW

- 1 My ego is delicate and easily bruised, and I lash out at others when it's injured.
- 2 I sometimes get so wrapped up in the game that I miss the obvious, even when it's staring me in the face.
- 3 Being surrounded by skilled deceivers has left me distrustful of others. I find it hard to get close to anyone.
- 4 I'm single-minded when following a lead, plowing ahead despite the danger to myself or my friends.
- 5 I can't resist the opportunity to show off my skills and will rise to any challenge.
- 6 I was clumsy in an attempt to woo someone influential, and now they have it out for me. I'm probably not as charming as I think I am.

northern storm, from calm and steady to tempestuous and boastful.

BARD COLLEGE: COLLEGE OF SHADOWS

Shadowsingers undergo careful training before they're sent out into the world. Skilled in both music and manipulation, they're the perfect blend of charm and cunning. The tricks they learn in their tutelage make them ideal for the subtle work of coaxing out secrets, entrancing audiences, and dazzling the minds of their chosen targets.

Bonus Proficiencies: Starting at 3rd level, you gain proficiency with three skills of your choice.

Mantle of Shadows: Starting at 3rd level, you can spend an action to twist the shadows around you for 1 minute or until your concentration ends. For the duration, you gain advantage on stealth checks and you gain the benefits of three-quarters cover as the shadows themselves obscure your passing.

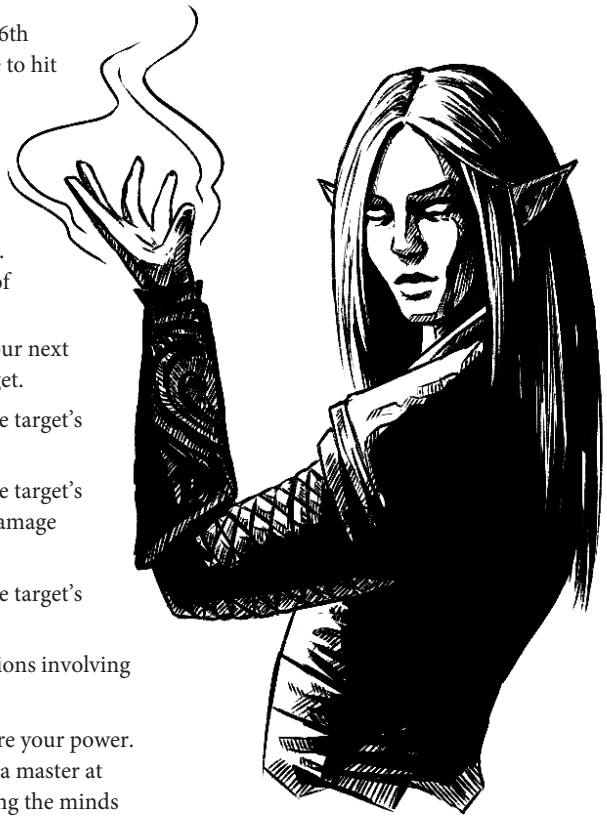
Lover's Haste: Starting at 3rd level, you can dash as a bonus action while under the effects of Mantle of Shadows.

Cunning Insight: Starting at 6th level, you know exactly where to hit your enemies, so it will hurt the most. You spend an action focusing on a target after which the target must make a Wisdom Saving Throw vs. your Spell Save DC. On a failed save, choose one of the following:

- You gain advantage on your next attack roll against the target.
- You gain knowledge of the target's damage vulnerabilities.
- You gain knowledge of the target's damage resistances and damage immunities.
- You gain knowledge of the target's condition immunities.
- You see through any illusions involving the target.

Shadowsinger: Your words are your power. Starting at 14th level, you are a master at weaving stories and influencing the minds of your audience. With the power of one performance, you can make or break someone's reputation. You spend at least 1 minute performing, relaying a tale through song, poetry, play, or other medium. At the end of your performance, choose a number of humanoids who witnessed the entire performance, up to a number of 1 plus your Charisma modifier. Each target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw vs. your spell save DC. On a failed save, the target(s) suffers one of the following:

- They believe the tale you told is truth and will tell others the tale as if it were truth, even under magical compulsion.
- They believe *someone* in the room knows their darkest secret, and they are at disadvantage on all Charisma,



Wisdom, and Intelligence ability checks and saving throws for the next hour as they are distracted and overcome by paranoia.

- They become convinced that you (or one of your allies if you choose to sing the praises of another) are a fearsome opponent. For the next minute, they are afraid of you (or your ally). In addition, you (or your ally) gain advantage on all attack rolls against them for the duration.

Remove curse or greater restoration ends the effects of this feature. Once you use this feature, you may not use it again until you complete a short or long rest. ☞

AMID THE LEAVES OF YGGDRASIL

by Richard Green

Author's Note: Parts of this article are taken from the infamous Nine Chthonic Papyri of Heknusret the Temerarious, disgraced former member of the Honorable Society of Portal Wizards. Heknusret traveled to many different times, places, and worlds through the Red Portals and meticulously recorded what he found there.

