



Werewood Forest

Friedrich Ulf Roehrer-Ertl

Book One of the Lost Books of Talislanta

Werewood Forest

A Regional Sourcebook for Talislanta



Credits:

Conceived and written by: Friedrich Ulf Roehrer-Ertl.

Additional rules, spellchecking and translations: Giles Bennett.

Additional ideas and creature statistics: Christian Goehlert.

Special thanks to my gaming group for all their support throughout more than 14 years of gaming, especially to Agnes Dinkel, Ingrid Dinkel, Henning Koehler, Robert Lehmann, Michael Roethlein, Eamon Roque, Richard Woolcock.

Very special thanks to みゆきどの for patience, encouragement and always believing in me.

Introduction: Enter at your own risk!	1-8
What is Werewood?	1-9
How to use this book	1-9
Chapter 1: Landscapes of Terror - The Geography of Werewood	1-11
Common Features	1-11
Sidebar: Why “Werewood”?	1-12
Sidebar: How do I get there?	1-13
Western Werewood: The Forgotten Land	1-14
Necros River	1-14
The Valley of Forgetfulness	1-14
Sidebar: Two Valleys of Forgetfulness?	1-15
Mordante's Deep	1-16
The Dread Forest	1-16
Northern Werewood: The Unknown Land	1-17
The Weeping River	1-17
The Mushroom Forest	1-17
Sidebar: Historical Resources on Werewood	1-18
The Green Lagoon	1-18
Sidebar: Regular Visitors?	1-19
Southern Werewood: The Ancient Land	1-9
The Sascasm River	1-9
Gnorlwood	1-20
Witchwood	1-20
Chapter 2: Unremembered Children of Forgotten Gods - The Dhuna	1-21
A Brief History of the Dhuna	1-22
The Origin of the Dhuna	1-22
Dhuna the Prophet	1-22
Sidebar: One People?	1-23
Flight and Settlement	1-24
Sidebar: Dhuna and Danuvia	1-24
Sidebar: The Stone Circles	1-25
Dhuna Religion and Magic	1-26
Sidebar: Why Forgotten?	1-27
Daily Religion	1-27
Sidebar: Remembering the Past	1-29
Magic	1-30
Living in Dhuna Society	1-30
Covens	1-30

Sidebar: It's not easy to be Dhuna man...	1-31
Sidebar: A Constant State of Emergency	1-32
The Orders	1-33
Sidebar: What's your Order, Please?	1-34
Wanderers	1-34
Sidebar: So you want to meet the Dhuna?	1-35
Warfare	1-36
Sidebar: The Last of the Dhuna?	1-37

Chapter 3: The Realm of the Boglins 1-38

On Boglin History	1-39
During the time of the Archaens	1-39
Sidebar: Boglins?	1-39
Sidebar: Boglin Bazaars	1-40
Separation and Withdrawal	1-41
Being a Boglin	1-43
Magic	1-43
Sidebar: How many wishes...	1-44
Religion	1-45
Weirdling Society	1-45
Sidebar: Raised as a Weirdling	1-46
Sidebar: A Rare Weirdling	1-48
Life as a Gnorl	1-49
Sidebar: Crossdressing	1-50
Secrets	1-51
Sidebar: A Case to be Judged	1-51

Chapter 4: Faces of the Past - The Phaedran Tombs 1-53

History of the Tombs	1-53
Sidebar: Buried in Pleasures	1-54
The Tombs Today	1-55
Sidebar: A Final Curse of the Phaedrans	1-55
What to Expect	1-55
Sidebar: Less is more.	1-56
The Tower of Marinaugh	1-57
“Solimorrion's Mausoleum”	1-59
Sidebar: The Tomb of Solimorrion?	1-59
The Tomb of Mirrors	1-60

Chapter 5: Strangers Beware! Flora and Fauna of Werewood 1-62

Amittina	1-63
----------	------

Avir	1-64
Bane	1-64
Sidebar: It's All in the Teeth	1-65
Batranc	1-65
Bog Devil	1-65
Bophannon	1-65
Caravan Bug	1-66
Chang	1-67
Dobonda	1-67
Exomorph	1-68
Far'afer	1-68
Fiend	1-69
Gall Oak	1-69
Ghast	1-69
Giant Mushroom	1-70
Hongodon	1-70
Kankryu	1-71
Keb'abaron	1-71
Kimochi	1-72
Kra, River	1-72
Lambado Grass	1-73
Maijno	1-73
Malathrope	1-73
Mandragore	1-73
Mang	1-74
Minutio	1-74
Nandato	1-75
Necrophage	1-75
Needleleaf	1-76
Nefkrago	1-76
Neurozoid	1-76
Ogriphant	1-77
Paykel	1-77
Pseudomorph	1-77
Quonlara	1-78
Rachmani	1-79
Ravenger	1-79
Ravir	1-79
Rogenda	1-80

Sago	1-80
Scarlet Sporozoid	1-81
Scavenger Slime	1-81
S'drimogon	1-81
Sea Dragon	1-81
Shathane	1-82
Sheeska	1-82
Sheeska (False)	1-83
Skalanx	1-83
Sniper-Bug	1-84
Sorcerer Tree	1-84
Spinal Shadow	1-84
Storm Demon	1-85
Stranglevine	1-85
Tatratta	1-85
Tundra Beast	1-86
Ulvo	1-86
Werebeast	1-86
Whitewood	1-87
Withergall, common	1-87
Withergall, mobile	1-87
Withergall, rare	1-88
Xyphalax	1-88
Yaksha	1-89
Zyzstantha	1-89
Chapter 6: The “Secret” Secrets.	1-90
On Creating a Werewood Mood	1-90
Adventure Seeds	1-91
The Classics	1-91
Sidebar: Some Personal Recommendations	1-92
The Unusual	1-93
The Extraordinary	1-94
Chapter 7: All the stuff you need...	1-96
Judging a Secret	1-96
The Forgotten Gods	1-99
White Gods	1-99
Grey Gods	1-99
Black Gods	1-100

New Equipment	1-101
New Magic	1-103
Special Abilities	1-104
New Archetypes	1-106
Bane Slave (NPC)	1-106
Dhuna Listener (PC)	1-107
Dhuna Prophetess (NPC)	1-107
Dhuna Protector (PC)	1-108
Gnorl Bargainer (PC)	1-109
Gnorl Judge (NPC)	1-110
Gnorl Outcast (NPC)	1-111
Weirdling Saint (PC)	1-111
Zandre Boatman (NPC)	1-112

Introduction

Enter at your own risk!

So, you want to go into Werewood? You must be mad, boy... oh, oh no, don't tell me why... I'm not interested. You know, I have seen so many people coming to me, young people like you, saying: Can you take me up the Sascasm? Can you bring me to Werewood?

Of course I can... I can take you... My ship is always ready to earn me some money... but after I have brought you there, I will come back here... and most probably never see you again...

So, I don't care for your reasons... whether you want to rob a Phaedran Tomb, to get some secrets from the Gnorls, those greedy little creatures... or you might want visit the Dhuna to learn some secrets of a far different kind... or are you one of those who seek to catch some of the seductively attractive Banes? When you file down their teeth they become quite docile... once spent a night with such a Bane slave... was part of my deal... anyway, I don't care what you want to do there... because I don't think you will survive... just like all the others...

If you want my advice... and surely you don't, the other people didn't want it, nobody wants my advice, it seems... anyway, if you really want to enter Werewood, find what you were looking for and come out alive, then prepare. Prepare for everything. Take food and water, yes, water, for months even if you plan to stay only for a few days, take extra weapons, extra torches.... take everything extra. Prepare for everything. Because Werewood is not like any other forest, not like anything else. Here, anything can happen, here, anything – will – happen. You can't trust anyone or anything you will meet. The Water is often poisonous, the plants and animals are deadly whether you are attacked by them or you are trying to gain sustenance by eating them... everything is treacherous in Werewood.

But even if you prepare, I don't expect to see you again. It's not that I care, you are not the first and surely you won't be the last. We are talking about Werewood... he who enters will seldom leave.

-Mirkosh, Mariner

Welcome to Werewood! Inside this book you will find all you need to run all sorts of different adventures in this mysterious region. The only other prerequisites are a copy of the Talislanta rulebook, some friends and, of course, your imagination.

What is Werewood?

Werewood is a dense forest area in the west of Talislanta, around the Green Lagoon and the Upper Sascasm and Weeping Rivers. It is surrounded by Khazad and Yrmania to the North, Urag to the East, Zandu, Arim to the South and Silvanus to the West. Its borders are defined by Mountains to the North and East and by the Necros River to the West. The mountains cause a lot of rainfall here, resulting in a deep, dense, humid forest, which supports a high percentage of fungi and supports a plethora of dangerous creatures.

The best known of these are the Banes, beautiful and deadly beings, feared by all who venture into Werewood, but also sought by some, because “pacified” female Banes achieve high prices on Talislanta's slave markets. As it is a territory which most people try to avoid, it has become the retreat for two cultures, the Dhuna “witches” who hide here from their Aamanian persecutors and guard the witchgates, hundreds of stone circles which can serve as gates to many different places. It is also home of the Boglins, generally understood to be two separate people, the Weirdlings and Gnorls, who are the descendants of the widely unknown ancient Forest People, whose kingdoms were once numerous. Also one can find remnants of the defunct Phaedian Empire. For the Phaedian Sorcerers, the Sascasm River was the river to their afterlife and so they built their tombs on its banks.

Whether you want to search for the ancient remnants of Phaedia, seek rare animals and plants, whether you wish to learn secrets from the Dhuna or the Boglins, Werewood can be an area for a host of different adventures.

What is Talislanta?

For those few who don't yet know: Talislanta is a creative Roleplaying System and World created by Stephen Michael Sechi (a.k.a. SMS). His goal was to bring a world to life that would own more to Jack Vance's Dying Earth novels than to the “standard” fantasy of that time. Now, more than ten years later, Talislanta stays one of the most innovative and inspiring RPGs on the market. And still feature no elves.

How to use this book

Well, put simply, the main use of this book is to serve first as an introduction and later as a reference guide on Werewood for any group playing Talislanta that wishes to use Werewood as a setting.

To provide easier access, this book is divided into seven chapters:

Chapter 1: Landscapes of Terror offer an introduction to the Werewood area. The ecology of the forest is addressed, followed by a description of the different subregions (such as the Dread Forest, the Valley of Forgetfulness, the Mushroom Forest, the Green Lagoon etc.). Here you can find out what being in a forest like Werewood is really about.

Chapter 2: The followers of forgotten Gods reveals the culture of the Dhuna, whose ancestors fled Phaedia to hide from persecution. Led by their Gods, forgotten by all others in Talislanta except the Dhuna, they came to Werewood, to what is now called Witchwood and settled there among the countless stone-circles called witchgates.

Chapter 3: The Secrets of the Boglins. Here you can find everything you need to know about the Gnorls and the Weirdlings, who in fact are just two parts of one people, the Boglins. Learn about them and their secret kingdom, perhaps the last of the many forest kingdoms of old.

Chapter 4: Faces of the Past: The Phaedran Tombs gives details on the old and mysterious burial sites of the Phaedran sorcerers, which dot the banks of the Sascasm river. Their history, their design and their dangers, you can find everything about them here.

Chapter 5: Strangers Beware!: Flora and Fauna of Werewood details more than twenty new creatures and plants found in Werewood as well as giving additional information on all creatures of Werewood described in the Talislanta Rulebook.

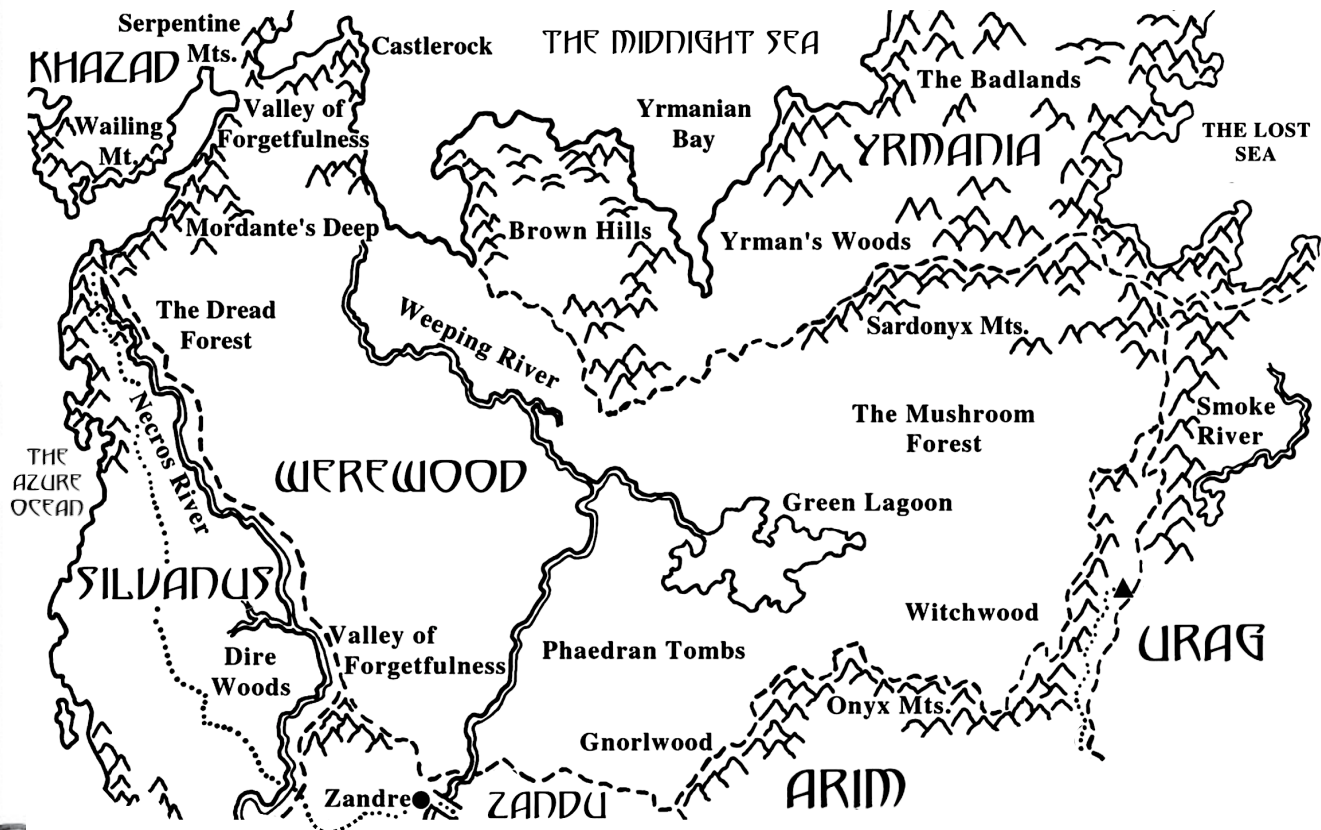
Chapter 6: Mastering the Darkness is the Gamemasters' section. It is filled with adventure seeds, suggestions on running campaigns in Werewood, creating a suitable gaming atmosphere, etc.

Chapter 7: All the stuff you need. Here, except of the statistics for creatures and plants (these can be found in Chapter 5), you find all the rules and statistics you need. You will find eight new Archetypes (Dhuna Priest, Dhuna

Protector, Dhuna Listener, Weirdling Saint, Gnorl Judge, Gnorl Bargainer, Gnorl Outcast, Bane Slave), as well as additional rules and magic for use in Werewood.

But what if I don't play Talislanta?

Well, of course this is your decision. While we think that Talislanta is the best RPG to play and surely the best to use this book with (after all, Werewood is an integral part of the Talislanta setting), we don't mind if you use the material presented here for campaigns using another Roleplaying System. Werewood, we think, offers enough inspiring material well worth to include into any other system. The statistics here are also given a version for D20, making compatibility easy. You bought it, so it is your book now to roleplay with. We hope you have fun, that's all.



Chapter 1: Landscapes of Terror

- The Geography of Werewood

Of course I did not heed the “warnings” of the boatman. Why should I have done so? Probably, like all the others, he just wanted to make sure I would never supersede the glory of Thystram. I was well-equipped with my keen intellect, my well-trained body, and my magic, being as I am among the most able wizards you will ever find this side of the Sascasm... What should I, a Phaedran of renown, fear, except to be successful? Of course, I was never afraid of that possibility.

On the second day of our journey, after having passed the proud tombs of our people, the boatman exclaimed he would carry us no more. That was fine with us, who could no longer endure his endless ramblings and curses. So we set our feet on the left bank of the Sascasm and started to march into this endless forest.

We lost our first comrade, Midorios just a few moments later, when he inadvertently stepped into the reach of a Dobonda bush, but this could not stop my anticipation. Bathing in the twilight of the forest, illuminated by the eerie glow of mushrooms, I stepped forward to wrest all secrets from this place, so I could later bathe in the glory of being not -a- , but -the- explorer of ancient, marvellous Werewood.

-Ninguarda, Phaedran explorer

Common Features

Werewood is a huge region in north-western Talislanta. Unlike the surrounding territories, the ground level is relatively low. In fact, the whole area can be classified as a slight depression with the Green Lagoon as the lowest point. All in all, the region is cool, but also very wet. The Sardonyx and Onyx Mountains, which gird Werewood in its eastern part, stop most of the rainclouds coming from the Azure Ocean from passing on into the Lost Sea, Urag and Central Talislanta, making annual rainfall in Werewood one of the highest in western Talislanta. The mountainous barriers cause a gradual increase of the amount of rainfall from west to east, with almost continuous precipitation in eastern Mushroom Forest and Witchwood.

It is this rain which dictates existence in Werewood. Too plentiful for the natural climate, it has washed out most nutrients of the soil over the course of the last centuries, leaving it arid and reddish: too poor and too marshy for irrigation and classical settlement.

Still, while the region is fenny, it is not a swamp of the sort prevalent in southern Talislanta; three large rivers – the Necros, Weeping and Sascasm River – pass through the western part of Werewood, continuing to the Sea; through them, and through countless unnamed brooks and streams, which run through all of the region towards either one of the rivers or towards the Green Lagoon, the ecosystem of Werewood is drained, leaving a humid and wet, but not too swampy region.

The unique natural forestation consists of high Amittina, Withergall or other large trees which form a thick cover over the lower vegetation. This upper layer allows most rain

in, but only little of the ascending humidity out. Together with the metabolism of Werewoods vegetation and other lifeforms, the microclimate below the trees and the macroclimate of north-western Talislanta differ greatly. While one would expect the region to be rather cool and temperate, the “inside” of the forest can be characterized as extremely humid and relatively warm (though not hot), making traveling there unpleasant for most visitors.

Apart of the ruins in the Dread Forest, there are no signs the region was ever settled in a classical sense; both in Archean times and later during the rule of the Phaedran Empire, Werewood was a remote area seen as being of little economical worth; sometimes wood would be brought from parts of southern Werewood which now form the Woodlands of Zandu, but generally the high humidity causes most of Werewoods lumber to be too infested with fungus and mould to be usable; the number of predators add danger for any expedition to these discouragements, driving the costs for wood from this area up far too high to be justifiable.

Only during the several gold rushes in the Sardonyx Mountains did larger groups of Phaedrans (and later Zandre) and gold-seekers from other parts of Talislanta try to pass through Werewood and settle along the southern edge of the mountains, in Mushroom Forest. The first, most spectacular attempt (and failure) was the establishment of a permanent village, on orders of the Phaedran ruler Damon. The fact that no gold was ever found on the Werewood side of the Sardonyx Mountains ensured that these attempts were short-lived at best.

All in all, Gnorlwood is today the most untouched and primordial forest in Talislanta. Most of the older trees are at least centuries old; some, it has been argued, might even date from the Archean period (something scholars like Thystram disputed, pointing out that the humidity is too high to let anything live for too long there). While some parts of this

Why “Werewood”?

The name “Werewood” was coined by the Phaedrans who first visited its outskirts in what are now the Woodlands of Zandu; at that time this area was still untouched and infested with predators, especially Werebeasts. Thystram abhorred the name, insisting that there were much wilder and more dangerous creatures in the forest than mere Werebeasts. He suggested that the names “Wyldwood” or “Wyrddwood” would be appropriate, but these names, to which Ninguarda, always keen on doing everything differently, had added “Ancient Monsters' Forest,” never enjoyed any wider usage.

The Boglins call Werewood “Sas'quatan”, which is said to mean something like “our home.” At least this name and its meaning were reported by Ninguarda who spent more than two years with the Gnorls. Whether this is the real name these inhabitants of the forest use for Werewood is open for discussion, but until someone pays the Gnorls a sizable price, a definite solution of this question is not in sight.

The citizens of Zandre have their own explanation for the name: “Werewood is called Werewood,” they say, “because once you are there, you wish you WERE somewhere else.”

The Aamanians, who always try to show they are better than the Zandir in everything, are attributed to have coined a variation on this joke: “Werewood is called Werewood, because when we go there, the witches wish *they* WERE somewhere else.” It is doubtful, however, that those Aamanians who -do- enter the forest in search of the Dhuna can find this sentence even remotely funny or true, even after just a few days of struggling to remain alive.

How do I get there?

Generally, the geography of Werewood seems as if it had been made to stop anyone from entering the forest. The Necros river to the west, the Valley of Forgetfulness and high cliffs to the north, the mountains towards Yrmania, Urag and Arim (whose slopes are generally too steep to climb safely), all these obstacles are usually enough to hinder most traffic from these directions, except for adventurers with either disregard to their safety, a tendency for flying or a witch-gate at hand.

This leaves four main ways of entry for the more serious explorer. By far the most comfortable way is to travel up the Sascasm river with boats available in Zandu for a reasonable, though steep price. The journey usually takes one day to the Gates of the Sascasm, as the breakthrough of the Sascasm through the hills between Zandu and Werewood is called, and one more day up to the so called "Tomb of Solimorrion." Unless heavy bribes are paid or the expedition owns the boat, there is no chance it would bring expeditions deeper into the region as the boatmen refuse to go further.

Travellers who shun the cost of hiring a boat can also travel to Werewood on foot or by riding Equis or the like. The Woodlands of Zandu, though not as wild and primordial due to centuries of cultivation, are in fact part of Werewood; by wandering northward, easy to find as the earth gradually leans downwards towards this direction, one can reach the targeted destination. Though the changes in the natural surroundings are rather gradual on this route, travellers still describe the border as sharp, pointing out that the trees in Zandu, be they Withergalls or Amittina, are not as large as in Werewood. Also, the soil in the southern Woodlands is not as moist and foggy as in the northern territories, making the fungi so common further north rare in Zandu. As renting a boat could attract attention, most travellers who want to do business that is meant to go unnoticed in Werewood use that route. This includes the expeditions of the Aamanian Witchhunters, who, coming via Arim in small groups, clandestinely cross over Zandu this way to trespass the forest in search of the Dhuna.

Another possibility for entering Werewood is via the Underground Highway, which, coming from the Seven Kingdoms for example, might be the best choice. Beneath Werewood, there is a well-developed part of the Highway running from Gnorlwood to the Dread Forest, which, controlled by the Boggins, serves as their main means of long distance travel. Smaller, often neglected tunnels connect this road with other parts of the Forest. Due to the common Far'after and other dangers, the tunnels get blocked often, making the journey slower than it is supposed to be, though still faster than travelling above ground. It is of a certain interest to scholars and adventurers that, according to Thystram, one of these tunnels supposedly leads directly to Mordante's Deep, but so far nobody seems to have found this tunnel (or, rather, nobody seems to have paid the Gnorls enough to find out). The Underground Highway to Werewood can also be used from Zandu, but the route from the Seven Kingdoms is generally seen as being safer.

Finally, much more extraordinary ways can be found, by using a windship or a witch-gate; the first option is risky at best, as the west-east wind is very harsh over the region, driving windships against the ragged cliffs of the bordering mountains. Additionally, besides the clouds which very often hinder sight (and thus navigation), the forest of Werewood looks alike from above with Withergall and Amittina trees forming an almost uniform pattern to anyone but the most experienced navigator (only the rivers, the Green Lagoon and Mushroom Forest are clearly discernable). Finally, the forest provides no regular wharfs; landing can thus become a dangerous experiment of its own.

As for using teleportation... supposing a suitable gate can be found, the (magically apt and extradimensional) traveller could reach Werewood through one of the countless Stone Circles which dot Witchwood; this is not a recommended way of travel, though, as the Dhuna are keen on silencing all people who might betray any easy route right into the middle of their territory. Those who try (and have the means to try) this possibility should either possess a keen ability of fast-talking or a lot of luck (or both).

forest are lighter and some are more dense and one (Mushroom Forest) is inhabited almost exclusively by fungi, there are some features common to all parts of Werewood: the high level of humidity, expressing itself by nearly constant fog; twilight, found everywhere except near larger bodies of water, caused by the shadows of the high trees and fungi, brightened only by the phosphorous light of moulds, fungi, luminescent creatures and mosses, which inhabit Werewood in large numbers. Also, the huge array of predators, which can all be found to some extent in all areas, should be named here.

Western Werewood: The Forgotten Land

The west of Werewood Forest is defined by rivers: The Necros in the west, the Weeping River to the north and the Sascasm to the east. Both its position far from the mountains in the east and the draining effect of these rivers make much of this area far less humid. On the other hand, this lack of moisture combined with the same arid soil of the whole region means less fungi and mosses and a lower general density of the trees. Compared with the rest of Werewood, this western part seems much brighter and orderly as well as easier to endure, which is why explorers like Thystram, the well-known naturalist, spent most of their time in this part of the region.

One should not take these advantages too positively, though. The relative gentleness of Western Werewood is also useful for the fiercer predators of the region. Thus, the proportions of Werebeasts, Banes, Shathane, Pseudomorphs, Necrophages; Malathropes, Kankryu, Ghast, Batranc and many other horrors is greater than in other parts of the forest.

Necros River

Traditionally, the broad, thick, sluggish Necros river forms the natural border between Werewood and Silvanus, though scholars and Sarista argue where exactly this border is. While the scholars traditionally see the line of separation in the middle of the river, the Sarista place all of the Necros on the side of Werewood, claiming that "such a dark river could never belong to our merry lands."

The Necros stems from underground springs situated in the mountains towards Khazad, which are generally considered to be tainted by forces from the lower planes. From here, the thick, tenacious black waterlike current flows south until it spills into Zantium Bay. Not surprisingly, even dark creatures such as Banes do not drink this water and its consumption is not advisable. At the very least it causes terrible nightmares, though it can also cause strong fevers, diarrhea, and other diseases; as these infections occur randomly, it seems to be left to chance what drinking from the Necros might do. Also, this water acts like a weak acid when in contact with wood, leather or clothing, making crossing of the river a risky business and navigating the river with boats or rafts rather difficult.

But often diseases and acid water are the least worries a traveller should have here. For, besides diseases, the opaque waters of the Necros are also the ideal dwelling for many creatures, among them Kimochi, Revengers and Skalanx. Especially, it houses many different entities that seem to spill directly from the lower planes, like the S'drimogon and other, yet unnamed horrors. It is these the traveller should fear most, especially when he is trying to cross over to Silvanus.

The Valley of Forgetfulness

The southern part of the Necros River, judging from its riversides, should be one of the most gentle parts of Werewood (or Silvanus, depending on the point of view). Mostly covered by violet Lambado grass, the

mildly rolling hills framing the black opaque waters of the river seem peaceful beyond belief. Banes and other predators dare not enter these meadows, making them the most secure place in all the forest. But security comes with a price.

During the evening hours, a silver mist rises from these sections of the Necros, covering the meadows up to the edge of the woods. Besides hindering any vegetation but the aforementioned Lambado grass from growing there, it also causes partial or even total memory loss of any person unlucky enough to inhale the thick silvery air. In

extreme cases the mist even erases basic concepts such as eating, drinking or orientation; this amnesia can endure - unless the victim breathes the mist again - for up to ten days; during this time the victims wander aimlessly around, as if seeking answers for questions they don't know, answers they will never find. Since often they won't leave the Valley by themselves (the Necros River seems to have a strong appeal to them), once someone is caught by the mist, slow but certain death can be certain, unless help from outside rescues the victim (and re-teaches him to live again). As this mist is not common to

Two Valleys of Forgetfulness?

Even though it is clearly shown on the map in this book, most inhabitants of Talislanta, if they know of the existence of a Valley of Forgetfulness at all, would not know that there are two distinct territories with the same name, unless they were part of a rather small group of scholars. On most maps available, the whole Necros River and most of northwestern Werewood is designated as the Valley of Forgetfulness, making no difference between the two and displaying them as one connected area. But, of course, this isn't the case.

While the region along the southern Necros River is better known, it has no connection to the Valley of Forgetfulness situated next to the border of Khazad. Still, both share the same origin, i.e. magic. When the southern Valley was discovered by the Phaedrans, much research was done to uncover its origin as well as the spell which created the Mist of Forgetfulness. Many notorious individuals (as well as even more who have today faded into obscurity) took part in this unofficial "research contest", not least among them Thystram and Ninguarda. The wizard who may have unlocked the secret of the spell was, in the end, a rather hapless Phaedran named Jasomirgott, who was killed by Mordante shortly after his (supposed) discovery.

As neither Ninguarda nor Thystram describe the northern Valley of Forgetfulness, it has ever since been common lore among those few who are interested that it was created by Mordante, using the spell he learned of Jasomirgott, in order to secure his hideout. Scholars who believe this also point out that this would be a perfect reason why nobody ever rediscovered Mordante's Deep since the mage's demise.