My visit to Yggdrasil, the World Ash, came about by sheer happenstance. I had ventured into the Crescent Desert to visit the ruined donjon of Shabhenti Djalit, self-styled “Master of Worlds,” to investigate rumors of a long-forgotten Red Portal. Unfortunately, the fortress had fallen into the hands of diabolical slavers (see *Warlock Lair #14: The Infernal Salt Pits*), and I was forced to abort my expedition. While relaxing at the lush Mentayni Oasis, which lies at the junction of the Howler’s Road and a much weaker ley line known as the Path of Salt, my scholarly curiosity was piqued by a huge date palm, clearly over a hundred years old. Sure enough, divination magic revealed that the tree’s great trunk held a Red Portal, accessible to anyone eating its fruit. Taking a bite from a juicy date, I stepped boldly forward into the trunk . . .

I found myself standing on the branch of an ash tree of indeterminate but truly vast size. Its thick bark was silvery-grey in color and rough to the touch while shimmering blue-green oval-shaped leaves grew from its many branches. The wide branch I was

standing on stretched off into the distance before and behind me as far as my eyes could see.

As I pondered which way to go, I noticed a small squirrel-like creature with sleek reddish fur and a pair of tiny tusks had appeared—a **ratatosk** (see *Tome of Beasts*). The little fellow regarded me curiously and began chattering rapidly in the tongue of the angels, asking who I was, from whence I had come, and whether I had anything tasty to eat. The tiny celestial was named Orrin Bristletail. Delighted with the succulent dates I gave him, he would become my constant companion and guide as I wandered amid the leaves of Yggdrasil.

The World Ash

Ratatosks are insatiable gossips and love causing mischief by twisting the truth or sharing others’ secrets, so what Orrin Bristletail revealed about Yggdrasil may not be entirely accurate. Nonetheless, much of what he told me was borne out by my own observations, so I am recording it here.

Yggdrasil, the World Ash, grew from a seed stolen from the gods Frey and Freya by Ratatosk, first of his kind, which he buried at the very center of the multiverse. The tree grew so tall and so broad that its branches and roots reached into all of the Nine Worlds, including our world of Midgard; Asgard, home of the Northern Gods; the Summer Lands of Alfheim; and the Underworld ruled by Loki's daughter, the dark goddess Hel.

Getting Around the World Ash

Navigating the twisting pathways along Yggdrasil's branches is far from easy, and I was glad to have Orrin as my guide, even if he did sometimes lead us *toward* trouble, rather than away from it . . .

The branches of Yggdrasil can be many miles in length, so reaching a particular destination usually takes several days on foot. Sometimes a quicker route may exist via a portal connecting two distant branches, but a traveler needs to know how to find it. Portals can appear as holes or simple wooden doors in the trunk or branch or as archways formed by entwined branches, and they are marked with the Eiwaz rune.

The vast network of paths is confusing enough to inexperienced planar travelers, but to make matters worse, it is constantly changing—new branches are discovered



while old ones die and break. Only the ravenfolk and the ratatosk seem to be able to keep track of which branch or doorway currently leads where, though the elves and valkyries know the major routes to the Summer Lands, Valhalla, and the Storm Court. Even with a guide, it is possible to get turned around and become lost as the branches twist and bend in the winds that blow through the tree.

Different parts of the tree have their own local gravity, so sometimes a traveler needs to walk along the underside of the branch or stride vertically up the central trunk. Some branches are treacherous and slippery underfoot, requiring a successful DC 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to navigate safely and avoid a painful fall of 2d4 damage

per 10 ft. to another branch or, worse, through a portal leading to a dangerous plane. Others seep sticky resin that acts as difficult terrain, hindering movement.

Inhabitants of Yggdrasil

Communities of ratatosk and ravenfolk are scattered throughout the tree. The ratatosk's larger cousins, the **ratatosk warlords** (see *Creature Codex*), build small watchtowers and sprawling tree cities among the branches, which provide protection and security for their smaller kin. These offer

travelers a safe place to spend the night as long as the overly suspicious guards can be persuaded to grant admittance. The leaders of the ratatosk meet at the fabled Squirrel Court of Yggdrasil (see below) inside the great tree's trunk; its precise location is a closely guarded secret.

The ravenfolk live in rookeries—ramshackle collections of individual nests, shops, shrines, and meeting places connected by bridges, walkways, and ladders. All manner of materials is used in the construction of rookeries, harvested from the tree itself and scavenged from places across the planes.

Travelers in the World Ash must also be wary of the wilder creatures that make their homes in its canopy. **Giant eagles** live in the upper part of the tree, offspring of the great eagle that keeps watch from the crown (see “The Eyrie” below). Lower down, the branches are home to **giant elk**, which nibble on the tree's evergreen leaves, and **giant boar**, which root out the tasty fungi growing on the bark. Both are dangerous if their meals are disturbed. At the bottom of the tree, fell creatures gnaw on the roots, including the terrible serpent-wyrm Nidhogg and its spawn, while the goat-legged **kallikantzaros** (see *Creature Codex*) try to saw through the trunk. Pathways leading to other realms and worlds are often warded by powerful guardians.

Magic on Yggdrasil

Yggdrasil powers certain types of magic. While they are among the branches of the World Ash, druids and clerics of the Northern Gods operate as if they were 1 level higher for the purposes of determining spell slots per spell level and spellcasting proficiency bonus. Characters who have learned the Eiwaz rune (see *Heroes Handbook*) via the Rune Knowledge feat can access its rune powers as if they were 1 level higher.

New Magic Item: Staff of the World Ash

Staff, rare (requires attunement by a bard, druid, ranger, or wizard)

This staff of silvery-grey ash has been cut from a branch of Yggdrasil and is carved with the Eiwaz rune. Ravenfolk and other dwellers in the World Ash create these staves to more easily travel its planar pathways.

You can perfectly recall any path you have traveled while holding this staff.

By striking the staff on the ground or against a branch of Yggdrasil as a bonus action, you can transform it into a *shillelagh* (as the spell) for 1 minute.

The staff has 10 charges and regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend one or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells: *create or destroy water* (1 charge), *freedom of movement* (4 charges), *locate Red Portal** (3 charges), *purify food and drink* (1 charge), *speak with plants* (3 charges).

*see *Midgard Worldbook*

Perilous Pathways

As we wandered the World Ash, Orrin Bristletail chattered away about the planar pathways formed by its roots and branches and where each led. He mentioned the “Nine Worlds” repeatedly but didn’t name the same nine worlds twice. I came to the conclusion that this was merely a metaphor used by the ratatosk and the Northerners for what we in Nuria-Natal know to be the infinite planes of the multiverse.

Paths to Midgard

Where the branches of Yggdrasil reach into Midgard, they manifest as World Trees—great trees that act as nodes of divine power, revered by followers of the Northern Gods. As you travel along a pathway on Yggdrasil leading to one of the World Trees, its foliage and bark begin to take on the characteristics of its destination. So the bark of a branch leading to the enormous Winter Tree at Domovogrod (see *Midgard Worldbook*) gradually changes from silvery-grey to a rich, dark brown, and its blue-green oval leaves become the needles of a fir. This transformation helps reassure you that you are on the right path, though there is no clear border between Yggdrasil and Midgard. These pathways are often guarded. The route to the Winter Tree is plagued by a grove of tree-like **children of Yggdrasil** (see *Creature Codex*) while savage **lizardfolk** warriors haunt the path to the Black Cypress (see *Midgard Worldbook*), hunting for fresh heads to shrink and hang from its boughs.

One of Yggdrasil’s three mighty roots stretches into Jotunheim, Land of Giants, in Midgard’s Northlands where it is fed by the Well of Mimir. Here, Wotan cut out his eye and exchanged it for a drink from the well in order to gain great wisdom. The god’s eye is said to rest in the well to this day, alongside the head of the giant Mimir who was decapitated by the Vanir but still

watches over the well. PCs who can prove their worth to Tove Mimirsdottir, the **jotun giant** (see *Tome of Beasts*) guarding this mythical location, can gain the wisdom of the well—as long as they are prepared to surrender an eye to Mimir.

PLANAR PATHS

Yggdrasil’s other giant roots both reach into different planes. The second root ends at the Well of Urd in Asgard where the Aesir gather to consult the Norns, the three wise old women who oversee the destinies of gods and men. The Norns mix water from the well with earth and use the mud to repair any cracks that appear in the giant root. A company of **valkyries** (see *Tome of Beasts*) keeps uninvited mortals away from the well.

The third root leads to the dark world of Niflheim where the spring known as Hvergelmir feeds all the rivers of the world. Here, on the Corpse Shore, the terrible serpent-wyrm Nidhogg feasts on the bodies of murderers, adulterers, and oath breakers and gnaws at the roots of the tree. The most wicked of these men are spared being eaten and are cursed by Nidhogg instead. They become the **tveirherjar** (see *Creature Codex*) and are sent to Valhalla to fight the valkyries and corrupt the **einherjar** (see *Tome of Beasts*). When Ragnarok is at hand, Nidhogg and his foul spawn will chew through the roots, and Yggdrasil will fall.

The World Ash’s branches extend into a multitude of other planar locations. Klingedesh, Marketplace of the planes, can be accessed via the Thorn Gate, an archway of hundred-foot-tall ivory spines carved with arcane glyphs, which stands on a thick branch near the trunk. Sounds of eternal battle ring out on the well-trodden path to the halls of Valhalla. Brightly colored flowers and ivy grow on the leafy branch leading to the Summer Lands of the elves.

Planar flora (see *Creature Codex*) is commonly encountered where the boughs

connect with celestial or fiendish realms. Thorned sulfurlords guard the pathways to Muspelheim, Land of Flame, while alabaster trees and ecstatic blooms grow on branches leading to the heavenly planes, and devil boughs and execrable shrubs can be found on highways to the Eleven Hells.