Other scholars, however, disagree with this point of view. They claim that according to Spyridon's "Life and Monuments of famous Mages", Jasomirgott was anything but capable of finding out the secrets behind a spell as complex as this one. Also how could the Xambrians find Mordante, when his hideout was secured by such a powerful spell? To them, the reason for this second Valley lies more in the Archeans trying to build a buffer towards Khazad and the tombs of the Thane there. As for Thystram and Ninguarda, only the great naturalist may have travelled so far to the north, but neither of them includes a report on this Valley (such a visit would have occurred before the time of Mordante, of course).

Finally, there are some scholars claiming that it might just be a phenomenon that occurred without the direct influence of mortals, a theory backed by Jaka stories, which connect the Valley of Forgetfulness with the Great Disaster; but as this is "just too simple a reason," it has only little backing among the sages of Talislanta.

all of the Necros river, but only to the southern part of it, a magical cause is to be assumed, which ever since its re-discovery has made quite a number of scholars search for the spell used here.

After its discovery by the Phaedrans, the Valley of Forgetfulness served as their preferred place for interring the bodies of traitors, so that they would be forgotten forever. During the last years of the rule of Solimorrion III. and his son Damon, critics of their rule or renegade mages were brought to the Valley to rob them of their memory or to have the Mist serve as an ordeal. Should a delinquent ask for it, he would be released into the Valley for one day and one night. Should he survive this time and leave the area by himself, he would be declared free of his crime (and his memory, too). Later Damon, according to some Sarista stories, which however are rated as being rather dubious source by serious scholars, may have enjoyed driving Forest People here and watching their tottering gait from a watchtower when they emerged after falling prey to the mist, something which he considered delightful. This story may or may not be connected with the ruins of several Phaedran towers along the southern borders of the Valley. With the fall of the Phaedran Empire, the Valley lost any use for the Western Civilizations; it has since stayed deserted by all but the occasional traveller.

Mordante's Deep

The northernmost part of Werewood, close to the border to Khazad, is bleak and withered. The unique ecosystem of the forest is destroyed in this area, and thus all vegetation seems to be weak and dying. This is said to be the influence of Mordante's Deep. Mordante was one of the most infamous black magicians of the early New Era. Perhaps a descendant of the vile sorcerers of Quaran, but most probably a reincarnator, he was a cold-blooded killer and without any scruples whatsoever. For a long time he dwelt in

Faradun, but fled to Werewood when hunted by Xambrian Wizard Hunters, erecting his keep in this very area. Secured by another Valley of Forgetfulness (see above), the scattered ruins of his castle still stand, haunted by Ghosts and Wind-Demons. As it is the last reported residence of Mordante, it is probable that it is also the place of his last stand with the Xambrians, though there has never been any confirmation from the Wizard Hunters that such an event took place at all.

It is said the ruins contain relics of Mordante, including magical inscriptions, artefacts and perhaps even spellbooks, all of which would demand a high price among scholars and Black Magicians. But it would also arouse the suspicion of the Xambrians, who don't like anyone messing with the legacy of this infamous mage.

The Dread Forest

The part of Werewood situated between the Necros, Weeping and Sascasm rivers is called the Dread Forest. Dense, but not as dense and humid as the rest of Werewood, it is infested with Banes, Bophannon, Dobonda, Ghosts, Fiends and other threatening creatures, making it truly deserving of its name. Still, it is this part of Werewood which has earned most attention from scholars all over Talislanta, because of the ruins which dot all of the Dread Forest. Dating from the Forgotten Age, they may be among the oldest ruins on the continent.

Earlier theories that they might include the remnants of Arcanopolis, the first city of the Archeans, were based on the fact that the Dread Forest was close to the Dolmen and Circles of Witchwood, which are attributed to this early period. They have been proven false by both Thystram and Ninguarda, who both point out that the ruins are built of violet stone (of unknown origin), not from the green stone attributed to Arcanopolis. To them, the ruins might date from the Early Archaean period, but if so, then they cannot be connected to any of the reported settlements of that time. The huge

area covered by the ruins makes one wonder why no report about it has survived the Great Disaster. It is interesting to note that the uncountable Fiends infesting the Dread Forest seem to be connected to the ruins, though the reasons for this phenomenon remains unclear. Ninguarda, basing its assumptions on Jaka lore, thought that perhaps the ruins belonged to settlements of entities of unknown origin somehow connected with the Fiends and eradicated by the Archaens. The Fiends would consequently be the final nightmares of these people, doomed to roam their ancient home forever. Of course this goes quite far, but the Boglins also tell stories about a huge battle between "two people of light and of darkness" taking place in Werewood.

This part of Werewood is also home to the Underground settlements of the Weirdlings or male Boglins. For more on them please refer to Chapter Three.

Northern Werewood: The Unknown Land

This part of Werewood is defined by the Weeping River to the west, the Sardonyx Mountains to the north and east and the eastern Sascasm and the Green Lagoon to the South. Lacking the drainage of western or southern Werewood, this area is marshy, almost bog-like, making it the least explored and least-known part of the forest. Even Thystram and Ninguarda, the two most important travellers of the forest only did sporadic expeditions into this region. From time to time, adventurers seeking gold in the mountains entered this part of the forest, in one case even trying to erect a permanent settlement, but they left no traces of their failure and demise.

The Weeping River

This northernmost tributary to the Sascasm issues from springs in the area of Mordante's Deep. Broad, but strongly meandering and

filled with silt and mud, it is extremely difficult to navigate (assuming one would find a boatman willing to go this deep into Werewood). River Kra, Kankryu, Bog Devils, Kimochi and Skalanx are often found in this river, and its banks serve as a favourite playground for Banes, Werebeasts and other creatures.

It has often been said the name of this river was coined by the Dhuna, who first settled along this river, only to be driven away by Mordante. While this is a popular etymology, it is definitely a false rumor. In fact, the name "Weeping River" was first reported by Ninguarda (the older Thystram called it "Upper Sascasm"). According to him, "it is called Weeping River by the Boglins, perhaps remembering expeditions of the Thane into their land; these would have come down the river from what we call Khazad. Another explanation to me would be connected to the strange ruins in the Dread Forest, which would mean that somewhere in the collective memory of the Forest People their inhabitants are still remembered."

The Mushroom Forest

While most of Werewood can be seen as forest in the traditional sense (albeit not in the sense of "nice and cozy"), the north-eastern part of the region is far from this picture. Being part of the area with the highest amount of rain, the main vegetation of Mushroom Forest is composed of many different fungi, with almost no trees. Probably there is no region in Talislanta sporting so diverse species of mushrooms, some of which, like the Minutio, can reach the same height as even the largest Withergall or Amittina tree.

As the caps of the fungi are not as erratic and thin as the leaves are elsewhere, Mushroom Forest is much darker than the rest of comparatively dim Werewood, something compensated by the many phosphorescent fungi found there, like the Xyphalax, which cast everything in their eerie light. Except for the occasional Gnorl or Dhuna in search of

Historical Resources on Werewood

Unlike the flora, fauna and culture of other regions of Talislanta, such as the Seven Kingdoms or even the Kang Empire, Werewood has so far attracted only few scholars interested in this region. Of the few written accounts, apart of the information given by Tamerlin, only two should be used by the cautious traveller.

Thystram, the great naturalist, wrote an exhaustive study on Werewood, mainly covering wildlife and vegetation, but also including his experiences amidst the Gnorls, in books seven to nine of his "Journey to the West" (of Talislanta), much of which he later used in his standard compendium "Thystram's Collectanea". Despite its age and listings of creatures which, like the Shi'mada, have long since become extinct, it is still the most reliable authority on this subject.

Despite his hopes and aims, "My secret life," written by the somewhat overbearing Phaedran sorcerer, traveller and fame seeker Ninguarda, should only be used as a secondary source. Its chaotic structure, which mixes history, botany, zoology, anecdotes, cooking recipes and somewhat wacky drawings without any index or other means to find the desired information in time, makes it an interesting, but arduous read. His accounts of Boglin life and culture are of singular value, however. Later attempts to rearrange his notes according to subject stopped with the downfall of the Phaedran Empire.

To quote an unnamed traveller: "In my eyes, the rather dry information in three volumes by Thystram is better than carrying all forty-two volumes of Ninguarda, because if you leave just one behind, the information you need will be in the missing instalment for sure."

rare fungi they need for their purposes, the area is left untouched by civilised life; it is the undisputed territory of Pseudomorphs, Scavenger Slimes, Scarlet Sporozoids and Bophannon. In fact, it seems as if the abundance of dangerous fungi is more than enough to keep even the danger from other predators such as Banes relatively small in Mushroom Forest.

The Green Lagoon

At the deepest point of the relative depression that forms the Werewood region lies the Green Lagoon. This huge quagmire is attracting most of the water coming down the Weeping river, which, after its division, is called "Eastern Sascasm" here, following Thystram's description, which, so far, is the most reliable. This, together with frequent rain, makes it one of the wettest and thus most inaccessible parts of Werewood.

Few people have ever seen the Green Lagoon, and fewer still have survived the way back to tell the tale. As it seems, this sinkhole is large, but mostly shallow; only towards the west, where the Sascasm enters it with full

force, does it reach a certain, unmeasured depth. As it is also part of the border between Mushroom Forest and Witchwood, it is cornered by Minutio and other fungi to the north and by Withergalls, Amittina and other plants, especially those liking marshy soil, to the south. The hostility of the region is emphasized by the plethora of Banes, Werebeasts, Malathropes, Ravens and Shathanes which can be found here.

The most common predators in the Green Lagoon are the Skalanx and the Sago, however. While the first are found mostly in the shallow parts of the Lagoon, anchoring their tails to the roots of vegetation on the shore, the latter form a thick layer over the deeper parts of the lake, creating the sickly green color that inspired Thystram to name the Lagoon.

Regular Visitors?

While most people who travel Werewood in search of secrets, riches or witches tend to enter it only a few times in their lives, with the possible exception of the Zandre boatmen who bring some of them up the Sascasm, there are regular visitors to the Forest, too, especially the Jaka and the Sarista.

The Sarista, who, like the Dhuna, fled the Phaedran Empire due to the Cult Wars, are based in Silvanus; from here, these gypsy clans (often appearing as carefree happy thieves to outsiders) usually travel to Zandu and other lands, but they also know how to travel to Werewood, where they meet with the Dhuna for secret reasons. More on the connection between witches and gypsies will be revealed in the next chapter.

Also, the Jaka, natives to the Brown Hills in Western Yrmania, regularly enter Werewood both for hunting, but especially in order to reach Zandu, where they trade. These proud and fierce creatures are very well adapted to the forest, which makes them the best guides a travelling group with a sense of self-preservation can acquire. Both Thystram and Ninguarda used Jaka guides during their expeditions to Werewood.

Even more, the Jaka seem to share an ancient connection with the Boglins, making them ideal for those adventurers who seek an introduction to Weirdlings or Gnorls - provided they can earn the trust of the Jaka in question first. More on this subject can be found in Chapter Three.

Southern Werewood: The Ancient Land

Huge, ancient Amittina and Withergall trees dominate this part of Werewood, which is bordered by the Sascasm, the Green Lagoon and the Onyx Mountains. Misty, warm and humid, it is the dark and dangerous home of two very different yet unique people, the Dhuna and the female Boglins, commonly called Gnorls.

The Sascasm River

Mainly fed by the Weeping River and supplemented by smaller creeks, the Sascasm is immediately parted into two branches, the Eastern Sascasm, which runs into the Green Lagoon, and the Western Sascasm, which goes south, through Werewood and Zandu until it reaches the Azure Ocean. In fact, one might well call the Western Sascasm a continuation of the Weeping river and the Eastern just a branch of the former; although Ninguarda observed and denounced this mistake by his rival, the separation between Weeping River and Sascasm River has never been defied since. A broad, relatively slow and flat river, it is navigable from Zandu to the joint between Western and Eastern Sascasm and the Weeping River. Only when the Sascasm crosses through the hills between Werewood and Zandu does it become narrower and slightly dangerous: this place is called "Gate of the Sascasm" by the Zandre boatmen, who like to exaggerate its danger to command a higher fee from travellers.

While the Zandu part of the Sascasm is relatively free of larger predators, in Werewood it is infested by River Kra, Kimochi, Skalanx, Bog Devils, Chang, Quonlara, Sago and other vile creatures, while Batranc and Kankryu swoop over the river in search for prey.

Even though it is not a well-known fact now, the Sascasm once held some importance for the Phaedrans, who believed it was by this

river they would enter the afterlife. Thus it became their habit to build their eccentric tombs along its banks. The name "Sascasm" reflects this, meaning "the final road".

More on the Phaedran tombs and the Sascasm River can be found in Chapter Four.

Gnorlwood

Gentle hills and withered trees form the twilight beauty of Gnorlwood, the region of Werewood adjacent to the Zandir Border. As the name already states, it is the home of the secret-mongering Gnorls, and has been for uncountable time. Despite humidity, predators, twilight and phosphorizing mosses and fungi, this region looks calm and civilised when compared to the rest of Werewood, dominated by gnarled woods and rolling hills.

The settlements of the Gnorls are still underground, however, which is no surprise; despite magic and the Dhuna keeping their adjacent eastern region of Witchwood clear of too many dangerous predators, there is still a sizable number of Banes, Mandragore, Shathane, Dobonda, Bophannon and other potential dangers living here; still, it is by far safer here than anywhere else in Werewood (with the exception of Witchwood, of course).

More on Gnorlwood, the Gnorls and their culture can be found in Chapter Three.

Witchwood

Surrounded by the Onyx and Sardonyx mountains in the south and east, bordering on Gnorlwood in the west and the Mushroom Forest in the north, Witchwood could be considered one of Talislanta's hardest to reach regions; the high prevalence of dangerous creatures and deadly vegetation ensures that. But, of course, the inhabitants of this region would not like it any other way.

From its appearance and geography, Witchwood is very similar to Gnorlwood: Old, withered trees, covered by moss and fungi, growing amidst round, pleasant hills; additionally, thanks to the outskirts of the

mountains, ragged cliffs and bizarre rock formations occur. But the most unique feature of Witchwood are the hundreds of Dolmen and Stone Circles, found all over the region. These magical portals, gates and/or summoning places were erected by the Archeans and are among the oldest magical structures still in existence and in working shape in all of Talislanta. It is both this remoteness and the Stone Circles which made this place the ideal hideout for the Dhuna, the witches who had fled from the Aamanians during the Cult Wars.

Because of the Dhuna presence, the rate of predators is relatively low, even though extra-dimensional beings use the gates of the area to cross over from other planes. Some scholars who care would argue that the Witches would even be able to eradicate all dangers from their territory, but that it suits them better to have the local dangers work to their favour. Thus, Werebeasts, Mandragores, Ghosts, Fiends, Necrophages, S'drimogon, Storm Demons and Banes roam Witchwood in significant numbers.

More on the Stone Circles and the Dhuna can be found in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Unremembered Children of Forgotten Gods - The Dhuna

...And when the gods convened and came together clad in brightest colors and feelings, form, not shape, experience, not writing, truth, not knowledge, they deliberated and decided to create people, so that they may bath in the power of their worship, to populate and prune the world of the stench of creation that the World-Maker had left. And it was good for them and they cherished their idea and each god created its own people, which is why we can find so many varieties in our time.

But among the gods where a great number who saw that creating people, each god by himself, would bring only flawed, impure results, so they decided to cooperate and to share all their common wisdom and glory with their creation. This is how the ancestors of Dhuna came into being.

However, after all people had been created, the World-Maker appeared before all the gods and scoffed at them. "How sweet you are," he cried at them, "to create so many creatures for me to spoil and trap and tempt; never will they heed you, you made them all too free and too soft and too weak. I will take them from you and their worship will be mine and you shall become forgotten and naught, you will twindle into nothingness until you are no more but a faint memory remembered by none."

This announcement greatly upset the gods except those who together had created our ancestors. These felt no fear, for they knew their offspring would be strong and would not succumb to the temptations of the World-Maker. Alas, the World-Maker, who understood this, overwhelmed our ancestors and wiped their memory out so that they could no longer remember their rightful gods. But still, the gods who had created our ancestors felt no fear; instead they left us runes and stones and a place to hide and waited for the right time to unbosom themselves in front of us and to show us the form and the experience and the truth to become ourselves again, free from the World-Maker who has enraptured the rest of the world.

-Excerpt from a Dhuna story, as transmitted by Anonymus 4

A Brief History of the Dhuna

Deep in the east of Werewood, in a remote area usually named “Witchwood” (but usually only in a hushed tone), live the Dhuna, descendants of an old cult worshipping gods long forgotten by everybody else. How did they come into being? And how did they come to Werewood in general and Witchwood in particular?

Almost nothing was known about the Witches until in the year 603 when the Cymrillian Lyceum Arcanum was ordered to open its secret archives. Among the texts published was also a tract written only a few years ago. The anonymous author, ever since identified as “Anonymus 4” (his text was the fourth in the codex), had managed to find the Dhuna and, spectacularly, could live among them for years, probably magically camouflaging him- or herself as one of them (unfortunately, the text is written without any indication to the identity of the author). This text has revealed a huge amount of information on the “Witches”, on topics such as their history, customs and stories.

The Origin of the Dhuna

Like so many people in modern Talislanta, the Dhuna can trace their ancestry to the people of ancient Phaedra, the empire that dominated the west of the continent for more than a century before collapsing at the beginning of the Cult Wars.

During its time, Phaedra was a culture composed of many different stratified groups (it is this allowance of quite different groups inside the empire that was one of its strengths as well as one of the main causes for its downfall). According to the anonymous text, the Dhuna were one of these “castes”; they traced their name to their ancestor, who was said to be an Archaen hero. These Dhuna were olive-skinned, sturdy people who knew a lot about cultivation of new fields and preparing

the land for regular settlement. Consequently, the mages who led the Empire had them move to the fringe of Phaedran expansion, so that they would prepare the ground for the peasants to follow. Due to this position, Dhuna groups were to be found along all borders of the Empire.

These original Dhuna not only shared the general neglect towards their women that could be found all over Phaedran lands, but even superseded most other groups in it. Stories and songs of the Witches describe this as “the time of mistreatment and hardships”: while the women had to clear the forests and prepare the soil as well as taking care of their families, the men would only rest and drink all day. But these songs, whether they are exaggerated or not, are not sad, but happy, because the hardships of their lives, combined with the dangers of living close to wilderness, taught them to be strong, cunning and self-sufficient. It is to this time that they trace their knowledge of herbs as well as their adaptability in order to survive. Still, the fate of the Dhuna might have been different if there hadn't been a girl who would change her people forever.

Dhuna the Prophet

Her name was Dhuna, not an uncommon name among both men and women of these people; her family was living on the northern edge of the Phaedran Empire, in what is now northern Zandu, but which was still connected with Werewood at the time. Dhuna lore holds many a story about her, which tell of her beauty, of the hardships she had to endure due to her father and what she had to witness being done to her mother. Finally, not capable of bearing these things anymore, she fled from her home and into the forest.

Since Dhuna was as beautiful as she was apt, she survived easily in the dark woods, but, as she had not prepared water for her flight, her thirst grew greater with each passing day. One night, already close to death by thirst, she suddenly came into a small

clearing, the first she encountered since her departure, and she looked up, longing to see the stars one final time before her death.

But instead of death, what followed was a vision: the stars, shining with many colors, came down to Dhuna and revealed themselves to be the Forgotten Gods; they taught her their names and gestures and offered her a bargain: in exchange for fealty they would teach her power beyond her wildest dreams and, even more, they would show her how the society of the Dhuna could be changed to improve the lot of the women.

For seven nights, the songs of the Witches tell, the gods talked to Dhuna and taught her magic and other skills as well as nourishing her with star-milk. Finally, during the seventh and last night, one of the Forgotten Gods, Tin'shiana, kissed her, giving her the power to evoke the Dhuna Kiss. When she woke up on the eight day, she felt prepared and returned to Phaedran territory.

Whatever the truth behind such stories may be, it is a fact that, upon her return, Dhuna started teaching. Wandering from settlement to settlement, she told people about her vision, about the Forgotten Gods and about her/their vision for a different society among the Dhuna or even the Phaedrans in general, one in which the women would be equal or even predominant. While her appearance, but especially her wildness and her cruel magic ensured she never became popular among most segments of the empire, her prominence within her own group became overwhelming.

As traditional Dhuna society already saw the women as those who did all the work, it was relatively easy to rally them to the new tenets Dhuna the Prophet was teaching them. Soon, most of the women of this group followed her; each of them received a kiss from her, thus gaining the same Dhuna Kiss she had herself received as a gift from Tin'shiana. Armed with this weapon, the

One People?

One of the many disputed questions among scholars conducting research into ancient Phaedra is whether the Sarista gypsies and the Dhuna Witches share the same ancestry or not. Due to their similar appearance and their common practice of witchcraft, many judge there is too great a similarity between them to be ignored; on the other hand, their character as peoples seems to be too different to allow for more than a distant relationship.

It is interesting, though, that both the Dhuna and the Sarista seem to ignore each other in their stories and songs. For both of them, it seems as if the other simply had never existed in the past – a strange fact, considering that both peoples do remember the other groups of the former Phaedran Empire, including those eradicated during the Cult Wars. Also, rumors about regular contemporary contacts between Witches and Gypsies are not necessarily pure fiction: Sarista don't seem to take great pain to avoid entering Werewood, though if they do, they cross through it as quickly as possible, and don't seem to take extraordinary efforts to meet Dhuna. Still, such meetings seem to take place and from time to time, Witches join the gypsies in order to have company when leaving Werewood. Finally, both people share certain mystical points of view, for example their astrological interpretation of the Seven Moons, which neither worship, but both associate with the same metaphysical aspects. It seems while both don't have all too much to do with each other, there is no greater antipathy between them.

Anonymous 4 suspected that in fact Sarista and Dhuna might once both have been part of the same group, which might have had the name "Dhuna." The Sarista would therefore be the descendants of those members of the group who did not follow the tenets of Dhuna the Prophet and instead developed a different philosophy. According to this text, it would be natural that now neither of these two groups would like to have too much business with each other, as they are both are somewhat ashamed of their brethren.

sluggish men put up no resistance against the women anymore.

This development did not go unnoticed by the other Phaedrans, of course, though they did not take it serious for a long time, as the rulers saw the Dhuna people as little more than peasants and in Dhuna the Prophet nothing but an ambitious but harmless impostor. There were other, more pressing problems, especially the more and more insurmountable discrepancy between the main religious groups of the empire, the Paradoxists and the Orthodoxists, or the fact that the current emperor, Kabros, had gone into exile and there was a look-alike ruling in his place.

A popular song about Dhuna describes how she was summoned before this false Kabros to discuss her cosmology with delegates from both Orthodoxy and Paradoxy; it seems the the ruling mages thus wanted to distract the religious groups from other matters. Unfortunately, it was during this very meeting that she, with her powers, revealed that Phaedra had a substitute as emperor. Her revelation, if we believe that song, started the Cult Wars, which brought down the Phaedran Empire and counted Dhuna the Prophet, burned on a pyre by Orthodoxists, among its first victims.

Flight and Settlement

After open war had been declared between Orthodoxists and Paradoxists, the Dhuna (now calling themselves after Dhuna the Prophet; to rule out further complications and to show their reverence to her, it became practice not to name any new children "Dhuna") suddenly became one of the main targets of persecution. The Orthodoxists, dominating at this stage of the wars, had at first ignored them, but now found out that the Dhunas beliefs not only showed signs of utmost heresy, but also that the "evil" entity opposed to the Dhuna gods could be identified with their very own and sole deity Aa. Consequently, "fight the Paradoxists but purge the Witches" became a popular slogan to

Dhuna and Danuvia

Of the civilizations that sprang from the ashes of the Phaedran Empire, only two, the Dhuna and the Danuvians, are dominated by women, while the others, like Zandu, Aaman or Cymril, retained the somewhat misogynic attitudes of their ancestors. But while it seems that the Danuvian women's path to power was one long struggle dominated by the wish for freedom with attention to physical strength, the Dhuna Witches were always driven by mystical reasons. Thus there is little common between these two people.

Still, it is interesting that both Dhuna songs and Danuvian lore speaks of Dhuna and the mythical founder of the Danuvians as sisters (the Witches see them as twins, while the Viragos claim Dhuna was the younger sister of their founder), who both wanted to free their gender from suppression by the men; in both peoples' stories, one of them failed miserably, while the other stayed triumphant. Needless to say, for the Dhuna the Danuvians chose the wrong path and vice versa. Besides, the physical differences between the two people seem to speak against any real kinship between them. So, it is probably nothing more than an old story.

them. "Witches" became synonymous with "Dhuna" and still is the preferred name for these people in Aaman.

Even though Dhuna the Prophet had taught her followers strong spells of witchcraft, it was not enough to withstand the persecution by the Orthodoxists, especially since the Paradoxists were indifferent to their plight, offering no real support. The slaughter that followed will forever be remembered by the Witches as the most horrific experience their people ever had to suffer. During this time, the prophetesses that had led the Dhuna after the death of their Prophet proved to be useless as leaders and, even more, dangerous

to the group as a whole; for they shared the belief of Dhuna the Prophet that the tenets of her faith should be preached to everybody, not just to the Dhuna themselves.

During this time of desperation, the most capable Witches took over the leadership of the decimated group, establishing a “primus inter pares” rule of High priestesses or priests that since this time have headed the groups (soon to benamed covens) of the Dhuna as well as taking care of many of their religious needs. Deciding that they would not stand a chance against the Orthodoxists, they led the last of the Dhuna over the northern border of

what had once been the Phaedran Empire, entering Werewood.

Even though they were used to survival on the frontier, surviving in Werewood as fugitives proved to be hard for the Dhuna and their number dwindled, as more and more males and youths were succumbing to the dangers of the forest. Just when it seemed to be just a matter of time until they would be too few of them to start a new life as a people, help came from an unexpected source.

As it seems, the Gnorls or female Boglins who had settled in eastern Werewood during the Age of Confusion (see Chapter 3)

The Stone Circles

Even though it is a commonly accepted fact that the Stone Circles and Dolmens found in Witchwood (and in smaller numbers in other parts of Werewood, too) are directly connected to the Forgotten Gods (and undoubtedly most Dhuna nowadays believe so), this is probably not the case. Instead, they were probably created by the Archaens during the Forgotten Age, who used this part of the forest as one of their centres for experiments using gates. While these ancient people did revere the Forgotten Gods, it is not certain whether they already used the circles of runestones in the manner practiced by the Dhuna today. The relationship between the ancient people and their gods seems to differ greatly in this respect from the relationship fostered by the Witches. The anonymous sorcerer who lived among the Dhuna for many years claims that while the melodies the Dhuna use might be ancient and their language surely is the ancient Elder Tongue, it seems as if the words of their songs as well as their dances and other parts of their rituals are far younger.

All in all, there are literally hundreds of such circles in Werewood, the highest number in Talislanta, even though others can be found in Silvanus, Khazad or even Zandu. Composed of between three and over a hundred steles of monoliths, crafted of probably otherworldly stone, they can form one-way or two-way gates to either a fixed or a random destination. Such a gate is inscribed with runes that reveal its attributes. Besides this type, there are many circles not inscribed with runes, so called blank gates, which can be inscribed by Dhuna Listeners to serve their whim. The Phaedran traveller Ninguarda, who saw these circles long before the Witches fled there, suspected that originally none of the gates were permanently inscribed and that perhaps either the runes or the circles or both might not even be of Archaen design (though he offered no idea who might have created them).

Besides fully functionable circles, there are many broken or incomplete ones as well as single monoliths, called Dolmen, which are usually not inscribed with runes. Both Ninguarda and Thystram saw in them means for either signaling borders or finding stars, but these explanations seem like desperate attempts to explain something inexplicable to them. As they don't serve as gates, their use to the Witches is mainly that of landmarks, though sometimes they are used for rituals.

To the Dhuna, exploring the Gates has become important, not only for interdimensional travel or avenues of escape, but also as a currency. Even hints to the use of a certain Stone Circle are more than sufficient to trade with Gnorls for news, information or goods. It is safe to say that in current Talislanta, no one knows more about the gates than the Witches.

experienced great trouble with demonic entities entering the material plane by the stone circles found north-east of their settlements, forcing them to lead a secretive life underground. To them, the Dhuna seemed to be an ideal solution for their problems, so they sent envoys to them. Their proposal was simple: In exchange for the Witches guarding the Stone Circles and hunting down all dangers emitted from there into direction of Gnorlwood, the Forest Kingdom of the Boglins would agree to have the Dhuna settle down in far eastern Werewood and to keep their existence and settlements as secret as possible to everybody. Needless to say, the Witches, seeing the advantages of having a hideout secured by a huge, dangerous forest, agreed and a formal contract between the Boglins, represented by more than a hundred Gnorls, and the Dhuna was set up; the Gnorls then led them to their new territories, the remotest part of Werewood, later known as Witchwood.

Ever since the Dhuna settled down in Witchwood, the number of their settlements is on the rise. They have adapted well to their new surroundings, developing spells and enchantments well as exploring physical skills and herbal lore to cope with Banes, Werebeasts, demonic entities and other dangers in their territory. Mostly, their Covens are self-sufficient, needing only little additional goods, which they get from the Gnorls in exchange for secrets about or discovered by the gates they watch and explore. Besides such goods, they take great pain to learn from the Rhabdomancers all they can about the political developments in Talislanta and to spread false rumors about themselves. Ever since their arrival in Witchwood, they have experienced no broader persecution except some scattered and usually demoralized groups of Aamanian Witch-hunters; still they want to be prepared. To the Dhuna today, the memory of their persecution is still vivid and real; their life in Witchwood seems like mere training to them, a training

for a final battle between them and the Orthodoxists. But this time, they want to stay triumphant.

As for their persecutors, it still has to be seen whether the newly published text on the Dhuna will have any impact on Aamanian views. So far, the Orthodoxists insist on the text being "a heretic fabrication of lies," but should this point of view ever change, a formal crusade could follow, which would put the Dhuna into serious trouble.