Hook. A loved one has died from illness while the PCs were away adventuring. Clerical magic has failed to bring him or her back from the dead, so the heroes must travel the undead-haunted road known as the Helveg to Gnipa Cave. If they can sneak past Garm, the monstrous blood-stained hound who guards the entrance to the Underworld, they can appeal to the goddess Hel to release their loved one's soul.



SPAWN OF NIDHOGG

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 168 (16d12 + 64)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +8, Wis +5, Cha +4

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Draconic, Northern Tongue

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Stench of Death. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the spawn of Nidhogg must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the stench of any spawn of Nidhogg for one hour.

Legend's Scion (1/day). If the spawn of Nidhogg fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The spawn of Nidhogg makes three attacks—one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. Melee weapon attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 13 (3d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Claw. Melee weapon attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Breath of Decay (Recharge 5–6). The spawn of Nidhogg exhales foul black mist in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 52 (15d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Plant creatures and magical plants make the saving throw with disadvantage and take maximum damage. Nonmagical plants that are not creatures simply wither and die.

Coiled around the roots of the tree is a sinuous wyrm with greenish-black scales, a pointed tail, and a crocodilian mouth filled with sharp teeth. The creature reeks of the rotting corpses it's been feeding on.

The spawn of Nidhogg the Serpent-Wyrm dwell in the lower reaches of Yggdrasil and in the dark realm of Niflheim. Like their loathsome father, the spawn feast on the bodies of the dead washed up on the Corpse Shore and gnaw at the roots of the World Ash, hoping to bring about the great tree's death and the end of the Nine Worlds. Their breath is so foul that it causes plant life to wither and die.

Wondrous Locations

During my brief sojourn to Yggdrasil, it was only possible for Orrin Bristletail to escort me to a mere handful of its many notable landmarks. I have recorded details of the wondrous locations that we visited below.

THE EYRIE

At the top of the tree sits an eagle the size of a roc. No one knows the eagle's name—he keeps it to himself—but he sees much of what goes on in the Nine Worlds from his vantage point. A smaller **giant eagle** named Vedfolnir also watches from on top of the great eagle's head so that nothing is missed.

Ratatosk visit the eagles each morning and evening to find out the latest goings-on and to relay news from the lower branches and the roots of Yggdrasil to the two giant birds. The little creatures enjoy embellishing what they've heard in order to stir up trouble, and it's hard to know what the eagle truly saw without climbing to the top of the tree to ask him yourself. Sometimes, the great eagle gets so annoyed by what the ratatosk tell him others are saying about him that he threatens to deal with the slanderers first hand and has to be calmed down by Vedfolnir.

Hook. The ratatosk go too far and succeed in provoking the great eagle with their tittle-tattle. Furious, he leaves his perch and flies down to the Corpse Shore to confront Nidhogg. Vedfolnir wants to go after him and persuade him to come back, but who will keep watch over the Nine Worlds while both eagles are gone? The giant eagle is desperate—can the PCs be trusted to stand in? And if they do, what interesting things do they witness?

WOTAN'S GALLOWES

High in the branches of the tree is the sacred place where Wotan hung himself from Yggdrasil, wounded by a spear and without food or drink, for nine days and nights. At the end of his ordeal, the god screamed in agony as he pulled knowledge of rune magic from Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void.

A village of ravenfolk has grown up on the branches close to this holy site. Perched precariously in a crook of the tree, the rookery is a bewildering mishmash of

architectural styles and building materials and is home to around 100 ravenfolk, many of them doom croakers. When the wisest of these mystics die, their souls will hang from Wotan's Gallows for seven nights after which time an egg will appear in the place where they died. The departed huginn hatches from the egg, reincarnated into a new body. The souls appear as twinkling motes of light. A dozen or so can usually be seen hanging from the branches.

Hook. The PCs are hired to escort a pilgrim from the Northlands to Yggdrasil, so she can hang herself from Wotan's Gallows and learn the secrets of the runes. Brave PCs wishing to undertake the ordeal themselves must offer a gift to Dreamwhisper, the high doom croaker, a venerable huginn with feathers of pure white, save for a black ring around one eye – a sign of Wotan's favor. Dreamwhisper hops excitedly from one foot to the other while waiting to see what the PCs have brought him. This should be something shiny or glittery and preferably magic.

Each day the PC spends hanging from the tree, they must make a death save with advantage. Achieving three successes means the PC has survived the ordeal and gains one of the benefits below. Three failures means death. Once the ritual has begun, the doom croakers will not interrupt it, though the PC's companions can.

- Seek the wisdom of Wotan, gaining the answers to up to five questions as the *contact other plane spell* (no saving throw required).
- Gain the Rune Knowledge feat (see *Heroes Handbook*) and learn two runes, one of which must be Eiwaz.
- Gain the ability to cast the *speak with dead* spell once per day.

SQUIRREL COURT OF YGGDRASIL

We reached a small, unobtrusive knothole in the trunk of the tree. Orrin Bristletail scampered inside, gesturing for me to follow. I crawled on my hands and knees after him through the hollowed-out tunnels, taking care to keep him in sight. Eventually I heard a great cacophony up ahead as the passage opened out into a large chamber filled with chattering ratatosk . . .