Dhuna Religion and Magic

According to the anonymous text, quoting Dhuna the Prophet, at the beginning of time there was only Chaos and the Gods; there was nothing else. At this point of existence, everything was in balance. Then, one of the gods, usually called the World-Maker by the Dhuna, became bored with this neverending status and created the planes, filling them with all kind of creatures and plants. Even though it has to be emphasized that to the Dhuna, the World-Maker is not evil, it was this belief that generated the extraordinary level of hate of the Orthodoxists towards them, as they see a mockery of their own god Aa in the Dhunas "World-Maker".

As described above, the other gods then created the various people of the planes, which, according to the Dhuna, include all intelligent life, including Banes, demonic and supernatural entities from other places, etc.. The Dhuna believe that they differ from these others in that not only one or a few, but many gods created them. From this fact the Witches do claim a certain feeling of preeminence, though outsiders can rarely perceive it. It is these gods that the Dhuna revere. Once they had forgotten them, but Dhuna the Prophet brought the truth to light.

To the Dhuna, there are myriads of gods, whose names are never spoken but expressed in sign-language. Each of them commands feelings, conditions and emotions rather than

Why Forgotten?

The so called Forgotten Gods are indeed the deities of the ancient Archaens; more elemental entities than “real” gods and goddesses, they suited the Archaens, whose ways were far different from modern Talislanta. From the relatively few hints scholars could find on this remote age, it seems that towards the end of the Forgotten Age, the Ancients were not worshipping their gods in a traditional sense; instead, they just accepted the existence of their gods, co-existing with them on an equal basis (though there are wise men who strongly disagree with this point of view).

After the Great Disaster, the gods of the Archaens were forgotten. Confronted with the end of their civilization as it used to be, with most of their arcane knowledge lost, their sky-cities fallen to the earth, and most of their kind either dead or scattered, it seems the former masters of the world suddenly realized that their gods, who they thought they equalled, had not helped them, had not warned them, had not even tried to save them. Whether the gods were angry over the insolence of the Archaens or just as surprised about the Great Disaster as their followers has to remain unknown, but even in their most desperate hours, it was sure that this silence would not be forgiven. During the whole Age of Confusion it seems that the last of the Archaens did everything to suppress any knowledge of their former gods, so that by the time of the Phaedran Empire, they were nothing more but rumors.

Even though the Forgotten Gods, as they have revealed themselves to Dhuna the Prophet, seem to share the same name as the gods revered (or rather accepted) by the Archaens, it seems their personalities, in some cases even their “gender” had become different to the time before the Great Disaster. Also the cosmology of the Witches seem to be completely original. This can lead to interesting questions regarding the true nature of such gods, but such questions would never be asked by the Dhuna themselves and there are few other people who could ever become aware of the problem at all.

concrete objects, which are under the control of the World-Maker; according to the Witches, their struggles for survival within Werewood is a mirror to the battles between the Forgotten Gods and the World-Maker over the material world, and their success here would be of enormous effect supernaturally. This struggle is fought because, while the World-Maker is not evil, he is jealous of the people the other gods have created, and especially of the Dhuna. Therefore he abuses his own creations as well as the races of other gods (such as the Aamanians, a fact that strongly contradicts the Orthodoxist claim that the World-Maker is a mockery of Aa) to gain control over all the people in all worlds. Only because of this has it become necessary to fight them. Should the Dhuna just survive for long enough, they are sure their gods will win their fight and pacify all worlds, making the Material Plane a paradise for all people.

The Witches divide their gods into three groups, which they identify as Black, Grey or

White Gods. According to them, much like the Dhuna Orders of the same name, this division corresponds to the attitude of these gods towards the means of survival employed by the Dhuna. Accordingly, White Gods abhor force as a mean to achieve survival, while Black Gods recommend its prudential use, and Grey Gods try to strike the balance. It has to be noted though, that the reverence of the different groups is not bound to the Order of the same name. Whatever their Order is, a Dhuna will always revere and accept all Forgotten Gods and often his or her favorite deities belongs to a group different of his own Order.

Daily Religion

For daily Dhuna life, their cosmology is not as prominent as one might expect. To the Witches, survival by itself is already one form of prayer; otherwise, silent prayer is the norm. Perhaps in strict contrast to the openly lived

religion of Aaman, Dhuna perceive most of their religion as something private, quiet. But besides this daily personal reverence, there is another side to their religion, too, marked by prophetesses and long rituals.

As the High Priestesses and Priests of the different covens have more an honorific than a truly holy position, it is the Prophetesses who lead the rituals of the Dhuna; apart from these duties, they are met with a certain contempt by the Witches. This attitude of the Witches dates back to the time of their hardest persecution by the Orthodoxists. At that time, the prophetesses who used to lead the Dhuna proved to be fatally inapt with coping with the slaughters of their people, hoping that praying and waiting and talking would be enough not only to stop the slaughter, but also convert the Orthodoxists to the tenets of Dhuna the Prophet. Of course this did not happen and in consequence, the Witches started to organize in Covens and rule themselves without the prophetesses, whom they saw (and still see) as a severe danger to their security.

Thus it is no surprise that becoming a prophetess is the wish of very few Dhuna, but like so many things in their society, it is not for them to choose, but for their gods. Once a Dhuna woman (for only women can become prophetesses) starts to receive visions in her dreams, it is a signal by the gods that they want her to serve them; this can take place at any age of the Dhuna in question, though mostly prophetesses-to-be start having such visions at the age of twelve; cases in which they start at an adult or even mature age are not unheard of, however. Often the Witch in question tries to ignore these visions, hoping they are just exaggerated dreams. But ultimately, this is fruitless, as other prophetesses receive dreams about the new candidate, and come to "pick them up".

At the moment a Dhuna becomes a prophetess, she is ritually cast out of her Coven and Order, becoming an outsider, who is grudgingly respected, but not integrated into normal society, a fact emphasized by their

special dress which includes a cape made from white, grey and black patchwork. They usually have no permanent housing, instead moving from hut to hut. It is custom among the Dhuna that none of them may reject a prophetess and has to house and feed her for one day and one night; after that period, the prophetess in question is obliged to bless the hut and its inhabitants and move on.

Besides their duty to lead the rituals and preserve (magical) knowledge, the main task of the Dhuna prophetesses is to attend childbirth and to determine the Order of the newborn. Apart from these duties, they also spend much of their time pondering upon their dreams, which they can invariably remember to the last detail and which may or may not contain a message of one or more gods; as usually this is far from clear and each prophetess is responsible for all Forgotten Gods, even those she doesn't know yet, this meditating and thinking can become a complicated affair. To other Dhuna, this is just weird and usually they are not interested in the results of this process at all, believing that something only a prophetess sees in her dreams is not a message important enough to be heeded.

But, whatever the status of the prophetesses is, rituals do form a backbone of Dhuna society as it is these that bring a Coven together on a regular basis. The time for a ritual is determined by certain cycles of the suns and moons, especially Ardan (as all current celestial bodies of Archaeus came into being during the Great Disaster, this too is proof that the Dhuna religion is far different from the original cults of the Forgotten Gods) as well as by visions of the prophetesses or important events. They usually take place among one of the many stone circles, partly because of the magic of these places, partly because the Dhuna clear the circles of trees and other larger vegetation, making them rare clearings in otherwise thickly overgrown Witchwood and one of the few places in all of

Werewood where such things as stars or moons can be freely perceived.

These Dhuna rituals are wild, ancient affairs, including hours upon hours of unanimous singing, dancing and wild reveling. Typically, they do not include formal offerings, as the Witches believe the energy in their songs and laughs and cries and tears are enough for their gods. In times of great need, a ritual may thus take the course of several nights; Anonymous 4 describes a ritual celebrated to pray for deciphering the runes of a special Stone Circle, which took seven nights in a row. "On the seventh night," he writes, "the Dhuna in question were too exhausted to do anything but slow movements, but determined, they sung and danced for the whole night. I am convinced they would have continued for the next night as well, had not the secret of the runes been revealed to them that evening."

Among these rituals, those for the deceased are the most ornate. The higher the

esteem of the person in life, the longer the ritual mourning for her or him. Unlike most other rituals of the Dhuna, these are performed during the day, a break with the usual safety measures the Witches are famous for, which is either a reminiscence of their former life as Phaedrans or a consequence of their new existence, with death being the opposite of life, so that its rituals must reflect the opposite of their usual rites. Such mourning rituals can take hours upon hours, during which every participant, one after another, shares her or his experiences and feelings for the deceased with the community. Out of secrecy, the Dhuna only refer to their gods by certain secret gestures. After the ritual is finished, during the next night the body of the deceased is brought to the burial cave of the Coven by the closest family (the spouses and direct children); these places, often elaborate caves, are warded with runes and symbols. They are strictly avoided by the Witches except during the burial ceremonies,

Remembering the Past

Even though the Dhuna have lived in Werewood for centuries, some of their customs still betray their ancestry as Phaedrans and inhabitants of far less dangerous surroundings. For example, the clothes of the Dhuna, while woven of plant fibres, still betray their origin in their patterns and cut. For humid, narrow Witchwood, these clothes are quite impractical, especially because they have no slits or cuts, making them uncomfortably sticky in a rather short time. Also, the long cloak usually worn by both sexes is often more of a hindrance than a merit.

Also, their dwellings, while built of local material, still betrays their lineage to the styles of the Empire of old. For example, even though Dhuna would never light fires close to their Covens for fear of being found out by the smoke, each hut has a vestigial chimney and the door is always large enough to allow a Dhuna enter it without bowing – just like the doors the proud Phaedrans introduced even to the tiniest village. These similarities could be pursued down to the patterns on Dhuna pottery, their way to construct beds and chairs (the Witches traditionally sit on the earth, but there is always a chair at the rear of a Dhuna house, next to the unused chimney, which is ceremonically offered to guests, which in turn refuse to use it. It seems that this tradition goes back to the time when imperial clerks used to travel from house to house of the then Phaedran Dhuna, and these were unaccustomed to sit on the floor).

Another truly Phaedran trait is the long hair worn by both women and men. Werewood has little clean water to offer (though Witchwood has more of it than other parts of the region), and the almost complete ceiling of vegetation makes the existence of countless bugs, fleas and other pests which tend to cling to the hair a normal occurrence. The Witches are too proud (and too knowledgeable in Witchcraft) to acknowledge this fact by wearing shorter hair, though, which lead to a Zandu saying "hair as alive as that of a Witch." It is thus no surprise that among the first things Dhuna do when finding a place with an abundance of water is to wash their hair.

for they believe it is unwise to disturb the sleep of the dead. Inside these caves, the dead are put to their eternal rest with all their clothes and possessions. Anonymous 4, who spent a long time with the Dhuna, writes that this might be another reminiscence of their time as Phaedrans. "I have seen their dead sit in the caves among those things they prized most high. It reminded me of the Phaedran wizards entombed along the Sascasm. Truly, the Dhuna are of Phaedran stock."

Magic

For Dhuna, magic is something natural; even before Dhuna the Prophet brought them the tenents of the Forgotten Gods, the women of this group had always committed themselves not only to herbal lore, but to witchcraft, making them, not only in the eyes of the Aamanians, the proverbial Witches of Talislanta. Even their language, the arcane Elder Tongue, as well as their names sets them apart of other people, setting them in a tradition dating back to the Forgotten Age or beyond. These ancient roots are accentuated by their brand of witchcraft, which relies heavily on relationships and incantations. In the case of the Dhuna, their spells show an age that made scholars like Anonymous 4 wonder whether their special branch of the order is not the oldest still practised, the individual words, rites and gestures being almost unchanged since the time of the Archaens.

Besides these powers, which often takes the shape of curses to the few non-Dhuna who experienced them, the female Witches also have a special power, the Dhuna kiss. Attributed to a gift of the goddess Tin'shiana to Dhuna the Prophet, all female Witches can employ it as of the onset of their puberty. Essentially, a man kissed by a Dhuna loses all his resistance towards her, though to be entirely effective, this kiss has to be given mouth to mouth. It doesn't have to be mentioned that persecutors of the Witches, like the Aamanians, know and fear this kiss

far too much to let any Witch come even remotely close to themselves for fear of this kiss. Only few men, including Dhuna Protectors, are relatively immune to this powerful ability.

Living in Dhuna Society

Little if anything is known of Dhuna society before they settled down in Witchwood. If one relies on their stories, it seems that during this early stage, there were neither Orders nor Covens in the current sense; instead they seem to have lived in family clans led by prophetesses. Only after the persecution of the Orthodoxists and their flight to Witchwood, during which this old division proved to be useless and during which the old clans were torn apart and mixed with each other, making a new organisation of the Dhuna people essential. Ever since, "survival" has been the leading concept of all Dhuna organisation and way of life.

Covens

At the centre of Dhuna society lies the Coven, which serves as a combination of village and family. Their sizes differ greatly, reaching from only a few Dhuna to several hundred Witches. Usually this is dictated by the surroundings of a Coven; as the Witches are strict vegetarians and both their taste and the climate of Werewood only allow for fresh food, so that a Coven can only have a limited physical size with a diameter equal to what an adult Dhuna can walk during one day and night there and back again. The food (and water) resources of this area then naturally determine the size of the settlement. Thus, should a Coven grow too big, it is divided by casting lots, with one half leaving to found a new settlement. While the number of Dhuna has greatly expanded ever since they set foot into Witchwood, there is still enough space (and enough stone circles) for new Covens. Besides, due to the dangers encountered here as well as in the rest of Werewood, the

It's not easy to be a Dhuna man...

Like the Danuvians, the Dhuna have a society in which men are not as decisive as their women. The sobriquet “Witches,” which is used by most outsiders to (often despectively) call these people is proof enough that their men are not perceived very much. But, unlike Danuvian society, where men are little more than consorts, Dhuna rather believe in equality of the sexes. Thus the men fight and work like the female Witches do and they even wield the same magic. In many respects, they are equal.

Still, equality stops with the usage of the Dhuna kiss. Unlike, say, the male Batreans, the men of the Dhuna are not immune to the kiss of their women, and, while the harsh conditions the Dhuna live in prevent the females from overdoing its application, they do give their “special” kiss to the males from time to time. While this usually doesn’t leave them with a decisively weaker or placid character, it does give them a certain sense of awe for the power of their women and while they take active part in all decisions of their Covens, it is relatively rare for them to do anything but agree to issues brought forth by female witches.

This situation leads to equality in sharing responsibility compared to most other Talisnantans: It is not unusual for male Dhuna to look after the children while most of the Coven is gathering food, and they can regularly be found doing household chores, or weaving and sewing clothes. Of course their higher strength means that they perform physical labour, like cutting wood, building huts, etc. Sometimes strong-willed males become successful Witches, becoming one of the leaders or even the High Priest of a Coven and having three or more spouses; more often, though, it is the females who have such positions while the men are content to play the second fiddle.

Perhaps it is due to this equality or even relative inferiority of Dhuna men that they too are called “Witches” and not “warlocks.” To most male Talisnantans, the position of Dhuna men is quite ridiculous.

founding of a new settlement is not as common as it might seem.

Covens exist to provide security and survival for its members; they consist of simple huts erected of stone and wood and covered by woven thatches. They are at least partly built into the soil, often leaning against an Amittina tree and using a dug hole beneath it as a secure and relatively dry room. Unlike the Gnorls they would never carve their homes into such trees, though. Usually these measures, together with carefully arranged bushes and other plants (and not to forget the occasional charm or spell) ensure that such housings are hard to spot in the twilight of Werewood. The distance between these huts, which can house between three and twenty people, is usually relatively large, another measure to ensure a high level of security.

Even though it would seem as a contradiction in terms for most outsiders, Dhuna Covens are self-sufficient, organised, liberal and free at the same time.

On the one hand, basically, each Witch is free to go and do as they will, and there is no obligation whatsoever; there are rare, but not unheard of changes of Coven or even of Order, often due to new marriages, or even Dhuna becoming solitary wanderers, often to find new enlight-enment far from Witchwood, which in this liberal spirit are easily accepted by other Dhuna.

On the other hand, there is the principle of “everybody helps everybody else” among the Dhuna. In other words: a person not supporting the Coven is not supported by the group either. Thus, while being totally free, it is quite natural that every member of a Coven is doing as much as they can to add to their community. For most of the time, this means patrolling a Coven's “territory” and gathering food, herbs and other useful things while looking out and, should it become necessary, driving away or killing dangers like predators that could become harmful to the Coven.

While this is the “work” of most members, others add their unique skills by creating pottery, carvings, woven goods or by taking care of the children. While breakfast and lunch are eaten individually, supper is usually prepared and taken by the whole Coven, coming together to share their experiences. Unlike the rituals, these evenings are usually spent rather quietly, though. Due to their history, the Dhuna are not a merry people; too deep is the fear of persecution in their collective heart.

Decisions within a Coven are always discussed by the whole group and decided by popular vote of all active members. Thus, children are the only ones not involved, as long as they are dependent on the Coven. Once a Witch is big enough to gather food or stand watch, she or he is entitled to discuss and vote on all issues.

This rather high level of democracy doesn't mean a Coven has no leaders, though. Rather, the two most respected Dhuna of any group are rewarded the title of a High Priestess or High Priest; abstaining from votes, they serve as mediators and organizers of daily life. They are two “leaders” so that both can supplement each other and so that one of them is always free to travel to other Covens, ensuring one High Priestess will always be present in times need. Often, but not always, a female and a male will be chosen for this post, though all-female High Priestesses of a Coven are not unheard of. Theoretically elected for life, they can at all times be easily removed from their posts if a majority is not satisfied with their work, High Priestesses and Priests can wield a lot of power, based on their integrity, wisdom, and power. In cases where a matter concerns more than one Coven, usually decisions are reached in separate discussions, and the results reported to each other by one of the High Priestesses.

Also, a Dhuna Coven serves as a family. Dhuna are liberal concerning marriage, with both sexes being allowed to have as many

A Constant State of Emergency

Even though there never has been an organized persecution of the Dhuna since their arrival in Witchwood and their contract with the Bogleins, they are still a paranoid people. Rumors brought by the Gnorls and the scarce Aamanian who actually succeed in reaching Witchwood are more than enough to keep the Witches in a state of panic. Anonymous 4 describes his insights into what that means in their daily live:

“Already as children, Dhuna learn not to make unnecessary sounds. It is unsettling to see all the children of a Coven sitting in one of the small, unlit dwellings, all together. No laughing, no idle chatter or child's play. Earnest, like Sindarans, they sit together, listening to one older Witch teaching them. I have learned that the Dhuna sometimes don't just use their rarely understood Elder Tongue, which changed from being their tongue of magic to being their vernacular after they fled the Cult Wars, obviously in order to avoid eavesdropping.”

“This desire to keep a low profile even leads to the fact that Dhuna would never dare to light fires inside their Covens. Most of their vegetarian food is prepared uncooked, either raw or fermented with the help of sharp herbs and spices. In the rare cases when a fire is needed – to provide warmth for the sick or to prepare one of the rare meals that need cooking, it is lit some distance away from the Coven. Some might think these and countless other measures are simply signs of paranoia. But the Dhuna themselves think it is natural to be cautious and not at all a sign of a weak person. To them survival is more important than pride. Or, rather, their pride lies in their survival.”

spouses as they like. After centuries in hiding with no contact to other people (and only scarce contact to other Covens), a certain tendency towards incest is not uncommon, but of no consequence to the Dhuna themselves.

Consequently, all children of the Coven (including those of the same Order adopted from outside, see below) are raised together, with all adult members of the community acting as parents. Dhuna education is practical as it is harsh. Children learn their first skills of survival as soon as they are old enough to understand language. Usually, they are full supporting members of their community by the age of 9 or 10.

The Orders

All members of a Coven belong to one of the three divisions of the Dhuna, which are the White, Grey and Black Order. Even though these colors correspond to the Black, Grey and White Gods the Witches commonly divide the Forgotten Gods into, they have their origin not in the Dhuna pantheon, but in an ideological division that started with their persecution by the Orthodoxists during the Cult Wars. Ever since the death of Dhuna the Prophet there had been discussions among her followers over how to counter the persecution that threatened to purge their community forever. While the prophetesses insisted that waiting, praying and talking would be the only possible way, all the others generally agreed that they had to go into hiding. Apart from that, there was little agreement, though, so that after reaching Werewood, the Dhuna splintered into three divisions, or Orders.

Of these, the White Order remained closest to the ideal of Dhuna the Prophet. Emphasizing the creative and fertile aspects of nature, they claimed that, like nature, they had done the right thing to hide, but now that they had reached their safe haven, hiding was all they should do. Covens of the White Order subsequently abhor force as a mean to solve problems, instead hiding as good as they can and trying to avoid killing, instead watching and evading intruders or predators. This doesn't mean they don't employ force when the need is high, for example when a coven is directly in danger. To the Dhuna, ideal and reality are two quite different things and while

the White Order would love to live peacefully, the dangers of Werewood are too high to allow for that. And it seems their compromise between encouraging peacefulness while employing force when other possibilities are not possible is quite successful; in fact, the White Order comprises most of the Covens. These communities usually choose rather peaceful territories containing only few runestones and circles.

Diametrically opposite to this philosophy is the Black Order, which admires the destructive forces of nature. Accordingly, they are willing to wisely employ force to secure their Covens, which essentially means they hunt down predators and intruders they deem to be dangerous. In the case of travellers the danger of betrayal of their location to the outside world is usually considered dangerous in itself. Generally, their Covens are among the largest, but also the most dangerous. But for these Dhuna, who feel more alive due to the danger, this is welcome, despite the high mortality (which is somewhat compensated by the high fertility rate). Alas, as there are only relatively few covens of the Black Order, they mostly settle close to Stone Circles known to be frequently used as gates for predators crossing over from other dimensions or close to areas known for their high numbers of Werebeasts and Banes.

Finally, the Grey Order tries to balance out the other Orders while favouring neither point of view. Covens of this Order believe that nature will always use the best means to achieve its goals; building on that they try to outwit any intruders and to skillfully overcome dangers with as little force as possible, while never evading it unless this would be the wisest tactic. Of all the Dhuna, they are the least xenophobic.

Finding it impossible to share daily life in a mutual community, each of these Orders originally formed one Coven. It is from these three original Covens all others are descended.

What's your Order, please?

The question to what Order a Dhuna belongs is, according to their belief, decided by the Forgotten Gods at the time of conception. To them, the only thing they can do is to wait for signs on the baby during its first hours on earth to learn the will of their gods. Such signs can be various: a long period of labor is seen as a symbol for Black Order (to the Witches, the womb resembles paradise; if the child really struggles to stay there as long as possible, it is seen as of the defiant and strong character which is the trademark of the third Order of the Dhuna), as are long and strong cries by the baby or a high loss of blood by the mother during birth; should the mother die while giving birth, an affiliation towards the Black Order is almost certain.

Should the birth be peaceful and fast, the cries feeble, the child would consequently belong to the White Order; the same holds for babies who smile or show peacefulness and happiness after birth or for a baby who drinks only moderately when put to his or her mother's breast for the first time (forceful drinking on the other hand is seen as a sign for the Black Order). Of course it is rare that a newborn shows signs from only one Order, so the prophetess assigned to find out the allegiance of the baby rather tries to determine which side of its character is strongest; in cases where she cannot decide, the child is given to the Grey Order.

After the Order has been determined, the prophetess proclaims the will of the Forgotten Gods, either giving the newborn over to the Coven, or, in cases where the Order of the baby differs from that of its original group, it is taken by her to the next Coven of the babies affiliation which can afford to raise it. Even though Dhuna Covens raise their offsprings together, the general distrust they have towards their prophetesses sometimes means that the proclamation of a child's Order can evolve into heated arguments between Coven and prophetess. Thus it is not astonishing that often the determined Order of a baby equals that of the Coven, while the determination of different Orders seems to amass in times when a Coven is low on food. Whether this is truly the will of the Forgotten Gods or rather a clever management of the Dhuna by their prophetesses is something not even a Gnorn could ever decide for sure.

Wanderers

Dhuna Covens are self-sufficient, each maintaining itself without any help from outside except in case of extremely dire straits. Somehow it even seems as if the fear of persecution inherent in their whole society discourages the different groups from mingling with each other too much on a regular basis or even to have all of their members know the exact position of the next Covens, which in any case lie too far from their own than that members of different groups could meet each other while guarding their territory or collecting food. In this way they parallel the Boglins who also shun all too much contact among each other. To the Dhuna themselves, this lack of contact is a strength; to outsiders like Anonymous 4 it is a weakness, as in times of need, like a full-fledged attack from Aamanians, they would

have little chance in convening on a larger basis.

While most Dhuna are thus content to live within their Coven for all of their lives, this is not the case for all Witches. Especially the High Priestesses and Priests, either on their own or in the form of emissaries, try to stay in contact with other groups of Dhuna (though only of the same Order), regularly doing their rounds between them. These visits are often only short, though, just enough to share the newest information or alert other groups for dangers approaching or exchanging potions or remedies. Apart of these, it is mainly the prophetesses and the Listeners (see below) who establish contact between the different Covens. Prophetesses not only wander within a certain Coven, but, once another prophetess enters a settlement, leave for the next Coven after having spoken to the new arrival, making them the probably best informed

Witches concerning the internal affairs of the Dhuna. Even though they are never really welcome among their people, it is this knowledge that makes even the most prophetess-hating Witch willing to talk to them from time to time. Once they leave, they take those newborn with them, which are in need of a new Coven, because their Order is different from that of his or her parents. Besides this regular travel of the prophetesses, they also call for rituals that need the participation of different Covens; it is before, during or after such rituals that different Witches meet, talk or fall in love with each other, ensuring that there is at least some mixing between the separate groups.

Besides the prophetesses, it is mainly the Listeners who cross between Covens. These rare individual Dhuna have the innate ability and interest not only to understand the runes inscribed on the Stone Circles and Dolmen of Werewood, but also to memorize and write them for themselves. Enraptured by runes, they move from runestone to runestone studying them and trying to decipher their secrets. To most of the Dhuna, these Witches appear strange at the least, as a general use of their interest is not seen by them; still, from time to time, they are used as emissaries to other Covens.

As for the Gnorls with whom the Dhuna trade for information and, rarely, herbs, potions and other "luxuries," it is the Gnorls that come to the Witches and not vice versa. Both sides still remember their treaty and no Dhuna, not even the most xenophobic member of the Black Order, would ever consider troubling a Boglin (this goes for the Weirdlings, too). On the side of the Dhuna, they mostly sell remedies made from plants like prophet tree, shrinking violet, tantalus, contrary vine and cleric's cowl besides secrets acquired from their Stone Circles. Such remedies are often re-sold by the Gnorls and highly coveted throughout Talislanta.

The case is different with the Sarista, with whom such trade is sometimes conducted,

So you want to meet the Dhuna?

If this is the case, the general advice would be: don't go there. Dhuna are rather xenophobic, which is not surprising considering their history. While Covens of the White Order would try to hide from the foreign traveller, those of the Black Order would not mind fighting him in order to secure their hideout. Only Covens of the Grey Order and prophetesses, who are always interested in sharing the tenets of Dhuna the Prophet, would ever consider meeting and talking to a stranger (though even then caution is advised), but to which fraction a Dhuna belongs is next to impossible to discern for travellers.

The best way to meet with Dhuna is to make a deal with the Gnorls. Even though they feel bound to their treaty with the Witches to never betray their settlements or anything else about them, they might, if they become sure of the sincerity of the traveller (this may take weeks or even months), establish contact between him and a Coven of the Grey Order, who could then decide whether to allow him to reach and enter their settlement or not (this could take a number of weeks as well). Given such long time spans, it is not surprising that the number of travellers who meet Dhuna peacefully and live to talk about it is very small.

Making deals with Sarista or even Jaka, on the other hand, is usually even more disappointing. Despite their possible claims, their connection to the Dhuna is not too good. If one should go with these races, it is preferable to go for the Sarista, as the Gypsies do have contact with the witches from time to time and might even know a useful contact (though one should not rely on that). The Jaka are almost completely useless, as they abhor the Dhuna as users of magic.

too. It is rare for the Gypsies to cross all through Werewood to enter a Dhuna Coven; instead, Witches wishing to acquire things from them wander to the routes regularly used by Sarista groups on their way south, waiting for one of them. Among the things regularly acquired this way is cloth as well as rare magical ingredients not found in Werewood and sometimes small jewellery too. Also, Dhuna deciding to leave Werewood to wander to other lands for enlightenment use Sarista caravans to hide from the feared grasp of Aaman. Finally, the Jaka, who regularly cross Werewood, generally shun the Witches, and deeply distrust them. Trade with them is very rare and only done in times of desperate need. On the other hand, there is only little a Jaka could offer to a Dhuna.

Warfare

Unlike other Talislantan cultures, the Dhuna have no separate group or caste of warriors; their culture, which is based on survival, prefers members with knowledge and skills of many useful attributes to specialised warriors. If one could speak of warriors among the Dhuna, then it would mean members of the Black Order, which

emphasizes a clever use of force to solve problems, and this means fighting, too. Still it would be wrong to identify Black Order Witches with a caste of fighters, like, say, the Aamanian knights are. Consequently, members of the Grey or White Order even less come close to being “warriors”, preferring outwitting an enemy or simply hiding from it to fighting.

A certain exception to this rule are the so-called Protectors. These relatively rare Dhuna, who automatically belong to the black Order, are chosen upon birth; being born with the legs first is seen as a will of the Gods that this special person should live a completely different life to usual Dhuna custom. These babies are never breast-fed; instead they are given milk from a Bane skull and beginning with their first meal, to everything they eat, a drop of a potion made from the rare Sarassos plant, a small and inconspicuous violet nightflower, is added. This bitter liquid is usually deadly when taken in larger quantities, but Dhuna Protectors grow used to it over the years until, around the age of fourteen, their bodies have adapted to it (though as a side-effect, their sense of taste is forever ruined). From this point, they can take a full portion of Sarassos Potion, which prevents them from experiencing any pain until the next dusk or dawn, whichever comes first.

Dhuna Protectors are raised by their Covens to be lonesome, dutiful watchers and fighters. Their function is to guard and patrol those Stone Circles not in the immediate vicinity of Dhuna Covens. They are respected by the Witches, but at the same time they are feared and seen as repellant, too. Even though it is they themselves who make the Protectors, Dhuna inherently dislike their nonconformity with the group.



The Last of the Dhuna?

Among most Talisnantans, the inhabitants of Witchwood are usually called “The Last of the Dhuna.” This is because scholars remember that only a few escaped the Orthodoxist slaughter during the Cult Wars, and newer data is not available due to the Witches taking care to keep as low a profile as they can. The Aamanians still firmly believe that their ancestors have purged most of the Dhuna and that only a few scattered women are still lingering in Werewood, desperately struggling to stay alive and terrified of the mighty weapons of Aa.

In fact, from time to time the Hierophant of Aa uses the Dhuna to sow fear among his people, stigmatizing them as a small but desperate group of troublemakers and heretics who would do anything to overthrow the “freedom” of Aaman. To fight them, and to ensure peace and prosperity, the followers of Aa are then advised to stick to the commandments of their faith as well as to sign up for expeditions into Werewood, to “find and purge the Seed of Evil in our time.” Even after hundreds of such announcements, the reaction to these calls is quite enthusiastic and many a zealous knight of Aa see it as their duty to hunt even the last of these heretics.

As Aaman and Werewood don’t share a common border, and the most direct way leads through antagonistic Zandu, this is easier said than done. Thus, only small groups of Aamanians cross over to Werewood from time to time and most of them are never seen again, the few survivors speaking of unnamed horrors and no Dhuna (as those who do meet them only come back alive in the rarest of cases). Still, the demise of Aamanians missing in Werewood is usually attributed the doing of the Dhuna, and brings forth even more Orthodoxists willing to face the challenge of Werewood.

That in fact there are now more Dhuna in Witchwood than even during the time of the Phaedran Empire is a secret only some assorted Gnorls know, who respect their pact with the Dhuna too highly to ever consider selling this secret to anyone (besides, it would be rare for an Aamanian to ask a Gnorl for help). Thus it is probable that for a long time the sobriquet “last of” will stay with the Dhuna; not that it is interesting to them anyway. This may change with the publication of the anonymous text on the Witches. Once it is accepted as true by the authorities in Aaman, there is little doubt that its information could end in a formal crusade of the Orthodoxists against the Dhuna with unforeseeable results.

Chapter 3: The Realm of the Boglins

...Thus I spent my third summer with the Gnorls, and surely I would have liked to spend another winter with them too, as they were of the utmost interest to me. Their wicked sense of humor, their way of life and the innumerable secrets they hoard... to me with my incomparable intellect, there are few places as exciting as Gnorlwood (though I know quite a few more comfortable places). But all that is beautiful always comes to an end far too early...

In this case, one morning I got up rather early as is my personal preference when feeling quite at home somewhere. At that time I was still living on the first floor of Shibaals Amittina housing, one of the largest I have ever seen in Werewood, with three floors above ground and at least two more below. Longing forward to a breakfast of fresh mushroom toast and roasted false Sheeska, I went downstairs to the reception room on the ground floor, casting my eyes over the table, the pleasant chimney, the shelves full of mysterious or precious looking books and artifacts and the huge bureau... of course I knew my host Shibaal had nothing of real value here, but since some of the things were copies of her real artifacts, which she guarded elsewhere, I still found the effect quite nicely done.

Unfortunately, there was no breakfast on the table; obviously my host did not expect me to rise quite as early as I did that morning (I could not blame her for doing so: it was the first time in more than two years I had got up so early, as I had only now adapted to the sounds of Werewood while trying to go to sleep in this tree- house). Thus, I took this opportunity to go up to the second floor of the home, where Shibaal had her private rooms and which I had not entered before out of my sense for taste and good manners (and her threat to throw me out should I dare to try). I figured my apologies and need for food would suffice as an excuse. Anyway, I silently crept up the tiny spiral staircase, carefully put the curtain aside, peeked into the room – and congealed.

The room I saw seemed to be Shibaals bedroom – an interesting fact, because that meant her private study was above her private room, in the highest floor, and not vice versa. I can't remember details though, as everything paled in comparison to Shibaal herself, who stood over a small bucket of soap-water and thoroughly washed herself. She was, if you allow such a base word in this book, buck-naked, and nothing of her body was not exposed to my eye. I must have fainted upon so much beauty, because when I came to my senses, I sat in the reception hall opposite my host and a number of judges (I think there were three).

Together, they kindly informed me on the price for the secret I had just inadvertently bought. It was so steep it took all the rest of my major secrets, leaving just barely enough to allow me to buy some farewell presents before setting off for Phaedra. Let this be my last advice to travellers in Gnorlwood: seeing a naked Gnorl bears far too high a price in comparison to what is on offer.

-Ninguarda

Probably, the Gnorls are the best known inhabitants of Werewood. Even people from distant lands, such as Djaffa or the Kang have heard of the gnarled little people who know (and sell) all secrets. Less well known is the fact that the Gnorls of Gnorlwood and the Weirdlings of the Dread Forest share not only the same ancestry, but are in fact nothing but women and men of the same race.

On Boglin History

Little definite is known about the history of the Boglins; from what has been preserved in surviving Archaen records, these ancients had no interest in these denizens of the forest, not even mentioning them except in sidenotes like “from time to time, we met talking animals in the woodlands. We preferred not to care about these pests.” Thus, to learn about their history, one depends on the stories of the Weirdlings, Gnorls and Whisps, but especially those of the Ariane and the Muses; these latter know much about the lore of the Forest Realms, as do some learned Gnomekin, Dhuna, and Sarista. Given the fact that through the centuries and millennia tradition has always been oral, it is natural that this history, as given here, is vague at best.

Scholars like Ninguarda have tried their utmost to bring it into agreement with general events and within itself, but as he admitted himself “this led to a high degree of yarning to make it meaningful at all.”

During the time of the Archaens

In the Beginning, long before there was Zandu and Aaman or the Seven Kingdoms, even long before anyone had ever heard the name Phaedra, even before the Archaens established their first cities, there were the Forest People. In the times of ancient Archaeus, much more of Talislanta was forestland than it is today. Stories tell that one could walk from the Azure Ocean to the Sea of Madness or from the Dark Coast to the

Boglins?

If you ask an inhabitant of Talislanta about “Boglins,” most people will answer with something like “eh?” Apart from scholars interested in the Forest Folk in general and the inhabitants of Werewood in particular, most people think (if they think about it at all) that Gnorls are Gnorls and Weirdlings are Weirdlings, with no real connection to each other. The infamous Cymrillian writer of travel guides Naru'hodo, even claims in his successful guidebook “How to survive in the West with comfort” that new Weirdlings are in fact magically created by Weirdlings from Withergall wood, whilst Gnorls come into being when somewhere in Talislanta a secret is betrayed. Such or similar stories can be found all over the Talislanta.

Only serious explorers, who make the effort to read Thystram, Ninguarda or Tamerlin, know of both the term and the meaning of the word “Boglins”. The Boglins themselves, by the way, dislike to hear it, seeing themselves as either Weirdlings or Gnorls rather than emphasizing their connection. Besides, “Boglin,” derived from the theory that they originally lived in the boles of ancient bog-trees, is a term first used by Thystram; whether the Boglins have a name of their own for themselves and how it would sound is a secret not even Ninguarda could ever solve, despite the masses of secrets he sold to the Gnorls for information.

Midnight Sea without ever having to leave the ever-changing, ever guarding cover of the woods. The Archaens drew their borders and established their territories, but this was of no concern to the real inhabitants of the forest, the citizens of their own Forest Realms. They referred to themselves as “Forest Folk,” but indeed they were of many races, among them the whisps, dryad trees, forest nymphs and many more; some of them, like the Elche, are

probably extinct today, others are just unknown to Talislandans, who usually do not care for such “lowly” creatures. The Boglems, of course, were among these Forest Folk, too, and were quite plentiful. The Forest Realms of old consisted of all places where one folk settled. At the time, these realms, with the Realm of the Boglems one of their number, comprised of hundreds or possibly thousands of small regions, extending from one coast to the other. So it was that small Boglem settlements were to be found in what later became Werewood as well as in what is today the Kang Empire, or the Wilderlands of Zaran.

The Forest Folk of old defined itself as all intelligent species living in the forests. Unlike

what the outward situation seems to be today, they were open-minded towards each other, trading and mingling frequently, but especially through the so-called Boglem Bazaars. The Boglems, who were much more numerous at that time and, of course, living together as one people, were the merchants of the forest, travelling through all the Forest Realms in search for things to sell. While the males gathered the trading goods, the females would do the actual trading. Besides actual staples, which would include anything rare and magical, the female Boglems would also sell something more valuable: secrets and gossip. Here, it is clear, was the beginning of the Gnorls love for secrets.

Boglem Bazaars

To scholars like Ninguarda, the roots of the Gnorls' secretmongering lie within the fabled Boglem Bazaars or Boglem Markets. These events are rumored to have taken place every month, during the full moon at some secret location known only to the Forest Folk themselves and a few chosen guests; this location, according to some rumors, was fixed, possibly somewhere in the modern Wilderlands of Zaran, while others claim it moved with every new month. During the Bazaar, many rare things were traded or sold: enchanted wares, artifacts, potions, powders... of course secrets were part of the regular wares, too. While all the Forest Folk took part in the Bazaar, most merchants were Boglems (hence, of course, the name). Male Boglems would take care of the goods, while the females would do the actual dealing. This would explain the brightly colored clothes of the Gnorls as well as the rather disdainful attitude of the Weirdlings.

Probably, the Great Disaster spelt the end for the Boglem Bazaar, or at least that is what most people believe. They usually point to the fact that no one, not even the Muses who are in constant contact to whisps, have ever told anyone about a Bazaar nowadays; further, it is clear that Weirdlings and Gnorls lead separate lives, so it seems impossible they could ever come together again to do trading. Typical for this kind of opinion is a remark by Thystram: “The last remnants of the Boglem Bazaar is the fondness for collecting both Wish- Gnomes and Gnorls share to a great extent. It is almost as if they collect their stuff only hoping that one day there would be a call for a new market. Should it ever come, the Boglems would be prepared, I am sure.”

Interestingly enough, Ninguarda claims in his book that he took part in a Boglem Bazaar. According to him, it now takes place biannually in Astar, under the protection of the Muses. His vivid description, taking up almost a whole volume of his memoirs, is somewhat refuted by the fact that numerous investigations, the last ones organized by the Cymrillians, were not able to find a single particle of proof for his claims. During the last of these inquiries, the King of Cymril even politely asked the Muse representative to the Council of Seven. Her answer was “to me the color of a water lily is more beautiful than the morning dew over my cast-away clothes after taking a bath in the dawn.” It is self-explanatory that this attempt, like all the others before, did not have the desired effect; there are some scholars, though, who insist that the especially absent- minded (or rather evasive?) answers of the Muses might be the final proof that such bazaars still exist. Otherwise, they claim, even a Muse would reply with something that makes more sense. Whatever the case may be, this is still a matter open to debate.

Separation and Withdrawal

During the time of the Archaens, the Forest Realms prospered, even though the Ancients propagated and cut down more and more of the ageless forests to gain room for tillage and wood; these were nothing but scratches to the massive woodlands of that time. Nevertheless there are hints that the Boglins, well versed in communicating with other races as tradespeople, did try to talk to the Archaens, but to no avail; to the Ancients, they were of no importance. Still, the Forest Folk were content with the life they had. To most of them "territory" had no deeper meaning. There was enough forest for all, and if the Archaens would clear areas too close to their dwellings, they would simply move. To the Boglins, this seems to have been even easier than to other Forest Folk; as traders and gatherers, they were used to be on the move, after all.

Then, everything changed. The Great Disaster took the Forest Realms by surprise and destroyed the former unity of the Forest Folk. The cataclysms of the catastrophe swept away the ancient woodlands in storms of fire, destroying in moments what had grown in ages. When it was over, most of the Forest Realms were turned to ash and even though much regrew, forming the forests of today, great stretches of Talislanta remained barren. The connections between all the woodlands, which had been the basis for the Forest Realms, were cut and many races of the Forest Folk disappeared from Talislanta forever, only to be remembered as faint names in stories and songs. It wasn't the end for the Forest Realms in general, though; the survivors of the Forest Folk, like all survivors of the Great Disaster, reorganized themselves and re-established their nations, but these were only pale shadows of their former glory. Even today such Forest Realms, often tiny and battered, can be found Silvanus, northern Zandu. Arim, Durne, Vardune, Astar, Cymril, Taz, Mog, and even Jhangara. Alas, this is a virtually unknown fact; most Talislantans of

today have never heard of the Forest Realms, and the few who have learned of them presume that they all fell during the Great Disaster. But this is another story all together.

For the Boglins, who used to dwell all over Talislanta, but especially in the light forests of what are now the Desertlands and the Wilderlands of Zaran, the Great Disaster meant almost complete eradication; like most of the other denizens of the forests, the firestorms that burned down the woodlands killed many of them. Of the few who survived, most were desperate. Their culture had been based on trading rare things; now the physical connections between the woodlands were broken and many of their customers were dead or impoverished, or even extinct like the Elche. But they had luck even in this desperate hour: parts of their own Forest Realm had been left untouched by the Great Disaster. To this Forest, which is now known as Werewood, the survivors retreated. A rumor has it they might have been searching for distant cousins of theirs, the ancestors of today's Gnomekin, who had formerly settled in the West. As they were unaware at first that the Gnomes had fled underground due to the Great Disaster, they mourned for them and settled down in what is now Werewood.

In the following time, the living habits of the Boglins gradually changed in two ways. As there were no more Boglin Bazaars (at least none which are known) they needed to attend to, they started to settle down in Werewood. For the females, this was easier than for the males, who seemed unable to get settled and rather longed for their former, solitary, wandering life. Over the course of centuries, the two genders thus drifted apart, until Weirdlings and Gnorls led the separate lives they still lead today, coming together only so seldomly that to many Talilantans, they are two separate races altogether. The other change came with the Phaedran Empire, which, ever-expanding as it was, drove the Boglins deeper into the forest. While they had

always settled in what is now the Dread Forest and Gnorlwood, they now had to abandon dwellings in what nowadays is northern Zandu. This was a hard time for them, as Werewood was as infested with predators then as it is today. Because of these dangers, all Weirdlings and many Gnorls chose to settle below ground, as such dwellings are more secure to hostile trespassing than the traditional tree-houses of the Boglins. The custom of living in a house cut into the trunks of Bog- or Amittina trees was never completely abandoned, though, but restricted to those Gnorls who were brave

enough, had enough magical knowledge or who could afford to hire guards of some sort.

With the establishment of the Phaedran empire also came the fame of the female Boglins, now universally better known as Gnorls. It remains unclear what propagated their fame, but ever since that time, people from all over Talislanta know of the fact that the inhabitants of Gnorlwood know and trade all kind of secrets. The constant demand for their services has broadened the difference between Gnorls and Weirdlings, however; while the former can manage a decent lifestyle through their tradings, the latter remain rather impoverished and at best hunted for their ability to grant wishes. Still, at least for the femals Boglins, life has changed for the better.

Since Ninguarda had visited the Gnorls during the reign of Damon, relatively little has changed among the Boglins. The arrival of the Dhuna, with whom the Gnorls, in the name of all Boglins, had signed a treaty, only brought some relief for their settlements, as the witches stand guard to secure the border between Witchwood and Gnorlwood. The trade with secrets they conduct either directly or preferably indirectly provides most of the secret-mongers with the luxurious possibility to import artifacts, magical tomes, clothes and other commodities; in fact, most Gnorls can even buy their food, gathering only herbs and other ingredients when taking a walk in the woods. The Weirdlings, on the other hand, lead a more secretive life than ever, as there are always some fortune hunters who try to find them to get their wishes fulfilled. On the other hand, such people, as well as other adventurers going up the Sascasm, act like magnets for the thieving Wish-Gnomes, so it can be doubted whether they are really unhappy about their current lot. All in all, the life of the Boglins may have changed, but their Realm is still strong and prospering.



Being a Boglin

Given the fact that both Weirdlings and Gnorls form the Boglins, what does it mean to be a Boglin? On first sight, there doesn't seem to be any similarity between the genders except physical characteristics. After all, both genders are quite odd-looking, with shrivelled features, yellowish skin and black, beady eyes. But there is more to them. Even though they don't live together anymore and have a fairly distinctive lifestyle, both genders of the Boglins do share a certain amount of common practices and beliefs.

Magic

Boglins are thoroughly magical creatures; Gnorls practice witchcraft and cryptomancy, the Weirdlings are adept in wizardry. This differentiation seems to reflect their original tasks during the Forgotten Age: the males needed wizardry to find, determine and enhance magical trading goods, while the females used their magical skills to gather food and pursue their passion for gossip and secrets. Since they separated, the Weirdlings seem to have done little to deepen their magical skills, though, while Gnorls are known to be avid collectors and seekers of rare magical tomes. Of course they value tomes describing secret rituals and long-lost arcana the highest – but there could be more to it than just acquiring knowledge for trade. Whatever their secret agenda may be (if there indeed is any common design behind this behaviour) is not known; Ninguarda suspected a “desire to find a way to reconcile with their men and re-establish the vast forests of old,” but he offered no proof whatsoever for this assumption.

It might be added, that, unlike the Dhuna, Boglins greatly dislike performing rituals which require more than one spellcaster. While the Weirdlings simply are too solitary for such magic, it can be assumed that Gnorls begrudge each others knowledge; after all, performing such a ritual (and it is safe to say

that most Gnorls know at least some magic requiring larger numbers of spellcasters; such magic is usually ancient, of course) would betray the fact that the Gnorl in question knows it, which can lead to multiple assumptions by other Gnorls. “Betray one secret to a Gnorl and she will deduce a dozen more from it,” as a common Boglin saying goes.

Besides this magic, both genders of the Boglins have their own magical ability. The Gnorls can see in the dark and perform Rhabdomancy, their art of summoning spirits to have them find out secrets for them. As neither ability seems to be natural to the Boglins (as Weirdlings don't share them), they must have been acquired by some sort of pact. Thystram, who was as a naturalist especially interested in their ability of nightvision, remarks that “if Weirdlings are really more than just myths, they are said to only see fairly well in the dark, while Gnorls definitely see as well as during the day or even better. This gender-difference is more than nature usually seems to allow.” According to him, this special ability might be a side-effect to the pact that allows the Gnorls to perform their Rhabdomancy. This power might be the most closely guarded secret of the female Boglins. Whatever they did to acquire it, the price must have been steep, though Ninguarda also suspected that Gnorls, like all Boglins, would not pay a high price if they could get a bargain. “Perhaps, though I am only offering a hypothesis from my cunning mind, one Gnorl, or rather many Gnorls had stumbled upon a secret so important that a cosmical entity gladly gave them Rhabdomancy in exchange for acquiring it or for keeping it from becoming common knowledge, and it even threw in some Nightvision as an extra. Anything but something on that level would be, to me, a disappointment, something creatures like the Gnorls just don't deserve.” More on the special ability of Rhabdomancy can be found in Chapter 6, while rules for

Nightvision are offered in the Talislanta Rulebook, page 107.

Unlike Rhabdomancy, the ability to grant wishes that Weirdlings have seems to be too ancient to be anything but natural. Even early Archaen fairy tales (some of which have survived written on spoilage secondarily used to bind somewhat younger tomes) contain references to "Wish gnomes", which may or may not refer to the ancestors of the male Boglins. Every one of them is bestowed with the ability to grant twelve wishes, which are not omnipotent, but of considerable potency, it seems, as long as they are personal or regional ("make me extremely long-lived" would work and "bring rain to this village" would work, while "Re-forest the Desertlands" wouldn't) and cannot affect the Boglin himself (which would result in them using all their wishes for themselves). While a Weirdling can probably grant one of these wishes whenever they

want, under normal circumstances a Weirdling would only use one of them if someone got hold of his treasure, as losing this is even worse to a Weirdling than losing a wish. However, the Weirdling only has to stick to the letter of the wish, and will almost always try to twist the meaning as much as he can. For above examples, "make me extremely long-lived" could result in the person unable to die for a long time but continuing to grow older and older; "bring rain to this village" could have the end of the rain never stopping in this place for months. Probably the moment most Weirdlings long for is the Thirteenth Wish, sometimes called "The Big One." Unlike the first twelve, which the Boglin is somehow forced to grant, whether he likes it or not (and he usually doesn't), the thirteenth candidate will get his wish reversed and sent back to him as a potent curse.

How many wishes...

It is well-known that Weirdlings or Wish-Gnomes have the ability to grant up to 12 wishes; should they "grant" a 13th, the result will invariably be a disaster with the desired wish turning into the exact opposite and becoming a formidable curse. This might even become dangerous, as someone wishing for long or even (almost) eternal life might end up with (almost) certain death, while someone wishing for endless riches might become cursed to spend the rest of her life with endless poverty. There are even rumors (though they are unprovable) that some of Talislantas Wastelands are the result of people asking way too greedy wishes of a Weirdling and getting "the Big One." On an amusing sidenote, most such rumors refer to Kasmir.

Given the danger of becoming the target of "the Big One," many people (at least those wise enough to do some research before going on a search for Wish-Gnomes) have tried to find a way to establish just how many wishes a particular Weirdling has left. It is also well-known that they cannot be forced to reveal this number (and that they are evil-minded enough to never ever consider giving a kind hint); this has had no effect on desperate "wish-seekers", some of which have tried torture on caught (or rather kidnapped) Weirdlings as well as bribery, cajolery, offering luxuries, using strong magic etc. Some particularly desperate people (and getting a wish fulfilled can make quite a number of people desperate enough) even tried to seduce Weirdlings, an almost impossible task as Boglins can only see one of their kind as interesting enough to even think about "romance" (whatever meaning they may ultimately connect with that concept). Some others, trying to be especially smart, tried to buy this secret from the Gnorls.

Unfortunately, none of these measures ever seem to have had any success. Gnorls, for example, do claim they know the number of wishes "their" men still have. They love to sell this secret for a sizeable price, including the name of the Weirdling and the number of wishes he still has. Alas, as the male Boglins use their names only when in contact with their women, this secret has no practical worth. So it is that the only way to know whether a wish is "The Big One" is to give it a try.

Given the many stories about it, many people have tried to search for a Weirlding or his treasure, but usually to no avail. Usually, the only Wish-Gnomes forced to give away a wish are inexperienced, taken by surprise or just dumb. Still, this relative lack of wishes being granted for real has done nothing to cut down the longing of quite a number of Talisnantans to give it a try. Many of those seekers first start by visiting the Gnorls, hoping to get some information on a Weirlding or, in the rather seldom case they know Gnorls are female Weirdlings, to have the Gnorl fulfill the wish. These latter people become almost invariably disappointed, though, as female Boglins never betray any signs of having this special ability. The reason why wish-granting is confined to only the male Boglins is, of course, unknown, as the Gnorls would never tell that secret. Perhaps they sold it for other abilities (as part of the Rhabdomancy-deal perhaps) or they never had it, or they are just not using it. Like so many things, this is a secret yet unsolved.

Religion

No traveller, neither Thystram nor Ninguarda nor anyone else has ever found any sign of religion among the Boglins.

"They have no idols, no prayers, and show no sign of worshipping anything," Ninguarda writes. "I tried to talk with my Gnorl contact, Shibaal, and I even offered her precious secrets of mine for telling me what they believed in. She thought about it, smiled (or, rather, grinned) and said: 'I think we could make a good deal with these secrets of yours, son, but not on this subject. We are Boglins. We need no religion like you Phaedrans do. We don't believe... we are.'"

I am not sure she was telling the truth, though. She smiled too much for her statement to be true, I think. Still, her words were the closest I could get to an explanation. There are rumors, also reported by Thystram, that the Gnorl and Weirlding gatherings are in fact religious rites. But if they are, they are the

most unreligious rites I have ever attended. I think I will give up finding out more on the subject of religion, it annoys my hosts and is leading me nowhere."

Indeed, nothing has changed in the attitude of both groups of Boglins towards religion since the days of Ninguarda. The easiest explanation is that the Forest People really stand above religion (as nature spirits in physical form, as some scholars see them, this would be the most convincing explanation) or, that to them, religion is so private that they keep it secret in their deepest heart (which is be possible, but not too probable, given the fact that in the eyes of the Gnorls no secret is too valuable to sell, while for the Weirdlings, the concept of keeping anything top secret would be odd). Whatever the case may be, the traveller is not advised to pursue the subject, as the reaction, at best, is cool at best.

Weirlding Society

"Weirlding" or "Wish-Gnome": these names, coined and used by Talisnantans, already betray the fact that very little is known of the male Boglins. Thystram, for example, searched for a Weirdlings lair for most of the latter half of his long life without success, finally believing and writing that they were nothing but stories and legends (the story goes that a strange hooded visitor described by his nurse as "uncommonly short, with a strange air about him" visited the old mage when he was already on his deathbed; he stayed only briefly, though, to whisper some words into Thystrams ear, to which in reply the famous naturalist muttered a few words. The next morning, Thrystam was gone and no one has ever heard of him again).

On the other hand, Ninguarda, who was desperately trying to prove his "arch-rival" (as he used to call Thystram) wrong, tried to meet Weirdlings through his Gnorl contacts and had more success, unveiling much about their habits through the female Boglins; his first meeting with a Wish-gnome was of little triumph, though; as he writes in his books, the

Weirdling just popped up at the desired juncture, used the chance to thoroughly rob the Phaedran of all he was carrying along, and then disappeared almost as quickly as he had come. Nevertheless, it is the information provided by Ninguarda which is the main source of knowledge on the Weirdlings for scholars.

First of all, Weirdlings or Wish-Gnomes (the latter name is derived from old fairy tales) never seem to call themselves by these terms. Unfortunately, they offer no alternative of their own, and also shun being called a "Boglin". As a traveller can already feel lucky if he sees a Weirdling and extremely lucky if he is able to lead a conversation with him, this should be of minor concern, though.

All in all, three points define the life of Wish-Gnomes: misanthropy, longing to collect, and wanderlust. While they rarely peregrinate outside Werewood and mostly dwell in the Dread Forest, they are almost constantly on the move, both above and (almost as often) below the ground, using parts of the Underground Highway beneath Werewood.

They all have an underground hideout somewhere in the Dread Forest, which they use to store their treasures, but out of fear to lose a chance to collect more or to bring too much attention to it, they only visit it rarely; instead they normally use one of their ancient spells to dig and conceal a hiding place in the ground as a temporary resting place to sleep safely, or they hide in abandoned caves or holes or hide in the housings or lairs of other people, including Dhuna or even Banes; for they are often bold beyond belief. Personal comfort seems to be of little concern to them, almost to the point that one cannot help thinking that they want to feel as miserable as they can and hope that every tiny discomfort helps. A Gnorl saying to that is "a man in the rain, blisters on his feet, with nothing to gain is happily unhappy indeed."

Weirdlings are as eccentric as they are passionate. When it comes to clothing, they love it as garish as the Gnorls do, but with little sense of decor or cut. Made of rags (or rather worn to rags), the frocks, camis, vests they love to wear usually look as if crudely stitched together of two or more clothes not fitting each other. Ornate girdles, bangles,

Raised as a Weirdling

As Weirdlings are male Boglins, there is the question how and why they are raised by the Gnorls to become as misanthropic as they are. On this, Ninguarda writes:

"I asked Shibaal about the male children, for I had seen some female Boglin girls in the settlement but no boys. It did cost me a hefty personal secret (concerning my habits with women), but finally, after the deal had been made, she told me:

'This is easily answered, dear customer. When a male child is born to us, we raise it only as long as it takes him to be able to swallow solid food and to walk and to talk a bit. And even for this period, we hide them in our homes and rather pretend to have had a miscarriage than a boy, for it is a matter of much gossip among the Gnorls when one of them delivers more boys than girls nowadays. Once the male Boglin is ready to survive, we send him to his father and put him into his custody. As far as I know, our male counterparts have no intention to take care of a possible rival for items to collect (though there are exceptions), so most Weirdlings are out there surviving on their own already as children. It is no wonder they trust us Gnorls more than other Weirdlings.'

One the one hand I was quite shocked by this revelation, on the other hand I found it amusing. I wonder how we Phaedrants would be if we handled things this way. If any of our people would fall prey to the rule of women, they would surely end up in a forest like Werewood. It would suit the twisted female mind."

earrings, pendants and other jewelry, usually of inferior quality, add to a rather efeminate or childish style. All in all, the outfit of a Weirdling looks as if it doesn't belong together, neither particularly masculine nor self-made by a Weirdling. The last is typical, of course, as they are skilled and bold thieves. At least that is what outsiders call them: a male Boglin himself would probably refer to their occupation as "collecting."

The collection is as close to the heart of a Weirdling as it is to the heart of a Sindaran. But there the similarities end. Wish-Gnomes collect everything they like, and usually they like bangles, bric-a-brac and curios of all sort. Depending on personal taste, this might include bucket-handles, strange buttons, jewelry, pottery, carpentry... the possibilities are endless and the reason why one Weirdling thinks a particular item is collectable and another is not is beyond the understanding of non-Boglins.