In a secret location inside the trunk of the World Ash, guarded by ratatosk warlords, the leaders of the ratatosk hold court in a chamber large enough to accommodate hundreds of their kinfolk, all excitedly shouting out their contributions from balconies overlooking the council floor. The nine elders of the Squirrel Court—five females and four males—sit in a circle, listening to the latest news and gossip from across the planes, so they can determine who needs to know what, who will carry the message, and how far the truth should be bent. Matters before the court vary widely, ranging from messages from the gods themselves and dire portents witnessed by the eagle in the Eyrie to what really happened on the wedding night of Hosvir the Unlucky and Rosmunda, daughter of Halvar Flat-Nose.

Hook. The PCs have uncovered evidence that Loki and the Cult of Ragnarok have entered into a dark alliance with the Night Cauldron of Chernobog. Warnings need to be issued to the priests of the Northern Gods and the PCs travel to Yggdrasil to ask the ratatosk to get the word out, preferably without embellishment. As payment, the Squirrel Court demands nine golden acorns—one for each elder—to be taken from the Splendid Oak growing in the Summer Lands. A bold raid across the planes lies ahead. 8

PLANAR VOYAGERS

by Kelly Pawlik

The head of a fierce basilisk stares off to the horizon, carved upon the front of this wooden seagoing vessel, long and narrow. From serpentine snout to the ship's stern measures 54 feet, making it shorter than many other long ships. Its shallow draft allows it to navigate waters only three feet deep.

Magnificent Muck

Overlapping oak planks, riveted together with iron fastenings, create the hull of the long ship. The decking is comprised of removable planks. An assortment of shields is fastened along the length of the vessel, providing protection from the harsh wind and wild waves as well as physical attacks by individuals looking to lay siege to those onboard.

A green sail with golden depictions of two serpents twined around a lightning bolt is fastened to the large, rectangular-shaped mast. Oar ports with rotating covers

Muck?

In gambling, “muck” most often refers to the pile of discarded cards into which players may throw their folded hands, but it can also refer to a form of sleight of hand used to win a card game.

allowing them to seal out water line the length of the boat. Each member of the crew possesses a sea chest, which also acts as a rowing bench. The narrow bladed wooden oars are usually stowed, however, as the crew aboard this ship prefer to rely on a more magical means of transport.

Most ships this size would encounter an issue with storing their booty, but a nondescript wooden chest allows the captain to hoard a decent number of treasures and other goods safely without compromising the limited deck space.

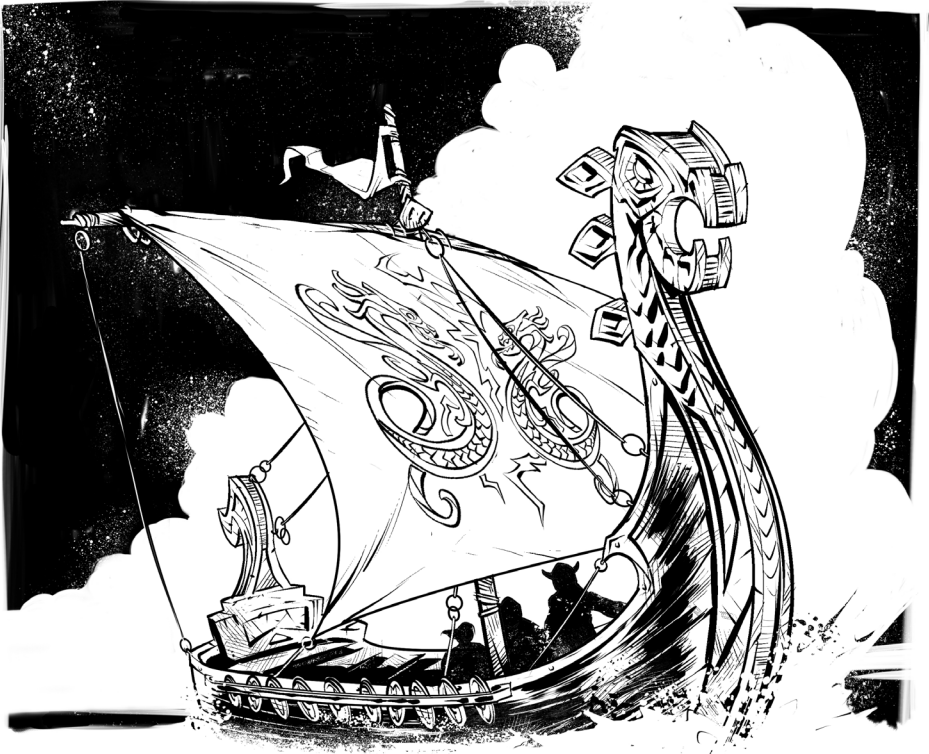
Without the use of the *Helm of Loki*, the *Magnificent Muck* requires a crew of 25–35 people to properly operate.

THE PLUNDERER'S SEA CHEST

Wondrous item, rare

This oak chest, measuring 3 feet by 5 feet by 3 feet, is secured with iron bands depicting naval combat and scenes of piracy. The sea chest opens into an extradimensional space that can hold up to 3,500 cubic feet or 15,000 pounds of material. The chest always weighs 200 pounds, regardless of its contents.

Placing an item in the sea chest follows the normal rules for interacting with objects. Retrieving an item from the chest requires you to use an action. When you open the chest to access a specific item, that item is always magically on top.



If the chest is destroyed, its contents are lost forever, though an artifact always turns up again, somewhere. If a *bag of holding*, *portable hole*, or similar object is placed within the sea chest, that item and the contents of the chest are immediately destroyed, and the magic of the chest is disrupted for one day after which the sea chest resumes functioning as normal.

HELM OF LOKI

*Wondrous item, legendary
(requires attunement)*

This unassuming ship's wheel is made of weathered birch with two narrow bands of unidentifiable red stone at each point one of the spokes meets the wheel. The true power of the helm is its ability to, when attached to a boat or similar vehicle, randomly *plane shift* anywhere in the Mortal Realm or across the planes, taking the vessel it is

attached to and everything located inside it, willing or not.

When attuned to the helm, you can immediately locate the closest tributary of the Ever River, and while boating on that waterway, you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to navigate it. When the Helm *plane shifts*, you are alerted four hours prior to its departure and can make a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check to guide it to one of two locations of your choice with a 50% chance of arrival at either destination. Regardless of where you are in the planes, you can transport yourself to a space within 5 feet of the helm as an action when it *plane shifts*.

No mortal magic can identify the helm as anything other than a mundane device. When attached to a vessel that does not use a wheel, the helm transforms itself into an unassuming example of that vessel's

steering mechanism, though it will always have two bands of red stone wrapped about its narrowest point.

Ship's History

The exact origin of the *Magnificent Muck* is difficult to determine. Before it was won by Captain Ibisrix, it was under the command of Captain Kogen Blackmaw, who took it by force from Captain Tillera Cloudhaven, a graceful and capable elven woman who led her crew on a great many adventures.

Captain Tillera possessed the ship for many decades and most of the crew currently aboard the ship joined up to serve under her. While Captain Tillera commanded the ship, she made some modifications to it, including the addition of a new helm.

The adventurous elf was as devout a worshipper of Loki as one can be, given the nature of the god himself. One day, when plundering the wreckage of a ship washed ashore, she discovered the helm and, recalling a description she had read long ago, knew it instantly for what it was, despite the lack of magical aura. At the time, the helm looked like a ship's wheel but Tillera took it, despite it appearing to be incompatible with her own vessel, and brought it to the *Magnificent Muck* where it transformed into the rudder it now appears to be.

FORMER CAPTAIN KOGEN BLACKMAW

The former captain of the *Magnificent Muck* is an angry-faced dwarf named Kogen Blackmaw (**thief lord**, see *Creature Codex*, with Darkvision 60 ft., advantage on saving throws against being poisoned, and Intimidation rather than Persuasion). Kogen, a capable fighter with a mouth full of black teeth, led his pirate crew on many successful conquests over the years. One day, seemingly out of nowhere, Kogen and his crew spotted the *Magnificent Muck*. They quickly pushed in on the ship, and a fierce

battle raged. Kogen thought the fight might be lost, but he persevered and managed to slay the captain herself. The battle raged only seconds longer; his crew was bolstered and quickly overcame the rival crew not willing to lay down their weapons.

Kogen soon realized his ship was too damaged to sail, and he did not have enough crew to man a ship. After confiscating their weapons to avoid mutiny, Kogen allowed what remained of Tillera's crew to live. Delighting in the possibilities of the new shallow-bottom vessel, Captain Kogen set off. The crew mourned their fair former captain, but they knew they did not have the ability to rise against the ship's new master.

For some years, the *Magnificent Muck* travelled the waterways of the mortal plane. One or two of Tillera's crew disappeared at various ports, always when Captain Kogen was too drunk to care (but too well defended to mutiny against). Others remained on board, almost as if they were waiting for the tide to turn.

One day, sometime after its last *plane shift*, the *Magnificent Muck* traveled into the plane of Casino. It was the first *plane shift* since Tillera's death, and Kogen, not attuned to the *Helm of Loki*, was surprised. Most of the crew had no idea how it had happened, and those who knew the secret of the *Helm of Loki* feigned ignorance. Despite the confusion, the crew disembarked and spent many months enjoying the pleasures and excitement of this entertaining location.

It was here, amidst the exquisite halls and gardens, Kogen found himself at a Dark Table in a dingy back pantry of a tavern kitchen, playing poker with an incubus. Unlike every other game in Casino, those played at a Dark Table are played in "real" coin, and the games are not monitored. Kogen, a canny card shark with some skill in sleight of hand, was certain of his win, and thus he bet the *Magnificent Muck*; in a strange twist of fate, the incubus laid the

winning hand. While the others present swore they could not hear it, the dwarf was certain he heard a mischievous chuckle as the final hand was laid.