Usually, when a Weirdling sees something while strolling about that he likes, he spends all his energy to "collect it" until it is in his possession. Afterwards it is brought to one of the Wish-Gnomes' deposits. These deposits or hoards are usually well-hidden caves or holes and secured by wards and rituals and can have any size from a few square centimeters to huge caverns easily holding thousands of pieces. Once an item is secured at a deposit, the Weirdling loses all interest in it, except that he does not want to lose it. This disinterest goes so far that they often just pile stuff in the hoards without any sense for delicacy, which often results in bent or broken objects.

Scholars like Ninguarda wanted to see patterns of their former existence as tradesmen in this: "as it was the duty of the male Boglin just to collect items for sale, it is natural they are only interested in something until they have securely deposited it; but where once the females would take care of it, now there is nobody who takes it or tells the Weirdling what to bring next or not to bring

anything so senseless again. Without this control by their women, it is natural they got to be so weird..."

It is probably this fixation on collecting personal treasure (along with their general misanthropy) that makes Weirdlings so inclined to being a maverick, shunning any company. Usually, while it is already rare to meet one of them, it is almost impossible to see two or more at the same time. Only at certain times during the year, which may or may not coincide with the dates they would originally go to the Boglin Bazaars, they meet with their own kind. These Weirdling festivals must be bizarre events, as dozens or even hundreds of Wish-Gnomes gather at certain places in the Dread Forest. Unlike their usual lifestyle, which usually means uncooked or hastily prepared food, they use a whole day making delicious (at least to them) dishes and perform the final steps of preparation of their favourite Paykel Brew, a mild beer prepared from the mushroom of the same name; often



A Rare Weirdling

Usually, Weirdlings seldomly leave Werewood, mostly roaming about in the Dread Forest and along the Sascasm River, on the look out for things to collect. While it is not unheard of that they rove deeper into every direction in search for what they long for, one can take for granted that no Wish-Gnome would go further than Silvanus, Zandu or Witchwood. It seems most of them just don't feel secure outside the well known forest environment of Werewood and dare not to travel too far beyond its borders. But of course there are exceptions. Especially when the item a Weirdling wants is in the possession of a traveller, he may wish to travel after it, hoping to find the ideal moment of striking and acquiring it. In some reported cases, the Wish-Gnome in question had thus crossed to countries far beyond Werewood, like Cymril, Faradun or even the Quan Empire (there are rumors that at the time the Quan ruled, a number of Weirdlings had moved to their lands, as they found the tastes of the Quan almost as "good" as their own. It has to be doubted any of them still wants to dwell in the Kang Empire of today, though). As one item comes to another, this can mean that such a Wish-Gnome could spend years in foreign countries and even get a taste for it, only returning to Werewood to deposit his treasures. But this would be a rare case; most would again choose to stay relatively close to their hoards in order to be able to check on them regularly.

The rarest such Weirdlings are called "Weirdling Saints". These are Boglins who decide to leave Werewood altogether, wandering through Talislanta in search of simple-minds and fools who possess things valuable to them. They then deposit a "treasure" and have the person find it "by chance." Once this is done, they appear before him or her, promising to fulfill a wish in exchange for being taken care of, something which means food, shelter, and lots of coveted things. Once the host insists too much on his wish, the Weirdling Saint (not bound by anything as the host doesn't have his real treasure) normally makes a swift exit. It has to be noted that this is a very rare case, though. Still, these "saints" are mostly considered to be mad by other Boglins, but of all Weirdlings they are the most easy to find.

large stretches of it designate such places of gathering. After this preparation, the Boglins collectively feast, accompanied by music and stories, as Ninguarda describes it. Unfortunately, he fails to deliver any proof for this story to be true, making it a rumor at best.

The contact between Weirdlings and Gnorls is not a rumor, and mainly takes place for two reasons. First, when a Weirdling is in need of information on a certain item or feels weak or ill, he goes to see a Gnorl to acquire treatment or a secret. While the female Boglins do not charge their usual prices with their male counterparts, they don't give help for free, which is the reason a Weirdling would only go to a Gnorl if he is desperate, especially when a secret is needed. Most of the things they collect are of little to no interest to the Gnorls, who invariably choose the item most precious to the male as compensation for service.

The second reason, of course, is mating. Being at heart tradesmen, Boglins do not connect romantic feeling with procreation. Instead, intimacy between men and women has to be paid with a dowry. As it is the Gnorls that are very self-conscious, it is the Weirdlings who have to pay. With the females demanding either a major secret or a huge pile of what the men call "treasure" to allow an intimate encounter, most Wish-Gnomes end up collecting for decades until they have enough to pay the dowry (usually by amassing their treasures, as they are very bad in finding any secret). Ninguarda even suspected that one of the main reasons for their current way of life was thus, in the end, procreation. If this is true, then most Weirdlings must be, in their heart, crazy for it.

Life as a Gnorl

Unlike their male counterparts, the female Boglins or Gnorls live in permanent housings. Defended by wards and enchantments and by the fact that quite a number of predators are kept out of Gnorlwood by the Dhuna, these villages of sorts almost appear as a joke, as they are gentle, peaceful settlements in such a dangerous environment, though they are still kept well-hidden. Most Gnorls live in underground caverns, carefully dug and ornately furnished with much (though somewhat wicked) taste. This tradition was developed as the original Bog-tree housings of the Boglins were too hard to defend against Werewood's dangers. Usually, a sturdy door is the only connection between the dwelling and the outside. Depending on the time and/or wealth a Gnorl put to it, such houses can reach a considerable size and contain quite a number of rooms, connected by tunnels, secret passages, stairways, etc.

For the true Gnorl, though, the only decent form of residence is a tree house. Usually carved into the thick trunks of older Amittina trees (which normally survive the integration of a house without any problems), they can reach up to five or more stores of single rooms connected with ladders or, depending on taste, a corkscrew staircase, with the addition of an intricate labyrinth of caves dug beneath the tree. Like the underground dwellings they hold no windows; a thick, often camouflaged door and small slits to provide fresh air or a disguised chimney are all signs of a Gnorl home (apart of carefully tended gardens ripe with herbs, fungi and other plants).

A Gnorl dwelling is furnished with small furniture, thick carpets and arrases, all in many hues and intricate patterns. Shelves and sideboards of all sorts dot the walls, displaying all kind of artifacts or tomes, for like their males, the Gnorls are avid collectors, though they covet only the rare and the curious artifact, shunning the trinkets Weirdlings usually love so much. Only few

visitors see these treasures, or even most of the rooms; they distrust visitors, or, as they call them, intruders, and will only let someone inside their dwellings after having scrutinized them from secret peepholes for quite some time with or without magical devices. It is thus not impolite to be left waiting in front of a Gnorl dwelling for minutes or even hours: it is plain normal. Among them, it is customary to send a Caravan or Sniper bug with a message bearing their seal if they want to shorten this period of being scrutinized. And even after being led inside, a visitor will only see the entrance hall, which also serves as the reception room.

This room is usually decorated only with fakes and all connected rooms or hallways or staircases are secured by thick curtains, (secret) doors and other precautions that make seeing anything else next to impossible (unless the visitor is one of the few – very few – trusted friends or assistants, or she is the owners employer or debtor). Depending on what the guest wants and what he has to offer, such visits can range from short to very long and the host from amicable to outright hostile. The main measure for this are of course the secrets he or she has to offer.

For, especially when the visitor is also a Gnorl, it must be secrets that are the reason for the visit. Like their male counterparts, female Boglins prefer to live alone, in the company of Caravan Bugs, which they love to keep and drill as messengers or even spies and guards, and favor to the company of others of their kind or other beings. Knowledgeable in the forests and well-versed in cultivating mushrooms, herbs and other edible plants, many of which they can (magically) grow inside their holes, they dislike leaving their homes except for collecting herbs or food they cannot provide for in or close to their homes, or to engage in the aforementioned exchange of secrets.

Unlike the Weirdlings, the safety of their collected things and especially their secrets is of highest importance to Gnorls. Gnorlwood,

Crossdressing

It is a well-known fact that a Weirdling is a Weirdling and a Gnorl is a Gnorl. While they seem similar in their appearance, their customs and ways of living are too different to mix except during rare sexual encounters. Adding to that the fact that Wish-Gnomes are males and Gnorls are female Boglins, it seems impossible that a Weirdling could ever become a Gnorl and vice-versa. Still, the traveller Ninguarda described exactly such a case. In his own words:

“One day, I gave Shibaal an expensive secret concerning one of the wives of Emperor Damon, upon which I had come by chance. In exchange, I asked many things among them, whether there are any Wish-Gnomes posing as Gnorls or Gnorls posing as their male counterparts. My host grinned mischievously and told me she did know Gnorls who, in rare cases of motherly feelings, did keep their male offspring, trying to raise them as females. Most of these attempts weren't successful, though, given the fact that Weirdlings just have a nature not suitable for leading a Gnorl life. Still, in some very rare cases “cross-dressing” is successful, and a Weirdling can become a Gnorl, though never a prominent one.

Gnorl society dislikes the presence of their male counterparts, so cross-dressers have to hide this fact to stay successful. Most tend to give up or become puppets in the hands of one or more Gnorls who come upon his secret; these usually become dependent Bargainers of such females. Besides, a Weirdling somehow never gains the ability to perform Rhabdomancy nor do they share the Gnorls uncanny Nightvision. Still, Shibaal wouldn't rule out that somewhere there might be a not yet discovered Weirdling posing as a Gnorl. The price of this information, by the way, was very steep; the other information I got on my own secret was Shibaals favourite colour (pink) and what she is hiding in one of her pockets (and that I better keep to myself).”

despite being considerably safer than other parts of Werewood, is still full of dangers which might be too much for even a Boglin with magical skills, a fact which makes them use the Underground Highway for most of their travels (not to speak of their voluminous clothes in brightest hues, with all the skirts, sashes and turbans, which don't make travelling or hiding outside any easier). Given all this, one may call the typical Gnorl an outsider. The Phaedran traveller Ninguarda for example needed almost two weeks to locate his later host Shibaal and only finally found her because she became interested in him.

This way of life is already implanted into the female Boglins from birth. For when a Gnorl is born (after her mother was paid the dowry for the intimate encounter by a Weirdling and a pregnancy of thirteen months), she is named by her mother and, if the mother is a successful Boglin, given into the custody of other Gnorls, as they somewhat dislike taking care of babies and children. If this is the case, and the custodian in question is either well-paid with secrets or coveted things or deeply indebted to the Gnorl, then the girls childhood will be quite pleasant, while in other cases, especially if the mother herself has to take care of her own daughter, it can be quite harsh.

During childhood, young Gnorls learn how to use herbs and find/cultivate food as well as the basics of acquiring and trading secrets. Most of this is learning by doing, the young girl helping her (foster) mother and trying to emulate her. This period ends in the moment the Gnorl first successfully performs Rhabdomancy, getting her first own secret. If the mother is caring (paternal love is rare or twisted, but not unheard of among Gnorls), she might add some more secrets before bringing the daughter to a Gnorl Judge and registering her and her seal. From this point the young one is on her own entirely, though she could ask her mother or other Gnorls for help (but only for a price).

Secrets

To the Gnorls, secrets are more than a necessity, even though they earn their livelihood by the trade of secrets. Rather, they are a passion and an art. Even though their society officially knows no classes (and in fact referring to such differences in Gnorl society would annoy a Gnorl deeply), the number and weight of the secrets a female Boglin owns determines her status inside Gnorl society. This is especially because, to them, money has little worth, and secrets take its role instead. Thus she who commands many secrets is also she who has many riches; such a person can pay for other Gnorls to work for

her, or to guard her in her treehouse (for it is a signal of high status to dwell in such a housing) or to take care of her ridiculously huge and elaborate clothes (for the richer a female Boglin is, the more voluminous and bright her clothes become).

Even after her death, the number of secrets a Gnorl had acquired during her life and the number she possessed at the point of her death determines the size of her burial; her heirs (for Gnorls leave their possessions to their daughters, closest relatives or friends by the means of a – secret – will) will surely be grateful and arrange a huge party if they have gained quite a large inheritance. Usually,

A Case to be Judged

As can be guessed easily, the whole system of secretmongering has become quite too complicated for even most Gnorls, and, given a certain tendency towards being miserable, more than just a few of their number seek to defraud their customers; as secrets are of vital importance to the Gnorl culture, it is thus little wonder, that some ways were developed to put a certain control on their trade. This control is performed by the so-called Gnorl Judges. There is approximately one judge per twenty-something Gnorls, overseeing the trade of secrets as well as performing other duties.

For example, every seal (and thus every active Gnorl) has to be reported to a Judge, who records it, thus making it possible to track back any secret sold in the official manner. And, while it is not mandatory, every transaction of secrets can be supervised (and co-sealed) by a Judge or can, retrospectively, be checked by her. As Non-Gnorls neither have a seal nor do they know the rules of the trade, it is officially mandatory that a Judge oversees any transactions with them (though this is a guideline which is all too often not followed). Finally, once there is suspicion (and almost every Gnorl can be suspicious), a Judge tries to find proof for foul dealings of a Gnorl. Such foul play can include reselling an exclusively sold secret, to use a different seal from the one that is registered for the Gnorl in question (whether this other seal was stolen or forged or taken from a dead Gnorl is of no consequence to the Judge). A Gnorl proven of committing such acts in three separate cases becomes an outcast, with her original seal broken; additionally, a potent curse is put upon her, forcing her to always say the truth and tell every new secret to at least three sentient persons, something which effectively puts the outcast out of business in Gnorlwood (though some of them manage to make their fortune elsewhere).

Considering that almost all Gnorls have bent or broken one of their rules at least once and possibly more often in their lifetimes, the Judges are easily the most hated persons in Gnorlwood. Adding to that the fact that Judges are not allowed to trade with secrets, as they hear too many of them to be trusted (instead they are paid a tithe in artifacts or vitals for their services), it becomes clear not too many Gnorls would consider becoming one. Still, the chance of sneaking into the business of any Gnorl in Werewood is just too nice to not attract enough candidates, especially as there is no formal election or appointment involved; the only thing a Gnorl has to do is to declare herself a Judge and look for customers.

every Gnorl starts with a few secrets gathered by means of Rhabdomancy; and then trade them with other Gnorls or outsiders. Such deals are done one-to-one, with one of the party visiting the other. At the time of her death, the number of secrets may have gone up into the thousands.

But what is the value of a secret? In a way, Gnorls treat them like stocks and shares, first estimating its initial value and then hoarding or trading it. A secret which may initially be of little worth can become more valuable after some time, for example when the secret concerns a person who, initially of no importance, rises to a high position. Of course, should that aforementioned person lose his position of importance again, the "stock price" would fall again, so to speak. Thus, trading with secrets becomes a vast network of calculation and intuition, supply and demand. Even further, some secrets are too expensive to be affordable by one Gnorl on her own, leading to joint ventures.

Young Gnorls new to the business are often confused when it comes to establishing connections and estimating value, and the rise and fall of secrets, often ending up being indebted to older and more experienced Gnorls, who in this way "acquire" employees to help them with taking care of things. Such Gnorl "Bargainers," as they are called, spend their time taking care of their employers' garden, gathering herbs or doing the laundry, but if they are promising, they can also play an important part concerning the trade with secrets. But, even if they are hopelessly indebted and dependant from their creditor, no Gnorl would ever consider giving up their own business with secrets, however small it may be. For this is their true passion and the only thing Gnorls are truly addicted to.

While there are many ways to "sell" a secret, it is custom to follow a certain *modus operandi* to trading. First of all, the secret is written by the seller with a magical ink prepared from the Gall Oak on a piece of parchment or bark; it is then sealed by her.

These magical seals, often crafted as pendants which the Gnorls wear in one of their sashes, leave a red angular imprint, with a certain symbol inscribed inside, and are of greatest importance. With it, the seller can (for an extra fee) promise to never sell this secret again, and always assures the buyer it is a true, real secret, cross-checked at least thrice.

This document is then deposited in a so called Gnorl-Box, a little thing that, when sealed by seller, buyer (if she is a Gnorl) and any Judge present, can only be opened when performing one usually ridiculous action per seal. Once the box is exchanged with whatever was the price (usually some artifact or another secret, often delivered in an almost identical box), the deal is done.

In more recent times, the renown of the Gnorls in that they have access to many (if not all) secrets of Talislanta has spread widely, which means quite a number of people seek the advice of these rather isolationist creatures. While the female Boglins don't really like too much involvement with the outside world, they don't want to miss the chance to trade secrets for antiquities or other, fresh secrets. Here, the Bargainers have come in handy, too, often performing the actual business in their homes for their employers, who prefer to remain in some hidden corner, content to viewing the process and giving their orders by secret signs. Some Gnorls have even started sending out some of their retainers in search for customers, antiques and new secrets, but these are rare cases indeed. All in all, Gnorl society remains both constant and in change, as some of them have started to become more interested in Talislanta as far as the gaining and selling of secrets is concerned.

Chapter 4: Faces of the Past - The Phaedran Tombs

Is there anything more wondrous than a tomb? After our demise, we will be beyond all reach, our souls will travel up the Sascasm, nobody will ever talk to us with a mortal voice again... how can we hope that we will be remembered without a tomb, to house our empty shells? Our writings, our other deeds, they will be forgotten in a few, far too few, centuries... In millennia, when even our mighty Phaedran Empire may have disappeared, only our tombs will tell of our greatness in power, wisdom and spirit.

Many empires, many mighty and wise people have thought that way, yet their tombs were shabby compared to ours. Behold them, as they line the Sascasm, the endless river of our glory! See the faces of all these great wizards! Every other week, I can visit one of my deceased friends, have some tea and meditate on his life and marvellous death.

Come with me to the place where Phaedra is mightiest and brightest. Come and see without fear. Nothing can exceed our tombs; even in thousands of years, nobody will ever dare to defy our memory and do something like rob our tombs.

- Ninguarda, Phaedran Sorcerer

History of the Tombs

The custom to build huge burial monuments was already known to the Phandre, the ancestors of the later Phaedrans. They used to build huge towers, armed with many traps and secret passages, and find their final rest in glass sarcophagi in high chambers. One such tower would represent a family and with each subsequent generation, such towers would grow to house more and more members. Near the modern city of Hadj, the remnants of such structures may still be found. After establishing the Phaedran Empire in the year 0, this custom seems to have continued; several ruinous towers, close to the borders of Werewood, suggest that.

Exactly when the Phaedrans started to use the Sascasm as their favorite place of burial remains unknown, yet some scholars interpret a certain passage of the Chronicles of Siccanon in such a way that, already a few

years after the founding of Phaedra, Solimorrion III. granted mages of high esteem a burial place “close to Our own, along Our beloved Sascasm, where, close to its magical waters, one can find peace for eternity”.

It must have been shortly after the construction of the first towers, however, that the basic design of the tombs was altered decisively. The towers of the Phandre were structures immortalizing the family more than the individual; this was of little appeal to the mighty among the Phaedrans. Instead of towers, they started to build faces, effigies of their own proud physiognomy.

The earliest of these faces, built during the third or fourth decade of Solimorrion's reign, were huge, but still rather raw and unrefined. But with each following year, the designs became more elegant as well as more gigantic. The rule of Damon (71-91) marks the climax of this development.

To build such a mausoleum was no small feat and a matter of great importance for any Phaedran of status. Already choosing a suitable spot along the banks of the river was something to be done with much consideration, intrigue and money. Places directly at the river, facing Phaedra in the West, close to the resting places of higher standing Phaedrans seem to have been the preferred locations. After having acquired such a site, hundreds or even thousands of Wild Folk slaves were used to erect the basic structures out of huge sandstone blocks brought by ships from the West. They followed intricate plans by some of the greatest Phaedran architects (for the inside) and artists (for the outside).

Work in the dangerous environs of Werewood however took its toll; many of the Wild Folk died during this work, squashed by stones, eaten by animals or by eating local flora and found a much simpler burial at the feet of their masters' monument.

After building this basic structure, the facial features of the client were carefully carved into the rock; usually he was depicted wearing a formal hood and with solemn features, though one can also see faces which smile, or laugh, or even exude a murderous madness (for example on a monument believed to belong to the mage Jydong, who was among the most able, and brutal, generals of Solimorrion III.). After this procedure, the entire monument would be covered with plaster and painted carefully to enhance the resemblance with the owner. In the end, a gigantic, lifelike bust of the Phaedran client, reaching up to 50 feet, would cast its eyes over the banks of the Sascasm.

With the decline of the empire, while Kabros ruled (and also during his subsequent purported reign), the tombs were built with less and less care. Instead of carving the faces, these were now made entirely of plaster over a rough, conical structure. Now, the effigies would mark only the entrance and seldom reach a height of more than ten feet, leaving the real structure beneath the surface.

Buried in Pleasures

While the outside of such monuments share a certain similarity, the interior reflected only the personal taste of the clients. The Phaedran mages were famous for their eccentric tastes and their final housings were bound to reflect this. Besides the usual traps, false entrances, dead ends etc., the core of each monument would be a sepulcher room decorated to mirror the personal tastes and hobbies of its owner and serving as the stage for the owner's mummy, embalmed and preserved to enjoy his burial chamber until the end of time. A mage especially fond of books would, for example, have himself buried sitting in a comfortable chair in a huge library, one who found his greatest pleasure in wine would find his rest in a wine-cellar filled with casks, bottles and barrels filled with the most exquisite liquors; finally, a mage who loved dancing might create for himself a sepulcher filled with magically animated dancing "people", his mummy among them, dancing the final dance forever.

Sometimes, a burial area would be dotted with two, three or more heads, each hiding false entrances, while the real entrance would be hidden without any marker. Just as the exterior, the interior changed as well. There were more traps, often of Kasmiran design, and the colorful, huge chambers of the older tombs were abandoned in favor of smaller designs. Fear of robbery grew, resulting in the construction of several watchtowers along the Sascasm as well as a castle, set on an artificial isle in the middle of the river, right at the start of the area of the tombs, to try to prevent anyone from coming close to any tomb to break into it.

With the Fall of the Phaedran Empire in 111, no more tombs were built and the watchtowers were deserted. No longer would workers, mourners or families head down the Sascasm on their boats. Now, the only vessels coming here are those of treasure hunters and grave robbers.

The Tombs Today

Many centuries have passed since the Fall of the Phaedrans and circumstances have not been favorable to their tombs along the Sascasm. The humid air and frequent rain has washed away almost all the color and much of the plaster, in most cases leaving behind only a grayish, moss covered sandstone core. Even where plaster and colour had been reinforced by magic (which has often been the case, though not as often as to be expected from the Phaedrans), time and weather has washed away most of it. In the case of most tombs, the faces are still visible, even though the clear facial lines of the past are blurred. With the tombs of the final years of the empire, however, whose features consisted almost completely of plaster, often no more than a rather small, gray cone remains, almost invisible amidst trees, plants and moss. Some of the largest and heaviest monuments in particular are barely visible today, their

A Final Curse of the Phaedrans?

Ever since the exploration of the tombs started, scholars discuss the cause of the many hostile attacks adventurers have to expect there from Banes and other creatures. While some of them point out that nobody knows (or cares) whether attacks along the Sascasm are really much more frequent than in other parts of Werewood and others point to the fact that the river, as a source for water and fish, of course attracts many predators, a few sages have developed another theory.

They claim that probably the last warder of the tombs, upon realizing the Phaedran Empire was at its end, cast a huge enchantment over the area, which lures predators to the river and perhaps even heightens their aggressiveness towards anyone coming to the tombs. Most adventurers don't really care about this dispute, though: to them, the source of the danger is of far less importance than surviving the next night.

weight causing them to sink in one piece into the soft earth of Werewood.

Besides the weather, the Sascasm itself has done its share in ruining many of the tombs. It has often changed course during the centuries, leaving many graves which once were at its banks far from them, or even in the middle of its flow, slowly crushing the structures and destroying them. Its yearly floods hollow out the substructures of many tombs, so that they start to list and finally crash into the river. Thus, entering, reaching or even finding a tomb can become an adventure in itself, but there are other worries. For some reason, Banes, Spinal Shadows, Kankryu and Bophannon seem to roam this area in greater number than elsewhere in Werewood, sometimes even attacking people on the river, if they are not careful.

Despite of the risk of falling prey to predators, traps or collapsing structures, interest in the contents of the tomb is running higher than ever before. Phaedran works of art are acclaimed throughout Talislanta and sages everywhere hope for books or scrolls about magic, history, nature, medicine etc., to broaden their knowledge with what the ancients knew. Especially Cymrillian Mages or Sindaran Collectors are thus willing to finance expeditions into the area in general or even to special tombs; in the latter case, Spyridons "Life and Monuments of famous Mages", a work which has survived the Fall and which describes more than 150 tombs, usually serves as inspiration as well as as guide, even though merely finding a certain tomb can be a tough job. Today, even though many of the tombs are already stripped of their contents, a sizeable number still remain untouched.

What to Expect

Probably, most groups going for the Phaedran tombs will start from the Sascasm River, entering the area from Zandu. Phaedran efforts had originally left the river without any obstacles, but it has since changed its course

too often. Thus, even though travelling by boat is much easier than crossing Werewood on land, it is far from easy, with countless islands, sandbanks, trees and monuments sticking out of the water. The guarding fortress marking the start of the burial monuments – originally in the middle of the river – is now some 40 feet to the left of it. Right after passing it, more and more of the gray tomb structures can be perceived along the banks. Resulting from the custom to seek a close burial to some extraordinarily famous and/or mighty Phaedran, the monuments occur on their own only rarely. Areas with only few visible structures alternate with sections dotted by dozens of tombs.

Assuming that the adventurers just seek any tomb and not a specific one, they can start at once. As a rule, structures close to the river (but not too close) and close to the entrance point are those most likely to be already robbed. However, a second look may never hurt, as often the other grave robbers left something interesting behind. Also, generally the deeper into the wood a tomb lies, the more likely meetings with Banes or other hostile creatures are.

As a rule, the “classical” Phaedran tomb is entered from behind, though doorways leading through the forehead, the eyes, the nostrils or the mouth of the busts are not unknown. Beneath the washed-off plaster, careful searching may reveal 3, 5 or more openings sealed with one rectangular block of sandstone. Usually a combined strength of +10 is needed to remove such a door. These doors are rarely equipped with traps, their sheer weight and their original hide-out beneath paint and plaster usually seemed to be enough security.

All but one of them are false doors, leading to either dead ends or one or more false burial chambers. Such chambers, mostly decorated like classical treasure rooms are filled with what was rather worthless stuff to the Phaedrans, made from lead or other cheap material, but which may have value to

Less is more.

When running an adventure on the Phaedran tombs, simplicity should rule over too complex designs. The monuments along the Sascasm are generally too small to house huge “dungeons” or too many traps, even in those tombs that are mainly situated underground. The danger from the hostile environment, from intruding water, collapsing walls or ceilings, from Banes etc. should usually prove to be more dangerous than the traps inside. Remember that for most of the time the Phaedrans believed that their rule would never end and that their power would always be feared sufficiently to discourage any robbers. Most tombs had never more than one or two traps, which were creative, but not necessarily lethal. Their difficulty should come more from their strangeness than from real trickery. This strangeness is even bigger in the actual burial chamber; surely no adventurer has ever seen anything like it!

collectors of antiquities today. Especially the usually carefully carved and painstakingly clothed wax effigy of the client provided in this chamber has high value among certain Sindarans, for example. Like the dead ends, however, there is at least one trap to be found here. With the exception of some Kasmiran masterworks, most of these traps are rather simple Pit Traps or sliding blocks cutting off the exit. The latter are usually triggered by lifting some of the “treasures” or touching the effigy.

The real entrance usually leads down steeply towards the burial chamber. It is secured by one or two traps, one a rather simple Pit Trap and another, usually triggered by carelessness after evading the first one, which is often magical or of Kasmiran origin. Disarming this last trap usually includes solving some puzzle connected with the deceased, often simple for anyone who knew him, but very difficult for the adventurer of today.

Behind this final trap, often unveiled only after solving it, lies the true Burial Chamber. Here, again, each Phaedran mage chose to decorate the chamber in a very personal and unique style. It has been said that no two burial chambers are alike: They can be small or huge, rectangular, trapezoid, spherical, regular, angular, distorted, and here we are talking only about the form. As unique as the shape is, even stranger is the decoration. As a rule, the hobbies that mattered most to the client of the tomb are displayed with the mage's mummified body, preserved to appear lifelike, amidst it, as if forever engaged in his favourite pastime. In some cases, especially in the tombs of the latest era, the burial chamber would include some final trap, often collapsing the entire structure when triggered, but this is rather rare (and in fact in many cases it isn't a trap but rather the age of the structure which brings it down). Also, sometimes the most valuable grave goods would be kept in a separate, secret chamber, though this is far not all too common either. Phaedrans, even the last ones, tended not to think this way.

Unlike the rest of the tomb, in the Burial Chambers magic usually runs high, not only preserving the contents, but also animating it. Several cases have been reported where the mummified client himself was part of this magic, moving around and even greeting the intruders. Usually, this magic was bound to the chamber itself, not to the contents; therefore removing something out of it will remove the effects of the spell on it, having it age all the skipped time in mere seconds. Wise grave-"visitors" will therefore be prepared to cast preserving spells, else they will see precious manuscripts crumble to dust, weapons to rust beyond recognition and priceless cloth rot into nothingness before their very eyes.

The Tower of Marinaugh

There are several sages who claim that this ancient tower was the first tomb to be built on the banks of the river Sascasm. Those sages usually attribute it to the Phaedran family of Marinaugh, though there is no firm proof for this hypothesis. Once it must have been a grand sight, rising to at least five storeys up into the sky and ready to be extended with each subsequent generation, as was the practice of the ancestors of the Phaedrans. But age, soft earth and the ever-changing Sascasm have all taken their toll. Nowadays, only two crumbling stairs can be seen amidst bushes, as the rest of the tower has sunken into the earth, thus vanishing from sight. Once the Sascasm flowed to the right of the tower, now it runs to the left. In changing its course, it had washed out the foundations of the tower, leaving those storeys that still can be seen above ground bent to the left.

The greatest problem adventurers will face when deciding to explore this tomb won't be the traps, because there are almost none, but the fact that the whole tower is by now filled with vegetation, dust and debris. Exploring the tower would mean to clean it and to secure it, because the danger of it crashing down is relatively high.

All storeys are made in the same way, a central circular room surrounded by a circular ramp allowing access and connection to the other storeys.

- A) The ceiling of this storey has been destroyed by the passage of time, leaving no clue whether this was the last storey or not. Finding and opening the ramp going down involves the removal of several days' worth of debris and vegetation.
- B) This storey seems completely unused. Cleaning would reveal that the raw structure of the burial compartment was never completed. Nothing except some pieces of rotten tools can be found here. Part of the floor of this storey has fallen in,

allowing direct access to the burial compartment of the next storey.

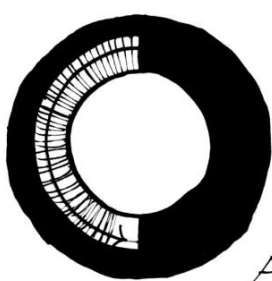
C) Upon cleaning, the Burial Chamber of this storey would reveal several stone sarcophagi. Only one of them seems to have been used; here, a relatively well-preserved mummy of a wizard can be found along with several tomes, which, unless at once treated with preserving magic, would crumble to dust.

D) Unlike the other storeys, the entrance to the Burial Chamber here is secured by an ancient security device, perhaps of Kasmiran design. Cleverness or sheer brute strength is needed to break through the door. The chamber itself is relatively clear of debris, though the frescoes which once covered the ceiling and the walls have long since vanished. In the middle of

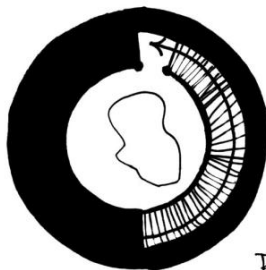
the chamber is a marble throne upon which the rotten mummy of the client is sitting. Along the walls several marble chests are situated, containing a sizeable number of emeralds, which speak for the personal preference of the wizard.

E) This storey, the final one, has retained much of its original beauty and has, seemingly, never been robbed. The walls and ceilings are covered with mosaics depicting the life of the buried. Set into the walls are eight alcoves. In these were originally set jewel-encrusted thrones with the mummies of the deceased; time and nature have worn down the magic and devoured everything which can rot. Still upon careful expectation many jewels and pieces of golden fittings can be found. Also, if treated carefully, the mosaics can be removed and sold to collectors.

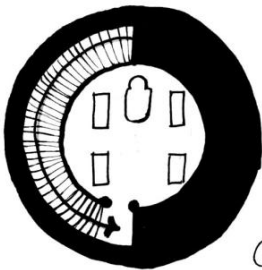
The Tower of Marinaugh



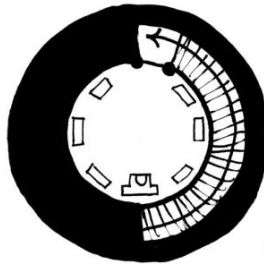
A



B



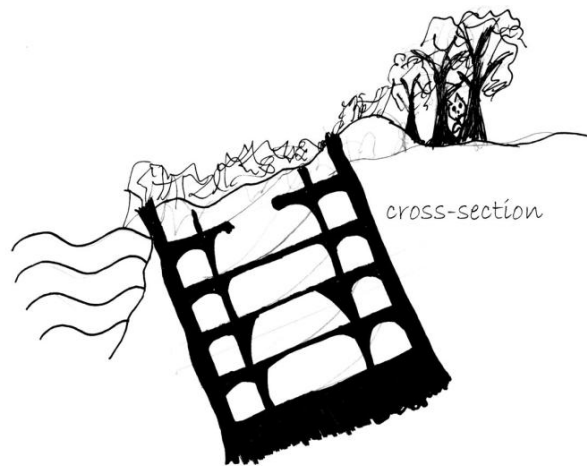
C



D



E



“Solimorrion's Mausoleum”

Perhaps this classical Phaedran tomb is the most well-known to explorers of the Sascasm today, as it is now situated right in the middle of it, as a result of the river having changed its course. Bathed and eroded by the river, the mighty head, which reaches as high as 50 feet, has already slightly bowed to the left; probably it will fall and be crushed in a few decades. Travellers point out that the worn, withered structure of the tomb still exudes an aura of dignity unparalleled by most of the other tombs. The face, of sharp features, topped by a conical cap, many would argue, must have been that of a high magician or even king.

The first and foremost problem with the exploration of this tomb, though, is reaching it. Situated as it is, it can be only reached by boat, but there is no bank nor island around it and the stones are bathed by the swift Sascasm on all sides. Getting there and climbing from the boat to the tomb is thus no small feat.

As the plaster covering has been worn down completely by the centuries, most of the entrances are clearly visible. Two of them are on the Back of the head, two to the front, one is in the left ear.

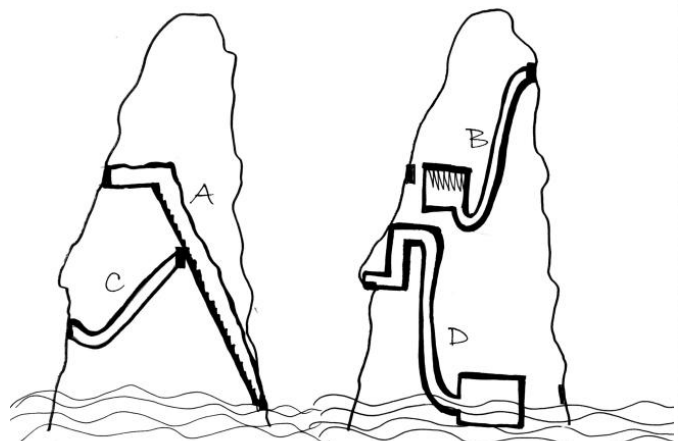
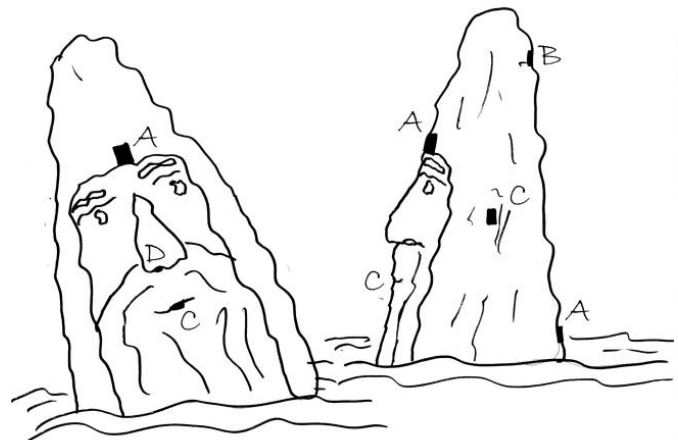
A) This staircase leads from one exit, on the front of the cap, right to another one, on the lower rear. There is nothing else to be found here. Due to the current situation of the tomb, this hallway is in the real danger of collapsing very soon, so caution is advised.

B) This entrance on the back of the Head leads down with a steep slide, which, after some time, suddenly goes upward, catapulting the adventurer foolish enough to take a ride not only into the false burial chamber, but thrusting him with high speed against the spiked ceiling of the

The Tomb of Solimorrion?

Due to the size of this tomb and its prominent situation, which makes it appear even larger as no trees or other flora has overgrown it, travellers usually attribute it to King Solimorrion III of Phaedra, a claim which is not backed by most scholars; they point out that, according to most surviving chronicles, the construction of Solimorrion's grave had been started by his successor Damon, but was never finished until his fall. Afterwards, it seems the project, which was situated within the boundaries of Phaedra and definitely not along the Sascasm, was discontinued. In the end, the owner of “Solimorrion's Mausoleum” still remains unknown.

“Solimorrions Mausoleum”



latter. Except for this “trap” (which can be easily avoided by going down slowly with the help of ropes or the like) the false Burial chamber is empty aside of the bones of some hapless tomb-robbers. It seems this room was found and plundered a long time ago.

- C) The entrance in the left ear leads down a steep slide not unlike the one described above. Yet, this one ends in the “mouth” of the tomb, spilling everybody sliding down out into the Sascasm. Probably before the river changed its course, the ride would have ended on solid ground, which would have ended in maimed or dead robbers. The closeness of this slide to the water level has left the walls covered with slimy algae, making it difficult to hold on.
- D) The entrance to the true Burial Chamber is hidden within the right Nostril of the tomb. After climbing up a vertical shaft, yet another slide leads down steeply, longer than the other slides. Unfortunately, the water of the Sascasm has flooded the lower part of it, creating a very damp, algae-covered atmosphere. Fixing a rope or hook into the walls here is thus extremely difficult. Unlike the other, false entrances, this one had no dangers originally; the slide ends abruptly, but not dangerously, and leads into the Burial chamber. Here, the true danger is again the water, which fills most of it, leaving only a small, two feet high section towards the ceiling free.

Explorers managing to reach the Burial Chamber alive and with light would be delighted to find it completely undisturbed (except the water), the magic preserving the artefacts (and the mummy) as if they were in completely dry surroundings. The owner of the tomb seems to have been fond of slides: around his mummy, which sits in a huge chair, more than a dozen model-slides, made of precious metals and jewels and complete with

little animated figures taking eternal slides, can be found. Provided the explorers get those and themselves out and into the boats again, they would bring a good price when sold to collectors or even just for their material worth.

The Tomb of the Mirrors

This tomb is on of the last built on the banks of the Sascasm. As the river has since changed its course several times, it is now situated some 200 feet away from it, buried beneath vegetation. The original structure consisted of four small, 6 feet high heads above ground cornering a rectangular field of 100 x 60 feet, with a fifth head in the centre. These heads, consisting mainly of plaster, cover five separate entrances into the tomb. Here, the first problem would be to find the now formless cones beneath the debris, trees, and mushrooms of Werewood. Also, here, already some distance into the forest, the dangers from Banes and other creatures run high. The establishment of a camp and the positioning of guards seem mandatory.

- A) The first entrance leads to a vertical shaft of nine feet. From here, a staircase leads down, leading into a hallway running for some 50 feet. Towards the end of the tunnel is a simple Pit Trap, six feet wide and nine feet deep. Finally, the way opens up to another staircase, leading up a few steps before ending abruptly in a massive stone wall, at least 6 feet thick. Breaking through it would take the explorers to “B”.
- B) This entrance leads down a long staircase and then down a long hallway secured by a trap causing a massive stone crashing down from the ceiling and blocking the way out. This trap is triggered by touching the false door at the end of the hallway. Behind it, the tunnel ends abruptly in a thick stone wall, the same obstacle as described above.

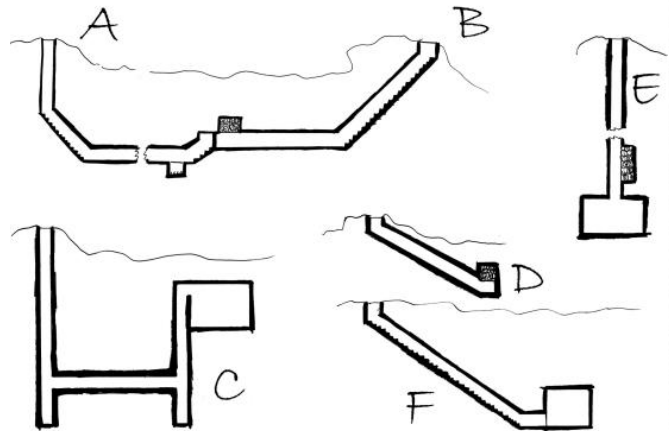
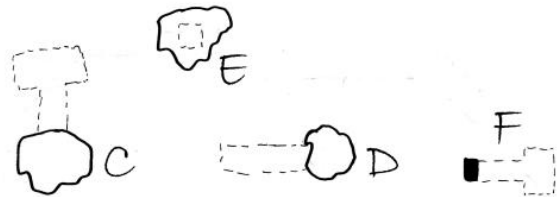
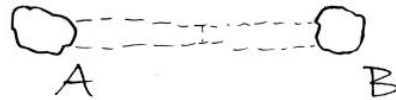
C) This entrance leads first to a vertical shaft of around 25 feet. Six feet above the bottom, a horizontal hallway leads straight for some time, ending in another vertical shaft going six feet down and 12 feet up. From the top of this shaft, a horizontal opening leads into the false Burial Chamber. The preserving magic still functions, therefore a fine effigy of the deceased as well as crafted goods made of copper and lead can be found here, which would bring a fine sum when sold to a collector.

D) This entrance leads down a skew hallway going for some 20 feet. At the end, there is again a false door. Touching it triggers another stone which crashes down from the ceiling, blocking the way out. Behind the door the tunnel ends abruptly.

E) From this entrance a vertical shaft goes down for at least 30 feet. At the bottom the shaft opens into a small room filled with several gilded copper artefacts. Touching them triggers a trap which brings part of the shaft down and traps the explorers.

F) This, the entrance to the true burial chamber, lies outside the rectangular field made by the five heads; it is situated close to entrance D, set after no system or clear pattern. It consists of a rectangular stone tablet hidden beneath more than two feet of earth. From the entrance, a staircase leads down for 20 feet, ending in a metal door secured by intricate Kasmiran traps. Behind it lies the Burial Chamber. Unlike the older tombs, this one has few grave goods, only some jewel-incrusted masks, which the owner seemed to have been especially fond of. The mummified client, too, is displayed with much less care and in much worse shape. Obviously, the display of the Burial Chamber had become less important to the Phaedrans than securing their final rest.

The Tomb of the Mirrors



Chapter 5: Strangers Beware!

Flora and Fauna of Werewood

Of all the experiences I had in this wondrous land, the most impressive was not meeting the Dhuna or the Boglins, nor was it seeing the great currents of the Sascasm or Weeping Rivers. What has indelibly burnt itself into my mind are all the marvelous creatures and plants. If you visit the gardens of Phaedra, you might be told they are a true presentation of primordial life; you might hear the same told in other lands of this and of other planes. But their garden plants and park creatures... they are nothing in comparison but tame, degenerate shades of life to me, now.

"Truly alive" I call thee, Werewood, chief among the forests of all the lands I have seen. Thou who containest wild, untamed, mad life. Whatever, whoever hast created thee, be it God or unknown sorcerers of a distant past, thou showest life in its rawest, best form.

Unfortunately, the friends who accompanied me on my travels could not see this. What a pity and waste, they died without insight, without peace.... I am sure, would they just have seen it, they would have found it soothing that they would become part of this mad cosmos in death....

- Ninguarda, Phaedran Sorcerer

Aquatic Creatures Bog Devil** Chang Kimochi* Kra, River** Quonlara* Ravenger Sago* Sea Dragon Skalanx	Airborne Creatures Avir Batranc Kankryu* Ravenger Ravir** Tatratta*	Creatures From Other Planes Fiend Ghast Hongodon* Necrophage Rogenda* S'drimogon* Storm Demon	Fungi Bophannon* Far'afer* Fungoid*** Giant Mushroom*** Minutio* Neurozoid*** Paykel* Scarlet Sporozoid Scavenger Slime Xyphalax* Zyzstantha*
Earthbound Creatures Bane Caravan Bug Exomorph Keb'abaron* Malathorpe Mang** Nefkrago* Ogriphant Pseudomorph** Rachmani* Ravenger	Shathane Sheeska* Sheeska (false)* Sniper-Bug Spinal Shadow* Tundra Beast** Ulvo* Werebeast Withergall (Mobile)* Yaksha	Plants Amitina* Dobonda* Gall Oak*** Lambado Grass* Maijno* Mandragore Nandato* Needleleaf Sorcerer Tree Stranglevine*	Whitewood*** Withergall (common)*** Withergall (rare)*

These tables are provided to assist in finding suitable creatures by habitat. Individual tables for the different areas of Werewood are not given, because almost all creatures and plants can be found, in large or small concentrations, throughout the region.

In addition to new creatures and plants (marked with an asterisk *), those already described in the current rulebook (no markings) and in the older supplement "Thystram's Collectanea" (marked with two asterisks **) as well as "Cyclopedia Talislanta 1" (three asterisk ***) are included. In these cases no statistics are given; instead, supplemental information concerning their role in Werewood is provided.

Amittina

The Amittina is the most common tree in Werewood. This hardwood tree is dominant in all parts of the region except Mushroom Forest, where its niche is filled by the Minutio. In the ecosystem of the forest, it is at the top, very literally. As the soil is not wholesome enough to normally provide enough nutrition for huge trees, it has found another way to cope with the environmental conditions by seeking to dominate the heights rather than the ground.

With strong but relatively small roots (whose purpose is mainly to keep it in place), the Amittina grows up to 20-50 feet (the Phaedran Sorcerer and traveller Ninguarda claimed to have seen Amittina as high as 100 feet, but probably this was just part of his usual exaggeration), while the trunks of these trees can reach a diameter of up to 10 feet. The wood is extremely hard and strong, yet it exhibits a rather ugly texture and is therefore not suitable for processing. The reddish bark is very thick (up to 2 1/2 feet) and soft, earning the Amittina the sobriquets "clothed tree" and "velvet tree" during the Phaedran Empire; at that time the bark was used as floor covering, a custom that has since been discontinued, mainly because flawless bark is

very rare. Normally, fungi, Avir and other creatures as well as parasitic plants pierce it with many holes to form nests or hideouts. To most of them, the inner wood is too hard to burrow into, however. Only the Gnorls regularly hollow out whole trees for their use as houses, which can have several storeys almost up to the treetop without the Amittina dying.

The trunk supports no boughs in its lower section: only at the very top does the Amittina feature an immense crown with huge, thick leaves of yellow color speckled with green and violet. These treetops, reaching a diameter of up to 30 feet, are the main reason for Werewoods' twilight, as they are quite successful in soaking up most of the sunlight, leaving everything beneath in a gloomy shade.

The reproduction of the Amittina is quite interesting. As it takes most of its nourishment from sunlight and precipitation, "normal" growth, with the young tree sprouting up from the bottom, wouldn't be suitable. Therefore the cycle of reproduction and development of the tree works the other way around.

This is how Thystram described it: "From time to time, all Amittina bring out large, purple flowers at the edges of their treetops, an event which the Weirdlings, as I have observed, celebrate with much joy and Paykel, their kind of mushroom brew. Singularly, flowers that are pollinated cease further development, as the contact with pollen signals that there is not enough space between the Amittina trees for another of their kind. This unique form of communication allows the trees to manage their own numbers. Unpollinated flowers will evolve into barrellike yellow fruit, which can be eaten without danger by anyone brave enough to climb so high, as I have seen Weirdlings do; the taste is satisfying though rather woody. After some time, however, undisturbed fruit will first develop a crown not unlike those of a grown Amittina; only afterwards will it develop a trunk, which grows down towards the ground until it can finally set its roots into

the weak soil of Werewood. This process takes several years and all over the forest it is possible to see young Amittina clinging to their mother trees, struggling to reach the ground. Only after the new tree is rooted is the connection to its parent severed.”

No statistics are given for the Amittina, as the chance of being attacked by it is next to nil.

Avir

These colourful birds can be found in Werewood, too, though they tend not to be as colorful as in other parts of the West. The kinds of Avir most commonly encountered here is the Ravir (see below), the so-called Emerald Avir, which is coloured in different hues of deep green, the Iron Avir (hues of gray) and the Clay Avir (hues of reddish brown). All of these can be hunted for food, but their feathers don't fetch high prices.

One rare Avir species that only occurs in Werewood is the Kron, or “Glowing Avir”. This variety is smaller than most other Avir; they feed mainly on Omphalos mushrooms, which makes them both inedible and causes the two long feathers on their heads to glow in the dark. Naturally, these feathers are prized by the upper classes of Zandu, Cymril and other countries, which is the reason why the Kron is almost extinct; this has driven the price to unknown heights. The sale of just two feathers can finance a whole expedition into Werewood.

More on the Avir, including statistics, can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 181; for the prices of Kron feathers, please refer to the Equipment section in the next chapter.

Bane

Perhaps no creatures in Werewood are as infamous and as feared as the demonoid Banes, who mainly occur in the west of the region, along the Sascasm and Weeping Rivers, in the Valley of Forgetfulness and in the Dreadwood area. They are solitary, sleek creatures, black, beautiful and very, very deadly. This sinister hybrid of night demon, darkling and extinct babbling howler stock embodies Werewood like no other creature.

Part of their fame is due to the female Bane Slaves available to (very rich) customers of strange taste all over Talislanta. No female, such people would tell you, is as wild and erotic as a Bane female. From time to time, rumours speak of such a Bane Slave losing its peacefulness and attempting a suicidal attack against its master in order to end its miserable life, but it seems that this enticing risk of death has made them even more attractive to the sort of customer who usually buys them.

Even though the Quan Empire, once one of the largest market for such slaves, has collapsed and their successors the Kang usually are not interested in such slaves, demand for Banes has not waned in Talislanta and thus quite a number of slave hunters, ranging from professionals to “hobby” slavers regularly enter Werewood in search of new stock. As a result, the population of Banes along the Sascasm River – the main entrance for such slavers, who prefer boats to a more vulnerable trip on foot – has become quite small, forcing the expeditions to go deeper and deeper into Werewood, especially as there are generally fewer female Banes than males. Thus expense as well as time and bodycount to gain a slave has risen considerably, which in return has driven up the price for female Banes.

More on the Banes, including statistics, can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 169. The Archetype for a Bane slave can be found in Chapter 7.

Batranc

The deadly airborne Batranc can be found in Werewood, too. They mostly prey on Avir and Kankryu of the region, but they have also been seen catching Nefkrago jumping from treetop to treetop or lookouts on ships travelling the Sascasm or Weeping Rivers. As the thick forests of Werewood are not all too suitable for this native of the Wilderlands of Zaran, it can be found mostly on the edges of the region, gliding over the Green Lagoon, the rivers and along the borders of the forest towards the Sardonyx and Onyx mountains.

More on the Batranc can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 336.

Beast of a thousand faces

See Pseudomorph.

Bog Devil

Bog Devils are amphibious humanoids up to seven feet tall, who are sentient, clever and something a traveller usually doesn't want to meet. They live in packs of 5 to 20 individuals in underwater caves and hunt for anything edible using crude nets, spears and traps that they are quite capable of devising. They are mainly encountered along the Dark Coast and the Swamplands of Mog, but at some point they succeeded in coming up the Sascasm and settling there. While the lower reaches of the river have since been cleansed of them by Zandu, the Werewood section of the river is still infested with them. This separation from their brethren has resulted in changes of appearance, so that the Werewood Bog Devils have a coloration more suitable to the color of their habitat, as well as spotted fins. Often a family of Bog Devils settles in one of the Phaedran Tombs now situated in the river, and they watch closely for any expedition of adventurers heading for the tombs, hoping to catch at least one or two of them.

Strangely enough, Bog Devils have never come beyond the Sascasm: they cannot be

It's All in the Teeth

It seems the ferociousness of Banes is deeply connected with their sharp, long fangs. Scholars, who have studied fangs painfully acquired from Banes, claim that the fangs have long tooth roots which, they conclude, are connected to their brains. By biting into raw, living flesh, something of the joy to kill supposedly goes through the teeth and their roots and bring the sensation directly into their brains, making them addicted to this very sensation. By filing the fangs, it becomes impossible for the Banes to receive this sensation, pacifying them.

Thystram however, who had studied the Banes in their natural environment, heartily disagreed with that view. Banes, he said, are very proud creatures. By filing their teeth they lose face in their own eyes and it is this humiliation and loss of confidence that makes them so peaceful. He also pointed out that this is only true for female Banes. Male Banes he observed often had broken, unkept yellow teeth, while females always tried to clean their fangs and to keep them whole and in a good shape. He concluded that, would Talislanteans seek male Banes, they would have a problem.

“But, fortunately, Talislantean men are sane enough to enjoy the company of women over that of bloodthirsty monsters.”

found in the Weeping River or the Green Lagoon because of the Quonlara and the Sago, which make this area too uncomfortable for them. On the other hand they are quite capable of defending themselves against creatures like the Kankryu and the Skalanx.

More on the Bog Devil can be found in Thystram's Collectanea, p. 8.

Bophannon

The Bophannon or “Slime Master,” as it is sometimes called by the Weirdlings, is the most deadly and most intelligent form of slime mold (also called Myxomycota) that are

so often encountered all over Werewood. Some adventurers would even call it the deadliest danger in the whole of Werewood. Its weapons are patience, speed and an acidic attack.

Bophannon slime molds are almost translucent; they usually form a big lump somewhere at the roots of trees such as the Amittina. From there it extends very small (1/2 inch wide) tendrils formed of separate slime cells clinging together into all directions. Unlike most related species encountered in Werewood, these tendrils are quite water resistant and can also be found in dry spots. The length of such tendrils can reach up to 100 yards from the main lump.

Once something edible (like an animal or an adventurer) touches one of the tendrils, it will stick on the target and at the same time give a signal to the lump. The target has to be alive to trigger the attack. Even while the victim is moving, the tendril will stay attached and thus serve as a guide for the rest of the organism. With amazing speed the whole slime mold moves to the victim, completely reaching and covering the average adventurer in mere minutes. It enters the body through all orifices while acid burns anything it touches. Death occurs within few minutes as the Bophannon mold enters the lungs, practically suffocating the victim. As it exists not as one creature in the normal sense and has no single brain that can be attacked to destroyed, defense with normal weapons is usually ineffective. Magic only has a reduced effect as well.

The best way to avoid an attack by a Bophannon is by not touching the tendrils, but this is almost impossible as they are practically invisible in the twilight of the forest. The Dhuna are said to have developed an ointment which, when applied to the feet or soles, can destroy the tendrils when touched, while the Boglins seem to be able to see them or have some secret weapon they won't talk about.

The Weirdlings are known to have their special way to deal with the Bophannon. They place captured false Sheeska on one of the tendrils, wait until it is covered by the mold, then catch the Bophannon and cook it with herbs. The Phaedran Sorcerer Ninguarda, who once took part in such a meal, called it "an interesting experience, which is much more stimulating than it sounds and less revolting than it looks."

Size: Around 10 ft. in diameter, around 450 lbs.

PER +3 - Sense of touch only

DEX +2

CON +3

SPD +2

All other attributes negligible

Level: 1-3

Attacks/Damage: Suffocation / Acid: DR 3 per level per round

Special Abilities: All damage a Bophannon takes is divided by 4 unless caused by a weapon or spell with an area of effect.

Armor: None

Hit Points: 40

Bounty Bush

See Dobonda.

Caravan Bug

These small, intelligent and social creatures can be found in most parts of Werewood except Mushroom Forest and the Valley of Forgetfulness; yet while they are not all too common in most other areas, they can be found almost everywhere in Gnorlwood. The reason for this seems to be unknown to all except the Gnorls themselves.

Still, travellers such as Thystram and Ninguarda observed the close connection between the two species. It seems the connection between individual Gnorls with individual tribes of Caravan Bugs can take very distinct proportions, depending on how much effort (and delectables) a particular Gnorl is willing to spend; perhaps, as

Thystram writes, a Gnorl who can employ "her" Bugs for many tasks even enjoys a certain esteem and renown in Gnorlwood. Mostly, the Caravan Bugs are used by the female Boglins as a sort of mobile burglar alarm, but it has also been observed that they were used as small and inscopious messengers, carrying news from Gnorl to Gnorl, or that they were even used as spies. In Ninguardas words: "I even observed a peculiar war while being guest of Shibaal. Two of her neighbours, she called them Michkaal and Laabanbalu, held a deep grudge towards each other. Since both feared the worst of each other, neither dared to leave their hiding places in order to guard their secrets.

But this wasn't the end of their quarrel. Both were apt in what Shibaal called 'befriending the Little Ones', that is the insects we call Caravan Bugs. As I saw with my own eyes, legions of them were marching against each other, either trying to enter the enemies' dwelling or trying to stop the invaders. Finally, a Gnorl Judge named by my host as Brimbaal had to intervene: otherwise, the two groups of Caravan Bugs might have ended up exterminating each other. Gnorls seem to view their relationship with the Little Ones mostly as a game; using them in a way like Michkaal and Laabanbalu is considered as being an extremely bad sport."

More on the Caravan Bug can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 163.

Chang

These terrifying metallic-scaled predators are most common in the Kang Empire, the Inland Sea and the Southern Rim, but they can also be found along the Upper Sascasm River, much to the dismay and horror (not to say demise) of the occasional traveller who had only longed for a bath. How they came there is still a matter of dispute amongst scholars.

The chronicler Spyridon reports that there were several Phaedran mages who kept Chang in glass vivaria for fun or experiments or both.

According to him, one of them, Maytmoton, was buried with a number of such vivaria some weeks before the Empire fell in 111 (this was the last recorded burial along the Sascasm). Probably, the scholars claim, during the chaos accompanying the Fall of Phaedra one or more of these vivaria were destroyed and its inhabitants ended up in the river or, somehow, the Chang in the Tomb of Maytmoton escaped into the Sascasm. Because of this academic question, several Cymrillian sages regularly finance expeditions to find Maytmotons resting place in order to find the truth.

More on the Chang can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 205.

Clay Avir

See Avir.

Clothed Trees

See Amittina

Dobonda

The Dobonda (also called "Bounty Bush") can be found throughout the whole Werewood region, though it is most common in the areas west of the Sascasm. It is one of the plants which fill the lowest level of the three-tiered structure of Werewood. As sunshine at the bottom of the forest is scarce at best, and because the soil is not nourishing enough to provide the nutrients necessary for survival, most of these bushes have developed other means to find sustenance, but none in such a peculiar fashion as the Dobonda, which lives in symbiosis. Viewed by itself, it consists of one long, sleek trunk from which many branches extend to each side, forming an almost conical and flat structure. The branches are very thin and support many sharp thorns, but no leaves. In the twilight of Werewood, it is next to invisible. Thus it seems that alone it would not be able to survive.