What remained of Kogen's original crew, with the exception of a single halfling, refused to abandon their captain. The incubus, seemingly eager to leave in a hurry, let them stay in Casino with their outraged leader. Here they have remained for some time, impatiently awaiting a way out of the gambling halls and back to the ship.

CAPTAIN IBISRIX

Some decades ago, an incubus was sent on a task to Casino. Here, he was meant to gather information and report back to his superiors. Somewhere amidst the cheerful noises, the bright lights, and the picturesque landscape, the incubus forgot his task; waging bets, winning hands of cards, and entertaining himself with other visitors proved a much better use of his time than gathering information on one or two sad souls, and nearly a decade went by. By this time, those souls had long since fled Casino, hopeful they had covered their trail and fled from their would-be-pursuers.

Word came Ibisrix was to return to the Abyss with his findings. The incubus panicked. He knew his punishment would be swift and extreme and had hoped his superior's fickle nature meant the assignment, and Ibisrix himself, had been forgotten, in favor of something else. While

Ibisrix knew he was safe in Casino itself, he was certain he could not out maneuver those who came to collect him for long. After briefly contemplating challenging an emperor for power, Ibisrix decided to avoid the responsibilities that came with the roll in favor of another risky option.

Ibisrix had some experience with Dark Tables in his time in Casino, always with mixed results; with few options left, he settled into a high stakes card game. Some of his opponents proved to be no challenge at all, and quickly the game was down to himself and a black-toothed dwarf. Certain his opponent was cheating but knowing little could be done, Ibisrix called out to the only god who might help an incubus trying



to escape his return to the Abyss through a game of cards: Loki.

By some miracle, Ibisrix won the hand and all the winnings, including the *Magnificent Muck*. Quick as could be, the incubus set off to board the ship and escape Casino. He cared little of the small band of pirates who wished to stay with the former captain; Ibisrix saw the ship as a means of escape, not a long-term commitment. He set off with what crew wished to remain aboard and sailed off down the River Lethe.

The ship's first stop ended up being Corremal, the City of Lanterns, in the Shadow Realm. Here, Ibisrix ran into a demon eager to report his location. With the help of a returning crewmember grateful for rescue, the incubus discovered the secret of the *Magnificent Muck* and once again outmaneuvered those who sought his return to the abyss.

Captain Ibisrix is an **incubus** with the following changes: chaotic neutral alignment, **Hit Points** 82 (15d8 + 15), CR 5 (1,800 XP), and the following feature: **Better Lucky Than Good (Recharge 6)**. Captain Ibisrix can have advantage on any attack roll, saving throw, or skill check.

FIRST MATE LANIA TRADEWINDS

Lania Tradewinds was exceptionally close to Captain Tillera Cloudhaven. A faithful right hand to the beloved captain, Lania wished to be more than friends with her companion, but Tillera preferred to focus on the adventure of the high seas, and the various planes they could visit once the new helm had been fastened to the ship; Lania respected her wishes. And so for decades, the two traveled together, gathering an assorted crew of interesting individuals, seeing amazing sights, and encountering all manner of adventures.

One day, the *Magnificent Muck* came to be on the River Lethe in the Shadow Realm. Here, while overnighing near the river

with a ship full of crew and nary an extra inch on board, Lania encountered a family who had come to find themselves stranded in the Shadow Realm. They were terrified and wished to return to the Mortal Realm. Lania insisted on helping them and, after some back and forth with Tillera, secured them passage on the *Magnificent Muck* in her place.

Tillera and the crew came back for Lania as soon as they were able, but she had been forced to move on from the location. As agreed, Lania had headed toward Corremal, a popular trade city and the safest place for mortals in the Shadow Realm; Tillera and the crew braved the dangerous waters of the River Lethe to search the City of Lanterns for the ship's first mate, but the timing was off, and the ship's peculiar nature made it impossible to wait.

Eventually, Lania did make it to Corremal, but her time spent in the Shadow Realm and the encounters she had along the way left her permanently shadow-tainted. For some years, Lania awaited Tillera's return until one fateful day she heard rumor the *Magnificent Muck* had returned. She hurried to the ship, eager to lay her eyes upon her friend, only to discover the ship was now captained by Ibisrix. Saddened, but eager to leave behind the shadows, Lania rejoined the crew and imparted the knowledge of the helm to Ibisrix.

Lania is a shadow of her former self, affected both by her stay in the Shadow Realm and by the loss of her dearest companion. Her former crewmates have been known to tell tales of the energetic and happy woman she was before her stay in the Shadow Realm, and she seems to serve as a warning against departing the crew for nary a member has chosen to leave the *Magnificent Muck* since her return.

She is grateful to Ibisrix for allowing her to return to the *Magnificent Muck* and for bringing it, even unknowingly, to collect her

from Corremal. Despite all she lost for her benevolent act, Lania remains a generous individual, giving away much of the treasure she acquires in her travels to those who are down on their luck.