The secret to the success of the Dobonda lies in the fact that two particular species, a fungus and a moss, are invariably found growing in its immediate vicinity. The fungus is called Xyphalax and is very common in all Werewood, a small, inconspicuous, slightly glowing mushroom which lives off other plants; for some reason it is attracted to the Dobonda, covering it all-over, so that the bush appears as one bright, big glowing spot. The moss usually found around the Dobonda is the Nandato, a rather uncommon moss, which is favoured by most inhabitants of Werewood for its sweetness, but which needs a relatively high exposure to light to grow.

Should a creature like a Sheeska, a Weirdling, a Dhuna or even a traveller either step on the Nandato moss around a Dobonda, or try to eat it, the roots of the bush will take notice, causing the trunk to detach and hurl itself on the creature, entangling it with its branches and bleeding it to death by cuts inflicted by the thorns. The force with which the trunk of Dobonda embraces its victim can be enough to kill even a Bane, not to speak of whole groups of Sheeska who have fallen prey to just one bush. Afterwards, the current trunk decays along with the victim. The nutrients are taken up by the Nandato moss, which, in return, is tapped by the roots of the Dobonda. It then brings forth a new trunk, waiting for the next victim.

Size: 10-15 ft., 700+ lbs.

PER +4 * - Sense of touch only

STR +6

All other attributes negligible

Level: 2-4

Attacks/Damage: Entangle: DR 6 per round.

Special Abilities: None

Armor: Bark, PR 2

Hit Points: 15

Emerald Avir

See Avir.

Emerald Jellyfish

See Sago.

Exomorph

These quadrupedal predators are particularly common in Arim, but they also roam the southern parts of Werewood in greater numbers and can be found from time to time in the rest of the region as well. Their uncanny talent for camouflage allows the Exomorph to adapt perfectly to the eerie surroundings of the forest.

Both Boglins and Dhuna are known to hunt the Exomorph to acquire the much coveted pigment sacs. The Gnorls or female Boglins have means to prepare all kinds of magical inks using these pigments, some of which they sometimes use to write down valuable secrets. Upon drying, these inks leave no visible trace on the parchment; in order to make it readable once again, the reader usually has to perform something extraordinarily strange or embarrassing, usually defined by three components; for example, as Ninguarda reported, he would have to dance naked at a city market while singing a childrens' rhyme. "Only then," the sorcerer added, "could he read the message again, after he had been released from the lunatic asylum, that is."

More on the Exomorph can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 153.

Far'afar

"The Far'afar," Thystram writes, "is a species of fungus that lives entirely beneath the surface, at a depth of about three feet or more. It consists of unshapely tubers of brownish color that can reach a diameter of up to three feet or more, connected by thick roots of the same color. One Far'afar my assistant Ordu dug out for me must have consisted of at least 30 such tubers, and I have no doubt that there might be Far'afar of 50 or more such components.

Caution is needed when digging out a Far'after, though, as this plant reacts to any such attempt by rapidly trying to fill any empty spaces encountered; in our case I had a hard time saving Ordu from the uncountable entangling vines (or rather roots) suddenly shooting out of every tuber."

To this, Ninguarda adds: "During my passage through the Underground Highway, I had to stop for several hours; a Far'after had, by chance, reached the tunnels and within moments had done its best to fill it with its roots. Yet my Boglin hosts didn't mind the delay caused by battling this plant; as they told me, the fleshy soft tubers made a fine meal and the roots came in handy for making ropes, as well as the basis of a brew capable to keep even the most tired man awake. While I am writing this, I have been awake for three weeks and though the daily dose of Far'after brew is now at twenty-two cups a day, I see no need to stop my experiment for the time being."

This reflex of the Far'after seems to be its method of hunting down small creatures like the Sheeska or the Keb'abaron. The roots that shoot out of the tubers are meant to pierce its victims, so that the decaying carcasses remain close and provide the fungus with nourishment. The force of the roots is sometimes even enough to kill a humansized traveller.

Size: Spread in an area of up to 100 ft.; individual tuber up to 3+ ft. in diameter, 100 lbs.

PER +1

STR +2

DEX +2

All other attributes negligible

Level: 2

Attacks/Damage: Root: DR 3

Special Abilities: None

Armor: None

Hit Points: 8 (per tuber)

Fiend

These terrors from the Nightmare Dimension regularly use the witchgates and shadows of Witchwood and the Dread Forest to appear on the Material Plane. Almost impossible to spot in the twilight of Werewood even during the day, they are feared even by the Dhuna, as these are creatures which have to be battled with bright light, something the Dhuna dislike to use. Still, the witches never show mercy to Fiends and relentlessly pursue every one of these creatures once they appear. Gates which are known as popular crossing points for Fiends are closely guarded by Dhuna priests who know magic even these entities fear.

More on the Fiend can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 300.

Gall Oak

The Gall Oak is common in all temperate forests and mountainous regions, and so it can be found in Werewood too, especially in the southern part of the region, though it is not as common as the Withergall. The blister-like galls growing on the bark of these trees contain a blue-black secretion which is a base for inks and dyes.

More on the Gall Oak can be found in the Cyclopedia Talislanta, p. 73.

Ghast

These foul denizens from uncharted reaches of the Underworld roam Werewood in great numbers. The Phaedran Tombs and the area of the Dread Forest especially serve as hideouts for many a Ghast, but they have also found lairs in many caverns and dark places all over the rest of the region. The parts of Mushroom Forest close to Witchwood seems to be another especially attractive region for them, a fact that led Ninguarda to the assumption, that either one or more of the gates in Witchwood lead to the original home of these vile creatures, or that perhaps the

magical gate that the legendary Mordante created and which might have brought the Ghost into the Material Plane is situated in Mushroom Forest and is still working.

"We have never seen Ghosts reproduce, nor have we seen their cubs on this Plane, yet their number seems only to rise and never to dwindle. The most reasonable cause for this can only be that there is still some connection between our plane and theirs."

Based on this theory several rich tradesmen living of goods acquired from tombs have offered a sizable reward for anyone who can find and close this or these gates (and prove so).

More on the Ghost can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 159.

Giant Mushroom

Ranging in height from two to over eighty feet, these umbrella-shaped mushrooms form the bulk of fungi that dominate Mushroom Forest, though they can be found in the Sinking Land and Khazad, too. Slightly phosphorescent and with a huge variety of hues, one could argue that all umbrella-shaped fungi of larger proportions belong to this group, which includes the Minutio, the dominant species of Giant Mushroom in Mushroom Forest.

Ninguarda wasn't happy with the term "Giant Mushroom." He writes: "For a traveller it might be true that all these varied species are just Giant Mushrooms. But for me, a naturalist, it is imprecise to have one name where a thousand are necessary."

More on the Giant Mushroom can be found in the Cyclopedia Talislanta, p. 73.

Glowing Avir

See Avir

Grass, Lambado

see Lambado Grass.

Hongodon

Among the extradimensional entities that sometimes cross the divide between their domain and the Material Plane, the Hongodon seems to be comparatively harmless. They have the appearance of androgyne humanoids with purple skin, pink hair and five eyes, and never speak, but use an alien form of sign language for communication. They appear in numbers from one to five and seem to be interested in observation only. Obviously uninhibited by shame or code of conduct, they try to touch and look at everything. They often appear in the circles of Witchwood and, using their ability to magically teleport over long distances, often turn up suddenly in closets, bedrooms or other, usually inappropriate locations.

Thystram, who managed to learn parts of the Hongodons' sign language, found their insights "eerie, but interesting." He advised against disturbing these humanoids. "Undisturbed, a Hongodon is quickly satisfied and usually leaves a magical gift, such as healing the host from a long ailment, or by giving him a precious gem; but a disturbed Hongodon can prove to be a strong enemy, wielding deadly magic against any opposition. Watching and learning, like the Dhuna practice it, is surely the best option."

Size: 5 – 7 ft, 80+ lbs.

INT +4 **PER** +6

WIL +3 **CHA** 0

STR -1 **DEX** +3

CON -3 **SPD** +1

Level: 5-10

Attacks/Damage: Per weapon employed

Special Abilities: Long distance teleport, Wizardry with four Modes at Ability Level.

Armor: None

Hit Points: 18

Iron Avir

See Avir.

Kankryu

"All travellers who journey up the Sascasm River know of the Kankryu," writes Ninguarda, "which is easy as it is huge and one can see at least a dozen of these huge avir at any moment. The boatmen who steer the boats on the Sascasm are thus all the more convinced that the number of Kankryu and the formations they fly in all have a meaning. This, of course, is ridiculous. For example, I met a boatman who told me earnestly that he had seen seven of these birds fly in a formation resembling the outline of the Phaedran Empire and then attacked each other, which, according to him, could only mean that the fall of our beloved homeland was near. As if such a thing could happen in a thousand years..."

Huge, covered with blue and white feathers, the Kankryu is one of the largest avir in the Werewood region. Living in flocks of up to twenty individuals, these avir spend their whole life in the air. Kankryu build no nests; instead the egg hatches in the beak. Once hatched, the young birds can fly immediately and, after they have been fed for some weeks by their parents, they catch their own food. The only reason for a Kankryu to dive down is either after death or in order to catch prey, which they drag into the air and swallow whole.

While they usually feed on fish or other aquatic life, the enormous beak of a Kankryu is large enough to catch even a Bane or a traveller. Travellers, especially adventurers of smaller stature exploring the Phaedran tombs are advised not to stay visible in the same spot for longer periods of time.

Size: 40+ wingspan, 13 feet long, 175 lbs.

INT -5 **PER** +6

WIL +3 **CHA** n/a

STR +7 **DEX** +3

CON +8 **SPD** +7

Level: 4-8+

Attacks/Damage: Beak: DR 10, Claws: DR 8

Special Abilities: Can remain airborne indefinitely

Armor: None

Hit Points: 42

Keb'abaron

The Keb'abaron or "Lightning Kobold" is quite an annoying creature when it is met above ground, but even though it is a most common creature in the whole of Werewood, it is seen only rarely, because it spends almost its entire life below the surface. Actually quadrupedal, it consists of a ridiculously small pinkish body supporting four little, almost useless limbs and a tiny head with huge blind eyes, a small mouth armed with long sharp teeth and enormous ears. All in all it is not longer than one foot. Due to highly developed muscles, the Keb'abaron can use its ears to burrow through the earth at an impressive speed.

The Keb'abaron mostly lives of nutrients in the soil it takes in while burrowing, constantly eating, digesting and disposing of it while moving on tirelessly. But, given the relatively poor soil of the Werewood region, it is always searching for extra nutrition, especially seeking liquids such as water or blood. Once they sense such a font above ground, be it a sleeping creature or a container with water, they pick up speed and hurl themselves from below the surface towards the desired liquid, then, after spilling as much as they can on the earth, they return to the depths of the soil, preferring to take in the spilt liquid after it has seeped into the ground.

For the traveller, this means sudden attacks with strong sharp teeth. Unless by chance a vital artery is hit, such wounds usually remain minor, though; often the damage to clothing is more annoying, unless a disease (like Swamp

Fever) is passed on. More dangerous to any expedition is the loss of water and other beverages carried by the adventurers. In a place like Werewood where potable, unspoiled water is a rarity; the loss inflicted by the Keb'abaron can thus become life-threatening.

Size: 1 ft., 30 lbs.

INT +1 **PER** +4

WIL 0 **CHA** n/a

STR -2 **DEX** +4

CON 0 **SPD** +5*

*+3 when moving underground

Level: 1-6

Attacks/Damage: Bite: DR 2

Special Abilities: Can move underground

Armor: None

Hit Points: 5

Kimochi

The Kimochi, also called "Glass Fish", lives in the Sascasm and Weeping Rivers as well as in the Green Lagoon and in the creeks and smaller bodies of water found in Werewood. No more than three to five inches long, they are almost invisible, as except for their eyes, spine and belly, they are almost completely translucent.

Of rather stale taste, they can be caught and eaten in times of need, but they can also be dangerous. In times of reproduction, the otherwise peaceful Kimochi become aggressive, attacking any living creature. While the wounds they create are no more than a scratch, extreme caution is advised, for they also lay their eggs – usually around 200 – into these small wounds. After about two weeks, the eggs hatch and the resulting larvae embed themselves into the body of their hosts. As they secrete an anaesthetizing saliva, no pain is felt by the host, but with each passing day it becomes weaker. After a period of six to eight weeks, the young Kimochi have usually succeeded in damaging the body of the host to

such a degree that it fails to function. Upon the death of the host, the young fish leave its body and start their otherwise mostly peaceful life as adult Kimochi.

While normally this life circle concerns only creatures also living in the water, like Quonlara or Skalanx, cases of travellers killed by Kimochi larvae have been reported. Especially those exploring the Phaedran Tombs along the Sascasm River have a certain chance of being hit by those fish, as the lower sections of these tombs are often beneath the level of the water of the river.

Size: 3"-5", 1 lbs.

INT -1 **PER** +2

WIL -8 **CHA** n/a

STR -7 **DEX** +1

CON +2 **SPD** +4

Attacks/Damage: Bite: DR 1

Special Abilities: Aquatic, Stealth 8

Armor: None

Hit Points: 2

Kobold, Lightning

See Keb'abaron.

Kra, River

These cousins of the gigantic oceanic Kra, who live around the Isle of Imria, share their fierceness, but lack their size. Blind, eellike creatures, the River Kra grows to no more than ten feet in length, the average being around five feet. They lurk in all rivers of Werewood as well as in the Green Lagoon, sensing their prey by sound and vibration. They are solitary predators and unless it is mating season, they even eat their own kind.

Unlike their relatives in the oceans, River Kra are not sluggish after mating and they cannot be tamed. Ninguarda reports that they can be cooked, though, and that they have a surprisingly pleasant taste.

More on the Kra, including statistics, can be found in Thystram's Collectanea, p. 38.

Kron

See Avir.

Lambado Grass

Lambado grass is soft, long and has a violet to pinkish color. It grows along the banks of the Necros River, but sporadically it can be found in the meadows of Werewood, Silvanus and Zandu, too.

According to Thystram, violet colored Lambado Grass, such as that found near the Necros River, is a sign of the presence of poison in the air, water or soil: Lambado Grass in safe surroundings has a pinkish colour, distinct from the deep violet it has in the vicinity of the Necros. It can thus serve as an indicator for potential dangers, which is why the Phaedran traveller Ninguarda took a pot with this grass with him during his travels. Additionally, he reports a recipe which he developed during the time of the Phaedran Emperor Damon; using ten pounds of Lambado grass and other ingredients, the coction, upon taken, can neutralize all ingested poisons for up to twelve hours. Still, this antidote never gained any popularity, not even among those Phaedrans fearing assassination or even with Ninguarda himself, because it also ruins any sense of taste for extended periods of time.

Lightning Kobold

See Keb'abaron.

Living Dreams

See Rogenda.

Little Ones, The

See Caravan Bugs.

Maijno

The Maijno is a long, sleek parasitic vine found all over Werewood; it glows with a bluish hue and attaches itself to Amittina trees as well as other larger plants or fungi and lives of them. Unlike the ever common Xyphalax, it grows and grows until it kills the host plant. Tragically, this also means the end of the Maijno, which is unable to find a new host and withers after having produced about a dozen glowing fruits, ready for creatures to eat so that they deliver the seeds to another site. These fruits are edible and tasty, a rare thing for Werewood, and go by name of Maijno Onions. As such they are a prized delicacy for the natives of the Werewood region. The Dhuna even cultivate them by planting them on Amittina trees and then, after some time, severing the connection between vine and tree.

Apart from this, it has no abilities or features worth telling.

Malathrope

These terrible quadrupedal predators, sorcerous hybrids of uncertain descent are native to the wastelands of Talislanta, but they can also be found in Werewood, especially in the Valley of Forgetfulness. Cunning and devious, they hunt not only for food, but for pleasure too; they need neither rest nor sleep.

Feared even by Banes, it is not advised to get into trouble with them. As Ninguarda wrote: "If you hear this special hissing laughter, turn and run. This is the best way to stay alive if you are not an archmage or accompanied by an army."

More on the Malathorpe can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 359.

Mandragore

These mobile plants are common all over Werewood, where they are native. Seldom larger than 3 feet, they are vaguely humanoid with gnarly rootlike limbs and leafy "hair."

Inactive and rooted during the day, they are usually mistaken for normal plants, becoming active little vile predators during the night. Armed with intelligence, numbers and nets of vines and grasses, they stalk Sheeska and other, usually small creatures, burying them alive and feeding of them as they become compost.

Intelligent species like the Caravan Bugs “employed” by the Gnorls are sometimes attacked by Mandragores, resulting in outright wars between the two species. The topic of the Caravan Bugs made Ninguarda comment on “the funny things that can happen between Boglin, Bug and Mandragore.”

More on the Mandragore can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 170.

Mang

Thystram once described the Mang growing in his backyard as “a stoic, somewhat static friend.” These immobile creatures resemble large, ancient trees and often are mistaken for Withergall – though Mang would not like to hear this comparison. On close inspection one can find gnarly, withered facial features and strong, surprisingly agile arms.

Mang are solitary, secretive and intelligent. They don't like being disturbed, whether by bugs, mushrooms, Banes or travellers. Even though they cannot move, their fists are more than enough to make most creatures leave them alone. They use a limited form of telepathy to communicate with all plants in their surroundings; add to that their lifespan of several centuries, they can often amass great wisdom. Thystram himself learned much from the Mang in his backyard; later the Phaedran Ninguarda, trying to outclass him, tried to befriend many Mang during his travels in Werewood, though with mixed success.

His conclusion was “Mang can be great friends, but they can also give you a bump you will never forget. My advice regarding these creatures is: meet them cautiously, be very polite and never call them cute.”

As a sidenote, both Dhuna and Gnorls seem to highly favour Mang and many of these wondrous creatures live in Witchwood or Gnorlwood, treasured and nourished by Dhuna or Boglin hosts.

More on the Mang can be found in Thystram's Collectanea , p. 45.

Minora

See Withergall, rare.

Minutio

The Minutio is to Mushroom Forest what the Amittina is to the rest of Werewood. This yellowish, fluorescent mushroom can reach heights of up to 15 to 30 feet, topping everything in their habitat. Their caps are deep blue in color with glowing spots underneath.

To quote the Phaedran Ninguarda: “In the part of Werewood called Mushroom Forest, travellers can find the wondrous phenomenon of walking beneath a never-ending starry sky. It seems that the Minutio mushrooms, which dot this area in a frequency that makes it appear more as a high hall of yellow columns than a forest, sport glowing dots underneath their shields which resemble an eerie sky full of stars. I have been told that from time to time mystics are drawn here from afar and wander about, trying to decipher the meaning of these weird constellations of false stars and to find new inspiration or insight in this way. Needless to say, the Minutio is completely inedible, though the Gnorls know the secret of extracting substances from it to dye their clothes (and sometimes for certain rituals even their bodies) in bright hues of blue or glowing silver.”

Not only is the Minutio inedible; from time to time many, most or all (here the scholars are unsure) of the Minutio die after having set out their spores. As if to prevent other plants of Werewood like the Amittina to take over their territory, the quickly decaying rotten mushrooms emit gasses venomous to most living creatures and plants. Only the absence

of stronger winds prevent these gasses to fly all over Werewood, which would undoubtedly bring death to an unknown number of inhabitants of the entire region.

Size: 10'-30'.

All attributes negligible

Level: 5-10

Attacks/Damage: Venomous gas: DR 4 per round (no armor)

Special Abilities: Emit venomous gas upon death

Armor: None

Hit Points: 50

Moss King, the

See Sheeska.

Mushroom, Giant

See Giant Mushroom.

Nandato

The Nandato is an uncommon sight among the many mosses which cover much of the ground in Werewood. It has a larger structure than other mosses and a deep purple texture with thick, fleshy stalks. When pressed, it lactates a strong scented, thick pink liquid which tastes very sweet. Both creatures and inhabitants of Werewood are very fond of this liquid, usually called "Leka," which is even more popular as the Nandato is itself not poisonous. As a rule, ten pounds of Nandato yield half a litre of Leka and need about a week to recover from being milked (unless, of course, the moss is ripped out to be milked, in which case ten pounds yield up to one litre, but result in the death of the moss).

As it would seem, this special moss usually would not stand a chance to survive; yet, it has two defences through symbiosis: First, it needs quite a lot of light, so that it grows mostly in areas covered thickly by Xyphalax (which often means areas where Dobonda grow); secondly, Nandato are usually secured, harvested and guarded by Rachmani, which

makes other living creatures think twice before trying to acquire it.

Apart from being able to photosynthesize and to lactate Leka, Nandato have no special abilities, statistics or features.

Necrophage

These nauseating humanoid denizens of the Underworld use rifts and gates to enter Talislanta. Of course, this means Werewood, too. The Dread Forest and the Valley of Forgetfulness seem to house many such rifts, so that these areas are infested with Necrophages. Also, several of the uncountable gates that can be found in Witchwood are often used by them and so they have become a common danger in this part of the region, too. The Dhuna are usually more than capable to fend off most Necrophages, though. Those gates best known for serving as transition points for these creatures are closely guarded by the Black Dhuna Order, who attack every intruder the moment it enters the Material Plane.

The text on the Dhuna by Anonymus 4 states that this connection between the Black Order of the Witches and the Necrophages is somewhat uneerie: "Could it be that the Black Order became the way it is – black, dark, cruel, ill-mannered – because it so often hunts Necrophages? Imagine you are a hunter, especially a hunter of creatures from the Underworld.... Wouldn't hunting such abominations require that you become one yourself?"

He also noted that the Dhuna seemed to be especially diligent in guarding the border towards the Boglin territories: "I often noted that despite what most people think, the Dhuna have very clear priorities in guarding the gates. First comes their own safety, of course. Mostly they are content to drive the dangerous intruders off their borders. But woe to the intruder who decides to appear in the south-west, close to the Boglins. No mercy to them. The security of the Boglins (or just of

the Gnorls?) has such a great importance to the Dhuna that I cannot but think that there must be a close connection between these two folk."

More on the Necrophage can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 159.

Needleleaf

The Needleleaf is one of the most common dangerous plants in Werewood and there is no area it cannot be found in far too large numbers (at least from the point of view of inhabitants and travellers). Reacting to vibrations in a radius of up to ten feet, it sends showers of mildly venomous barbed needles, each measuring about one inch. The venom itself only causes a very unpleasant burning and itching sensation, and is not deadly to all but the smallest creatures, but the prevalence of the plant makes it hard not to be annoyed by Needleleaf-plants on a regular basis.

The thorns are commonly used as weapons by Caravan or Sniper Bugs. Also, some Gnorls use the needles to prepare a certain tea they love to give to customers who try to haggle. The result is quite spectacular, as people start to scratch themselves all over their bodies.

More on the Needleleaf can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 170.

Nefkrago

No other creature is better adapted to life in the treetops of Werewood than the Nefkrago. These creatures, which can measure up to eight feet, sport a long, sleek body, a big round hairy face with big eyes, two long, extremely hairy arms and three long tails. With these five limbs it can hold itself in and hurl itself from treetop to treetop in an amazing speed.

Even though it looks almost cute for a denizen of Werewood, the Nefkrago should not be underestimated. As it is carnivorous and hunts and lives in groups of one or two males (distinguishable from the females by

their long facial and abdominal hair) with five to fifteen females and a similar number of Nefkrago young, it is more than capable to fight down the unwary traveller.

Young Nefkrago can be tamed and kept as watchers when taken away from their parents right after birth (something which usually involves killing the whole group of Nefkrago). As such exotic animals are cherished by the idle rich all over Talislanta, expeditions to catch young Nefkrago enter Werewood quite often (often combining the search for these creatures with the hunt for female Banes). As a result, the population of Nefkrago along the Sascasm has dwindled considerably, forcing such expeditions to go deeper into Werewood.

Size: 6'-8', 180-200 lbs

INT -6 **PER** +4

WIL +3 **CHA** n/a

STR +4 **DEX** +3

CON +3 **SPD** +6 (in treetops),
+3 (on ground)

Level: 4-12

Attacks/Damage: Bite: DR 8, Punch: DR 5

Special Abilities: Climbing at Level+DEX

Armor: Fur, PR 2

Hit Points: 35

Neurozoid

Neurozoids are ambulatory, slightly phosphorescent fungi which can be found in Werewood's Mushroom Forest. These bizarre, pinkish entities can measure up to four feet in diameter, resembling masses of pulsating brain tissue. While they move around slowly (Speed -3), they graze on slimes and moulds. Even though Neurozoids may look like brains, they are not sentient beings; in fact "the only sentient thing one can do with a Sporozoid is to smash it," as Ninguarda quotes one of his fellows.

Horticulturists and gardeners have a different view of the Neurozoid, though. As it

feeds of other fungi, they use it to battle parasites of that sort; additionally, fertilizer made of Neurozoid is quite effective in a land with such a poor soil as Werewood. Thus, the existence of Neurozoids outside of Mushroom Forest can often be traced to nearby settlements of Boglins or Dhuna.

As they prove no danger to adventurers, no statistics are given for them here. More on the Neurozoid can be found in the Cyclopedia Talislanta, p. 74.

Ogriphant

These huge creatures are a common sight in all of northern and western Talislanta, and thus they can be found in Werewood too, especially along the northern fringes of the region and in Witchwood, as the forest is lighter here.

The Dhuna are among the people who have domesticated the Ogriphant, though it is not a commonly used beast here. Sometimes small groups of Ogriphants are kept close to a Circle to serve as a natural defense; emerging demons or other entities are often surprised that an Ogriphant is usually quite capable of fighting back.

More on the Ogriphant can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 314.

Omphalos Mushroom

See Xyphalax.

Paykel

To the Weirdlings, nothing in Werewood equals the Paykel, a small, otherwise unobtrusive mushroom which features a pink, fleshy cap on a reddish trunk. Relatively uncommon in other parts of Werewood, they can be found in huge numbers in the Dread Forest; the Phaedran Ninguarda even claimed that "looking out for large numbers of Paykel is a fine way to find a Weirdling festival ground".

The reason for this is relatively simple, as the Weirdlings know how to make a mildly alcoholic drink of the Paykel they are more than fond of.

To quote Thystram: "While travelling through the Dread Forest I was offered a most interesting brew by a quite generous Weirdling. The taste was mild, spicy and quite stimulating. Unfortunately my assistant Ordu made the mistake to ask for the recipe. As the Boglin happily informed us after much haggling, the preparation of Paykel (as the brew is commonly called) requires the chewing of the trunk of the mushroom of the same name; after this the chewed mushroom is spit into a clay container. Together with several herbs they kept secret from me, the container is then buried for three weeks and three days before the Paykel is fermented and ready. Unlike the trunk, the cap of the aforementioned mushroom is unsuitable for eating, as it is a strong laxative.

Needless to say, this news was like a laxative to us, too. For the rest of our journey in this part of the world, we followed the example of the Gnorls and Dhuna, who would never drink Paykel."

As there is no imminent danger from this mushroom, no statistics are necessary.

Plant, the Nameless

see Withergall, uncommon.

Pseudomorph

Of all creatures not originally native to Werewood, the Pseudomorph is probably the most successful in adapting to this region. A magical creature brought into being by the ancient wizards of Phantas, a Pseudomorph in its natural form is a colorless, magically animated lump of protoplasm, lacking any true form. They have the ability to alter their shape at will however, and also to project illusions. Combining these powers, they can mimic virtually anything, be it an individual, creature or inanimate object. Still, they are not

true shapechangers. The shape of the protoplasm remains vague, making them dependent on their illusions to appear “real”; also, they cannot mimic sound, and so remain mute.

Still, these abilities make the Pseudomorph a perfect predator, which kills and devours its prey by engulfing it with their protoplasm and suffocating it. After the death of their victims, they drain the corpse of all vital fluids, leaving behind little more than a withered mummy.

It is unknown how exactly these vicious predators escaped Phantas; probably, they hid as cargo crates, crewmen or something similar on a Phantasian Windship; now they can be found all over Talislanta and, of course, in Werewood too.

While Pseudomorphs can be encountered in all parts of the region, they tend to be most common in areas frequented by Dhuna, Boglins and Banes, which led the sorcerer Ninguarda to the conclusion that it probably yearns for the fluids of higher creatures. The Banes in particular seem to be favoured as models to be copied by the Pseudomorphs when assuming the form of a living creature; obviously it is easier to mimic these wild, rather speechless predators than the much more communicative Dhuna or Boglins. Still, these peoples have a certain fear of this dangerous entity and many children stories are told in Eastern Werewood about the “Beast of a thousand faces.”

More on the Pseudomorph can be found in Thystram's Collectanea, p. 57.

Quonlara

Perhaps no other creature in Werewood has such varied colors as the aquatic Quonlara, who dwell mostly along the Weeping River and in the Green Lagoon. These fish – flat, soft, disk-shaped, about the size of a palm and not unlike a skate – are colored in patterns containing virtually all possible (and, as Thystram observed, some quite impossible) colors.

Quonlara live in shoals of 100-1000 specimens and, unlike most such creatures, they have a kind of hive mind, which allows them to use simple tactics, as the Phaedran sorcerer Ninguarda remarked: “Once I saw with my own eyes how a group of perhaps four Bog Devils pursued two of the brightest Quonlara I have ever seen. The fish seemed to have no real sense of what was happening, of what 'being pursued' really meant, to judge from the slow, almost happy manner they were swimming in in front of the much larger hunters. Then, suddenly, the fish stopped and turned, and not just these two, as from all around the Bog Devils hundreds of Quonlara whizzed from hiding places on the rocky bottom of the Weeping River. As I have experienced myself, these fish are not only beautiful and very tasty – they also know how to protect their own lives. The Bog Devils fought hard, but they had no chance. Within minutes, the Quonlara had won, gorging themselves on the dead predators.”