Lania is a **war priest** (see *Creature Codex*) with darkvision 120 feet. Her Imbued Warhammer attack deals thunder damage rather than radiant or necrotic damage. She has the following feature: **Storm Bolt (3/Day)**. Lania can throw her warhammer to a range of 60 feet. When she does so, it becomes a line of lightning 5 feet wide, beginning at her and extending straight toward her target. If the target is less than 60 feet away from her, the line of lightning extends beyond it. Each creature in the line takes 19 (2d10 +8) lightning damage or half damage with a successful Dexterity saving throw. Lania has two levels of shadow corruption (see *Midgard Worldbook*), which have not been cured despite her exit from the Shadow Realm.

Ship's Crew

There are currently twenty-five crewmembers aboard the *Magnificent Muck*, including Captain Ibisrix. The crew is an assorted bunch; originally from various cultures, races, and even planes, what the crew of the *Magnificent Muck* has in common is their love of the ship and their desire to explore.

Some of the notable crew include:

Tavika Wolfbane. (Winterfolk halfling **druid**). Originally press-ganged to join Captain Kogen's crew, Tavika found herself aboard the *Magnificent Muck* after attacking it. She despises Kogen and has come to respect all of the current crew, especially Captain Ibisrix. She is often a bit standoffish to newcomers and always prefers the company of her gull companion.

While she is best known for her healing prowess aboard the ship, Tavika is also a capable combatant.

Songbird. This androgynous human is actually a disguised fallen **deva**. As their punishment for slipping into neutrality, Songbird was cast from heaven and told that they could not return to Paradise until they could sing the Celebration of Fourteen Dooms. They seek this lost song still. They have been crew of the *Magnificent Muck* far longer than anyone else and precede the ship's association with the *Helm of Loki*. Songbird is perpetually silent and has lost their healing touch and ability to cast *raise dead*.

Kror and Klar Ironwulf (wolf reaver dwarf, see *Tome of Beasts*). These brothers are two of the most recent additions to the *Magnificent Muck*. Hired on by Ibisrix shortly after his acquisition of the ship, the brothers were found stranded in Beruthea, Kingdom of Cats, after using the House of Infinite Doors to escape a particularly nasty encounter with a band of **magma mephits**. They have proven themselves to be capable in battle, and their teamwork is inspiring. The Brothers Ironwulf look almost indistinguishable from each other.

Erasmus. This **clockwork watchman** (see *Tome of Beasts*) has been with the ship for several years. The recent addition of the **clockwork soldier** (see *Creature Codex*) Number 76 to the crew initially excited Erasmus who longs to make friends with his aloof new companion. For its part, Number 76 feels that Erasmus is always staring creepily at it and feels uncomfortable around the other clockwork. Number 76 does not understand that Erasmus, as a watchman, has been designed to stare at everything and that he merely wishes to make conversation. ☹

NAME	RACE	PLANE OF ORIGIN	QUIRK
A Sonnet to Indigo, Ship's Mage	Far Wanderer (CC)	Court of Countless Stars	Whispers to herself
Ahlis	Aasimar (acolyte)	Plane of Radiance	Sheds dim blue light
Bleak	Dark Folk (CC)	Mortal Realm	Grinds her teeth while rowing
Chitters	Ratatosk (ToB)	The Loom	Constantly interrupts conversations
Clara Vulksdottir	Human (scout)	Mortal Realm	Sings in battle
Corrack	Cueyatl Warrior (CC)	Plane of Water	Flicks tongue out constantly
Dhornvig Axeclaw	Bearfolk (ToB)	Mortal Realm	Rubs his poorly healed right knee often
Ennis Priory	Human (bandit)	Mortal Realm	Absently pats his pockets
Erasmus	Clockwork Watchman *	Plane of Gears	Watches Number 76
Giltis Lesshaven	Shadow Fey (ToB)	Shadow Realm	Swears in Goblin
Ibisrix, Captain	Incubus *	Abyss	Flips a coin to make decisions
Ick Tavers, Cook	Shadow Goblin (CC)	Shadow Realm	Giggles when frightened
Klar Ironwulf	Dwarf*	Mortal Realm	Scratches his head
Kror Ironwulf	Dwarf*	Mortal Realm	Strokes his beard
Lania Tradewinds, 1st mate	Shadow-Tainted Elf*	Mortal Realm	Gives coin to those down on their luck
Number 76	Clockwork Soldier *	Plane of Spears	Tries to avoid being watched by Erasmus
Pia Belittsdottir	Human (berserker)	Mortal Realm	Wears a string of decaying fingers
Redfeather	Aaracokra	Plane of Air	Molts when excited
Salistree Sunhild	Elfmarked (guard)	Mortal Realm	Squints and frowns
Songbird	Deva	Heaven	Never speaks
Sten Fiendborn	Human (gladiator)	Eleven Hells	Smirks lecherously at males
Tavika Wolfbane, Ship Chirurgeon	Winterfolk Halfling*	Mortal Realm	Talks to her gull companion
Tyche Holland	Human (guard)	Mortal Realm	Smells faintly of cardamom
Yaniq Ut'Maru	Human (guard)	Mortal Realm	Bites his nails
Yorn Pettersen	Neverborn Human	Underworld	Smells of grave rot

* See description

CC = *Creature Codex* ToB = *Tome of Beasts*

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