As Thystram noted, this hive mind mentality can make the Quonlara follow one of their shoal as long as they feel it is alive. For example, by catching one of them and casting it into a shallow puddle, sometimes the whole shoal can be “encouraged” to jump out of the water to join their comrade. The fact that this tactic does not always function has led scholars like Thystram to the conclusion that a shoal of Quonlara is divided into an unknown number of ranks, with only the higher positions commanding enough respect to be followed virtually everywhere.

Size: 4"-10", 1 lbs.

INT -5 **PER** +2

WIL -4 **CHA** n/a

STR -7 **DEX** +2

CON +1 **SPD** +4

Level: 1-7

Attacks/Damage: Bite: DR 1

Special Abilities: Aquatic
Armor: None
Hit Points: 2

Rachmani

These rather large beetles, which can reach a size of 10-25 inches, are a common nuisance in Werewood. Brown and oval, sporting eight wings, a certain intelligence and a poisonous sting beneath their shells, they live in groups of 20-50 individuals. Their flight is almost completely quiet, making them fine predators who catch up with smaller beasts like the Ulvo, which they poison and bring into their underground nest for nourishment. Usually, the amount of poison one Rachmani can inject is not enough to cause more than a slight dizziness in adventurers, except for those that are very small and/or frail (Muses would be a good example). But when they attack as a group, things look different. The provocation that drives the Rachmani to attack usually stems from the Nandato Moss.

Nandato Moss lactates a sweet liquid when pressed. Most inhabitants of Werewood covet it, but most of all the Rachmani. In fact these beetles are so fond of Nandato, that they build their nests beneath this moss and attack anybody who they believe is trying to take away their precious sweet. Because of this, Dhuna children, Weirdlings and even Banes end up heavily or even deadly poisoned on a regular basis. Generally speaking, any traveller is advised to be extremely cautious when coming close to larger stretches of Nandato, because unless it is Nandato planted and guarded by Boglins or Dhuna, it is quite certain that it is infested by Rachmani.

Size: 10"-25", up to 7 lbs.

INT -10 **PER** +2

WIL -10 **CHA** n/a

STR -8 **DEX** -3

CON 0 **SPD** +2

Level: 1-2

Attacks/Damage: Sting: DR 1, Poison: DR = Level

Special Abilities: None
Armor: None
Hit Points: 3

Ravenger

Opportunistic and able to live underwater, on land and in the air, Ravengers can make their living almost everywhere, therefore they exist in Werewood, too. They can be found in all parts of the region, but never in large numbers; the high number of other, more specialised predators makes life difficult for the Ravenger. According to Anonymus 4, some Dhuna circles regard the sighting of a Ravenger as a lucky sign.

More on the Ravenger can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 281.

Ravir

These thoroughly black species of Avir can be found in all the woodlands of Western Talislanta, but especially in Werewood. It is a most remarkable carrion eater that has a high level of intelligence as well as the uncanny ability to speak Talislan.

Ravir love to follow humanoids, presumably looking for scraps of food behind; but besides that, they seem to have a perverse pleasure in annoying intelligent people by spouting prophecies and portents of the most gloomy sort. Threatening it with force, throwing stones at it, etc., will only temporarily drive away a Ravir; the best way to handle is to ignore it altogether, as the Dhuna do who are regularly plagued by these birds.

As an interesting sidenote, while some Gnorls seem to be fond of having a Ravir or two as pets to give them an aura of gloomy atmosphere, Weirdlings have their own way with dealing with them, by simply killing and eating any Ravir unfortunate to try its luck with them. As for the prophecies they utter, though Thystram believed one of them to

have come true, they usually have no connection to reality.

More on the Ravir, including statistics can be found in Thystram's Collectanea, p. 62.

River Kra

See Kra, River.

Rogenda

The uncountable Stone Circles that dot Witchwood serve as a transit point to an endless number of planes, but they also bring forth other phenomena, among them the Rogenda. These ephemeral creatures, who appear as a whirl of glittering colors, hail either from the Dream Dimension, or, as Ninguarda assumed, they might be "dreams of great importance, dreamt by the great men of our world (such as myself), given substance by the mysterious powers of the Stone Circles."

Whatever their origin is, many Rogenda can be found in Witchwood and Gnorlwood and also sometimes in other parts of Werewood. One of the main reasons for scholars to travel into this area is that they believe that they could learn much from the Rogenda by learning to understand them. So far, though, none have succeeded.

Despite their ephemeral appearance, Rogenda are substantial and can be hunted and killed. Tea made of dead Rogenda is prized by rich insomniacs all over Talislanta, even though it is highly addictive. But Rogenda are not helpless, as their strong telepathic magic is enough to drive away most attackers except those who have a strong will or magical protection.

Size: up to 10 ft. high.

INT +4 **PER** +3

WIL +4 **CHA** n/a

STR -6 **DEX** -2

CON 0 **SPD** +1

Level: 4-11+

Attacks/Damage: None

Special Abilities: Telepathy at Level.

Armor: None

Hit Points: 20

Sammet Tree

See Amittina.

Sago

Sago, also sometimes called Emerald Jellyfish, are small jellyfish who mostly live in the Green Lagoon, but can be found in the Weeping and Sascasm Rivers in smaller numbers as well. Thystram described them as "beautiful emerald creatures, no more than a foot in length", to which Ninguarda added "beautiful they may be, but they also burn like the furnaces of nine hells."

It is from these jellyfish that the Green Lagoon partially derives its name. Living from plankton and the energy of the light of the suns, an uncountable number of Sago form a thick layer of several feet beneath most of the surface of the Lagoon, giving it its eponymous shiny, bright emerald color.

Still, as beautiful as they are to behold, the traveller is not advised to catch or touch the Sago: not only does it lose all its color within minutes after being brought out of the water, its surface is also venomous. Within minutes after contact, the victim starts to lose all control and his body becomes numb, starting from the area touched by the Sago. Without (magical) help death occurs within minutes.

According to Anonymus 4 some Dhuna believe that the Sago cover the Green Lagoon in order to keep something hidden. "Though whether this would be a secret gate, an underground palace, a treasure or even one or more of their forgotten gods (or all of this together) they would not tell me."

Size: 1'.

INT -8 **PER** +1

WIL -5 **CHA** n/a

STR -6 **DEX** +1

CON 0 **SPD** +3

Level: 2-6

Attacks/Damage: Poison: DR 4 per round

Special Abilities: Aquatic

Armor: None

Hit Points: 10

Scarlet Sporozoid

These dangerous mushrooms can be found all over Werewood, but especially in Mushroom Forest. Coloured blood-red, their crimson spores are each deadly devouring organisms. Extreme caution is advised.

More on the Scarlet Sporozoid can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 125.

Scavenger Slime

These huge, single-cell creatures are not only found in their native Sinking Land, but also in the Werewood sections of the Underground Highway and in the marshier parts of Mushroom Forest. Compared to other predators, they are a smaller threat, yet they should not be underestimated.

Unlike their cousins underground or in the Sinking Land, the Scavenger Slime native to Mushroom Forest tends to glow in weird, whirling colours, which scholars attribute to the consumption of Xyphalax; also, they are more aggressive, attacking smaller creatures like the Sheeska or even unwary (usually sleeping) travellers.

More on the Scavenger Slime can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 304.

S'drimogon

S'drimogon hail from the Nightmare Dimension and use rifts and gates to intrude into the Material Plane. Appearing in Talislanta as huge frightening nets of black substance, they are immaterial and can only

be attacked by magic. Many of them enter this plane by the Stone Circles of Witchwood.

S'drimogon are parasitic demons who live of the dreams of their victims. They constantly search for new prey, be they animals, plants or sentinents. It often attacks its victim while it sleeps and then merges with it. Victims merged with S'drimogon are obsessed with sleep, but cannot extract either dreams or rest from it. Unless the S'drimogon is magically expelled, the victim is bound to die slowly over the course of several weeks.

One should never underestimate a S'drimogon; their magic is strong and they dislike being disturbed in their parasitic lifestyle.

Size: 7 ft., immaterial.

INT +4 **PER** +4

WIL +3 **CHA** n/a

STR n/a **DEX** 0

CON +1 **SPD** +2

Level: 7-17

Attacks/Damage: None

Special Abilities: Invocation with two modes at Level, Wizardry with two modes at Level, harmed only by magical weapons and spells.

Armor: None

Hit Points: 32

Sea Dragon

These great aquatic serpentes usually roam the sea; yet, from time to time, travellers claim to have seen them in Werewood, too. Ancient rumor has it that that several of these creatures dwell in the Green Lagoon.

Thystam doubted that this was true, and pointed out the following arguments. "For how," he would ask, "can a Sea Dragon come up all the way from either the Sascasm or the Weeping River? It would have had to be a very young specimen to do so, for neither river is large enough to be comfortable for an adult Sea Dragon. But even if that would have

been the case, the Lagoon is composed of sweet water; how can that suit a monster of the oceans?"

The Phaedran sorcerer Ninguarda, hoping to prove Thystram wrong, travelled around the Green Lagoon several times during his travels, but without sighting anything but the Sago which "blocked my sight and kept me from entering the water." Still, he pointed to the fact that even those predators abundant in Werewood, some of which do not have to fear the Emerald Jellyfish, would still never enter the Lagoon, which means that "something has to be here; perhaps it is no Sea Dragon or at least none of the ocean variety. But whatever is here is huge and dangerous, yet wise enough not to appear while I was there; for I would surely have been its end."

From time to time Cymrillian scholars send out expeditions to prove either the existence or the non-existence of a Sea Dragon in the Green Lagoon. Taking part in these forays is highly coveted, as such expeditions are relatively safe and well-paid.

More on the Sea Dragon can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 228.

Shathane

These relatives of the Werebeasts can be found in the Werewood region, especially in the Valley of Forgetfulness and the western part of Mushroom Forest. Indeed, they are so numerous in the former area that some scholars wonder whether this is the region of their origin. Even though their strength is quite lethal, they seldomly pose a problem unless they are interrupted while eating, irritated by loud noise or find the unwary traveller close to where they hide their young. In these cases, running away as fast as possible might be the best option.

More on the Shathane can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, pp. 210f.

Sheeska

The Sheeska is one of the more common creatures in Werewood and can be found in almost all areas of the region. It is most common in Witchwood and Mushroom Forest. When seen in broad daylight, they appear as 15-30 inches long cylindrical pinkish mammals with small, sharp-clawed extremities, three big black eyes and a huge nose which branches out into several small extremities. With these extra "limbs", they can smear a fluorescent substance on any surface.

Sheeska live in hives constructed in dead trees. They use their claws and teeth to carve tunnels and cavities into the wood, which has to be quite rotten to be suited for this purpose. They use moss to coat the living and sleeping cavities. They also feed on most kinds of moss and, during the night, can be observed carrying moss to their hive. Such a community can grow to several hundred Sheeska living in up to 20 adjacent hive "buildings".

At the centre of each hive is the "Sheeska Emperor", sometimes also called "Moss King" by the Dhuna, an especially bloated and big specimen of its kind; Sheeska are hermaphrodites, and once a new Moss King is established, all others turn into sexless workers. He never moves and instead produces children; in return he is guarded, defended and fed by his Sheeska workers, who also rear the young. Should a Sheeska Emperor die or should a Sheeska community become too large and have to divide (at around 1000 individuals), all Sheeska fight for the leading position by biting or kicking each other in a hilarious way, at least to the observer. Such fights can take days until a new Emperor is found.

Sheeska use their fluorescent colours to communicate with each other as well as to mark all Sheeska of their hive. As has been established by naturalists such as Ninguarda and Thystram, each hive seems to have special markings; an individual from another

hive is either chased away or killed on the spot. Zoologists from Cymril are still quarrelling about how deep their concept of "language" actually is, but it seems they can "say" quite a lot of things. For example, if a Sheeska finds some promising spot of moss in the forest, it will return to its hive and paint the news, along with the best route, on a fellow member of the hive and lead it through the entire nest. Other Sheeska will immediately "read" the message and paint it on each other to tell the tale. This way, enough workers will be on their way in no time.

One might wonder how such fat, sometimes even amusing creatures can survive in Werewood, especially as they run around clearly visible since they glow. The answer is simple: Sheeska are utterly poisonous; eating them will bring fever, cramps, and finally painful death; unfortunately, first symptoms occur only after 1-2 hours, which results in many travellers inadvertent death. Death by having Sheeska for dinner can be easily identified, though, as victims of such a meal glow like the creature which caused their death. Extreme caution is advised.

Size: 15"-30", 20+ lbs.

INT -4 **PER** +2

WIL -7 **CHA** n/a

STR -6 **DEX** +2

CON 0 **SPD** 0

Level: 1-4

Attacks/Damage: Bite: DR 2, Claws: DR 2

Special Abilities: poisonous

Armor: None

Hit Points: 13

Sheeska (False)

The False Sheeska mostly looks like the true Sheeska. They are a bit smaller (10-25 inches), and, more importantly, their noses are big but have no retractable extremities. Also,

their skin is not plain pink but instead glitters in many fluorescent colours. They use mimicry to appear like the true Sheeska for a good reason: They are not venomous and quite delicious, especially when prepared with local Maijno-Onions.

False Sheeska live in groups of 5-20 individuals. They build no hives but instead sleep in cavities provided by nature. Compared to the true Sheeska they are quite dumb creatures and have few defenses apart of their mimicry. To the untrained eye, the difference is hard to tell though, so a traveller is not advised to hunt for them, unless they are very sure of what they are doing.

Size: 10-25 inches, 15+ lbs.

INT -8 **PER** 0

WIL -8 **CHA** n/a

STR -5 **DEX** +1

CON +1 **SPD** +1

Level: 1-4

Attacks/Damage: Bite: DR 1, Claw: DR 1

Special Abilities: None

Armor: None

Hit Points: 11

Sheeska Emperor

See Sheeska.

Skalanx

These aquatic horrors – either of demonoid origin or relative to the sea-scorpion – can be found all along the Sascasm and even the Weeping River, where they hide beneath the surface, attacking smaller vessels or other aquatic lifeforms. Creatures like the Kankryu or the Quonlara prevent them from becoming a common threat in the Werewood section of the Sascasm and the Weeping Rivers, however.

More on the Skalanx can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 181.

Slime Master

See Bophannon.

Sniper-Bug

These wondrous creatures, who arm themselves with small weapons and organize like an army, have raised much interest from scholars. They are encountered mostly in Arim and Zandu, but they can be found in Werewood too, especially in the eastern parts of the region, ambushing and battling smaller creatures like Spinal Shadows with success, using the thorns of the Needleleaf plant as arrows, javelins and lances.

While Sniper-Bugs could never be tamed as completely by the Gnorls as the Caravan Bugs, they are used from time to time by them; something which led the traveller Ninguarda to the conclusion that the two bugs may be related, a long disputed question among scholars ever since. He describes one case in which one Gnorl, Michkaal, "hired" a platoon of Sniper-Bugs with sweet nectar to have them attack the messenger Caravan Bugs of her rival, Laabanbalu:

"Seeing the two groups of Bugs going to battle with each other like great armies, all orderly and with great valor," the sorcerer concluded, "gave me the creeps; for, if even these small creatures can wage war like us, what is the difference between us and them?"

More on the Sniper-Bug can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 153.

Sorcerer Tree

These hybrid trees, probably created in Archean Times to frighten-off superstitious Wild Folk, resemble hooded sorcerers when seen from afar. Rare in the Seven Kingdoms, they are more commonly found in Werewood, especially around the Phaedran Tombs built on the banks of the Sascasm, where they may have been planted by the builders of the tombs. The timber stand is progressively being depleted though, as the wood of these

trees command a high price because of its presumed magical virtues.

More on the Sorcerer Tree can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 122.

Spinal Shadow

A common saying among the Dhuna is "camouflaged like a Spinal Shadow" and indeed there are few predators as well adapted to their surroundings. Living all over Werewood, but especially in Mushroom Forest, they consist of a long branch-like body with twelve thin spiderlike legs, each ending in two sharp forklike claws. Ninguarda thought that they must be of demonic origin, given their cleverness in comparison to their size; this claim, though uncontested, has yet to be proven.

Spinal Shadows live on the bottom side of leaves and mushroom cups, like those of the Amittina or the Minutio. They wait for living creatures to pass beneath their hiding place; once this happens, they drop themselves on their prey, clinging to them with their claws. Then, they wait until the target sleeps or rests. Once this happens, the Spinal Shadow starts moving, searching for the spine of their prey; once it is found, the predator first inserts a secretion that locally anaesthetizes the target. After this, the Spinal Shadow sheds its legs, bores its body into its victim and finally fuses with the spine.

During the following days and weeks, the victim will slowly start to lose control over its body as, more and more, the Spinal Shadow takes over control. In the end, the takeover is complete and the victim can only helplessly experience as its body moves, eats and fights on its own. Spinal Shadows favour chaos and bloodshed over everything: Once it has enough control over their host, it leads it into suicidal situations, until the victim is dead. Then, after having laid its eggs into the carcass, the Spinal Shadow dies too.

Size: 10", 1 lbs.

INT -6 **PER** +2

WIL -8 **CHA** n/a

STR -4 **DEX** +3

CON -1 **SPD** 0

Level: 2-4+

Attacks/Damage: Bite: DR 3, Claw: DR 2

Special Abilities: Stealth 12

Armor: None

Hit Points: 8

Storm Demon

These terrifying demonic creatures are native to the upper reaches of the Demonrealms, but sometimes visit Talislanta via magical gates and rifts. While they are not a common sight in Werewood, they regularly enter it through one of the Stone Circles in Werewood.

The Dhuna, as guardians of the circles, try their best to fight all Storm Demons right when they are crossing into Witchwood. Otherwise, without doubt, they would be a much greater danger to all inhabitants of Werewood.

More on the Storm Demons can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, p. 160.

Stranglevine

This parasitic plant can be found in almost all forests and jungles of Talislanta; it can also be found in all parts of Werewood, except Mushroom Forest. It seems that it needs trees to survive and cannot live on fungi. Attaching itself to other trees, it is usually next to impossible to spot, waiting for small prey it tries to entangle in its tendrils.

Some Stranglevines have attached themselves to two or more trees, forming a net with their tendrils to catch flying Ulvo or Tatratta; Ninguarda claims that it was this model the Boglins learned to catch Ulvo with nets from.

More on the Stranglevine can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, pp. 136f.

Tatratta

The Tatratta is, as Thystram observed, "probably a hybrid of Avir, something like a Tazian Fly and something else we cannot call anything except demonic." Small (5-10 inches), it sports sleek red feathers and a long, almost syringe-like beak. Tatratta live in groups of 10-25 individuals, who build their dwellings in the trunks of Amittina or Minutio. Nocturnal creatures, they rest during the day and go hunting during the night.

This hunt is, of course, for blood, on which the Tatratta sustains itself. The tactic they use to get it is relatively simple: The Tatratta swarm searches for anything alive and containing blood. If they find anything fitting that description, they attack in wild kamikaze style, without any sense for strategy or even self-preservation. Their sharp beaks are sufficient to penetrate anything but thick armor. They virtually mill their way through the body and to the blood.

Being attacked by Tatratta is, if successful, deadly. One of these bloodsuckers can drink up to half a litre of blood and a swarm of them is usually more than enough to drink most creatures dry. Also, the attack itself can result in deep wounds or even the loss of eyes. Fortunately, the Tatratta have a sharp attack, but almost no defense. The tactic of the Tatratta is particularly deadly if a target is attacked while sleeping.

Thystram was once attacked by Tatratta. "I heard the high tones that these pests make when they attack. I waited until it was loud enough, then I quickly rolled over to the side. The sound of a dozen or more bloodsucking birds boring themselves into the soil was more than interesting."

Size: 5"-10", up to 10 lbs.

INT -6 **PER** +3

WIL -4 **CHA** n/a

STR 0 **DEX** +3

CON +1 **SPD** +5

Level: 3-8

Attacks/Damage: Beak: DR 6 Special

Abilities: Night vision

Armor: None

Hit Points: 16

Tundra Beast

Usually the vicious Tundra Beasts can be found in the frozen plains and coniferous forests of northern Talislanta, but from time to time they can be encountered along the northern rim of Werewood, too. Two-headed, up to four feet tall at their shoulders and weighing around 200 pounds, they are justly feared as one of the worst predators that can be encountered in this region; even Banes and other fierce creatures would think twice before confronting them.

More on the Tundra Beast including statistics can be found in Thystram's Collectanea, p. 81.

Ulvo

The Ulvo is a small, hedgehog-like creature, that can be commonly found in all Werewood. At a size of only 10-20 inches, it is a rather peaceful, solitary omnivore; its round torso is covered with elastic, rather soft scales of greenish colour. It has four small, clawed feet and a small head with huge black eyes and a big snout. It is a creature which lives mostly of mushrooms like the Xyphalax or the carcasses of other animals. It has soft, tasty flesh, making it popular as a dish to all meat-lovers in the region.

Unfortunately, catching an Ulvo is as difficult as its meat is prized; not only is it a nocturnal creature which hides in caves under the roots or in the trunks of trees like those of the Withergall during the day: Upon sensing danger, it rolls itself up into a ball and throws itself against the trunk of the nearest tree or fungus. The soft, elastic structure of its scales allows the Ulvo to bounce like a rubber ball, using the thick vegetation of Werewood to hurl itself from trunk to trunk until it has

reached a place of safety. While it tries to get away from danger, it cannot control its course; therefore, it is not unusual for an Ulvo to hit something other than a trunk – a traveller, perhaps, or, quite often, a Dobonda, which would mean the end of the little creature.

The Boglins have developed a means to catch Ulvo by using nets, but, even more than catching the Ulvo for food, they love to play all sorts of games with it, usually sports which involve throwing Ulvo at each other. For this purpose they have even started to breed them, though it has to be admitted that the quality of the meat is far lower with the domesticated Ulvo than with its wild brethren.

Size: 10"-20", around 8 lbs.

INT -6 **PER** +2

WIL -5 **CHA** n/a

STR -3 **DEX** +1

CON +2 **SPD** +1

Level: 1-6X

Attacks/Damage: None

Special Abilities: Night vision

Armor: Scales PR 1

Hit Points: 12

Werebeast

A native to Werewood, Arim and Zandu, this ferocious carnivore is a common threat to all travellers to Werewood. Dormant during the day, it comes forth at night to hunt in packs of three to seven members.

The Dhuna are renowned as strong-willed hunters of Werebeasts; Some claim that this is because they consider them to be descendants of enemies of their gods. Others state that long ago a pack of Werebeasts had killed several Dhuna children, which prompted the Witches to declare war on them. Whatever the case may be, Werebeasts are relatively rare in Witchwood and Gnorlwood.

More on the Werebeasts can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, pp. 169f.

Whitewood

Endemic to the hills of Gnorlwood and Witchwood, this ivory-colored coniferous tree is prized for its beauty, but even more for its durability and rich texture. Also, it is very resistant against parasites, so that it seems to be a flawless pearl among the Xyphalax-infested vegetation of the region. These sleek and beautiful trees were once common in most mountainous and hilly forests, but the high demand for its wood among carvers all over Talislanta (and collectors who want to own items or decoration made of it) have made them rare in other regions, which is somewhat intensified by the slow growth of Whitewood, making the stock in south-eastern Werewood one of the largest. The Dhuna (as well as the Ariane) commonly use it for making bows and staffs.

Theoretically one could make quite a lot of money by exporting Whitewood, but Dhuna and Boglins dislike such actions in their territories.

More on the Whitewood can be found in the Cyclopedia Talislanta, p. 75.

Withergall, common

The (common) Withergall is one of the most common trees in Werewood. A variety of the Gall Oak (see above), it is tall and gnarled, grows as high as 40 feet and can be found all over the region, but especially in places close to clear water. It is most peculiar in its bizarre shape, already withered and eerie as a sapling. With its many forked branches and small as well as deep caves in its trunk, it is ideal for nests of creatures such as Ulvo or Avir. In Werewood, where parasites like the Xyphalax can be found along the roots and trunks of the Withergall, too, this bizarreness is stressed by such glowing fungi.

Both Ninguarda and Thystram pointed out that in areas of Werewood where finding drinkable water is a problem, like in the Valley of Forgetfulness, the Mushroom Forest or parts of Witchwood and Gnorlwood,

burrowing at the roots of a Withergall can bring forth the desired liquid.

Apart of this use and its distinguishing look, the Withergall has no other features. The Mang, the Mobile and the Rare Withergall are often mistaken for the Withergall.

More on the common Withergall can be found in the Cyclopedia Talislanta, p. 75.

Withergall, Mobile

The Mobile Withergall is not a stationary plant. Like the Mang, with whom it shares the similarity to the common Withergall, it is not immobile, but can even move from place to place, albeit very slowly. Very uncommon in this respect for a denizen of Werewood, it is mostly vegetarian, living of all kind of plants and fungi it devours via openings it has on its rear end. Unlike the Mang, it has no facial features or armlike structures; therefore, as long as it isn't moving, one has a hard time to distinguish it from the common Withergall, except for the lack of Xyphalax or other parasites.

The Boglins call the Mobile Withergall "the Nameless Plant"; they dispose of their dead by leaving them close to such trees, which then devour the bodies. The Dhuna do something similar with Necrophages and other transdimensional abominations they kill. Therefore the Mobile Withergall is most prevalent in Witchwood and Gnorlwood.

To the average traveller the Mobile Withergall usually poses no problem, unless they sleep far too long and deep or they are bound and left behind by a third party, something which certain Aamanians do with the rare Dhuna they catch.

Size: 10 ft.

SPD -8

All other Attributes negligible

Level: 2-7

Attacks/Damage: None

Special Abilities: None

Armor: Bark, PR 3

Hit Points: 35

Withergall, rare

The so-called rare Withergall, also called Minora by the inhabitants of Werewood, looks like a small sapling of the normal or common Withergall. Measuring only up to one foot in height, it is one of the rarest plants in Werewood and can be found only in remote areas of Witchwood and Gnorlwood. Its mimicry of the common Withergall is so perfect that it can only be distinguished from it by long observation or by the shape of its roots, which are barbed.

In fact, these barbed roots are the reason why the rare Withergall is in such demand all over Talislanta, as it is an important ingredient for an ointment against pimples. Even though since the downfall of the Quan Empire the price of rare Withergall roots has fallen considerably, it is still high enough that the roots of two or three rare Withergalls are enough to finance even large expeditions into Werewood.

Interestingly enough, the Gnorls never use the roots, but pick the leaves of the plant to prepare a very bitter decoction they drink on a daily basis if possible and which they will sell only to the Dhuna if at all. Ninguarda, who had the chance to taste it after coming down with an infection of Scarlet Sporozoids, called the sensation "most interesting".

"This bitter medicine", he writes "burned down my throat, killing off the Sporozoids in an instant, but also giving my skin deep wrinkles and my voice a deep, cracking tone for many days. I have no doubt that the Boglins, who take this brew almost daily, remain healthy and unendangered by most vegetable dangers. But it really made me wonder how they would sound and what they would look like if they wouldn't take it so often. The Weirdlings as far as I could perceive it, get this medicine from the Gnorls in exchange for security and other things I don't know about, but only use it in times of real necessity."

Xyphalax

The Xyphalax is the most common fungus in Werewood. Small (1-3 inches in size) and slightly fluorescent, it is one of the few inhabitants modest enough to be able to sustain itself from just the soil or from the roots, trunks or branches of other plants and fungi like the Amittina, Dobonda or Zyzstantha, the preferred locations of the Xyphalax. Usually this is not lethal for the host, even when hundreds or thousands settle on the same tree; it seems that the little mushrooms have a feeling for balance, which is why they appear as symbols in many Dhuna stories.

The glow of the Xyphalax is the main source of light at the bottom level of the forest, and the many hues of the Xyphalax (mainly pink, green, yellow and red) seem to serve local Dhuna, Weirdlings or Gnorls as a help for orientation, though so far nobody has found out in which way (Thystram noted that reddish tones are more common in the east and greenish tones in the west, while yellow and orange hues are most common in the middle of Werewood, but this seems to be a guideline only), as all natives seem to be keen on keeping this secret.

Even though they do not taste well, most varieties of Xyphalax are edible and are eaten by all inhabitants of Werewood when needed. One sub-species, the Omphalos, is usually shunned by most creatures except the Kron, though, as its consumption makes the skin, fur or feathers glow in the dark. As this effect wanes after some days, they have recently become popular among some Zandirans looking for extraordinary skin coloration.

Travellers are not advised to try them without knowledge of proper preparation, as sometimes, when the mushroom is eaten shortly before delivering its spores, it can infect the eater from inside and, while not killing him, becomes an especially annoying nuisance.

Yaksha

These fierce cousins of the Werebeasts are a common bane in Yrmania and the Northern Reaches, but their maniacal cries can also be heard in the north-eastern regions of Werewood. The wild, dense forestlands suits some of them well, because their tactic of attacking by jumping from their hiding place can be easily done here, as places to hide in can be found almost everywhere. On the other hand, Werewood has a far too high density of lethal flora and fauna to allow many of the somewhat dumb and therefore unflexible Yaksha to survive here, so encounters with them are thankfully relatively rare.

More on the Yaksha can be found in the Talislanta Rulebook, page 175.

Zyzstantha

The Zyzstantha is a large species of fungus which is very common in Mushroom Forest, but which can also be found in smaller numbers in Gnorlwood and Witchwood. The trunk of the Zyzstantha can measure up to 10 feet (with a diameter of 4-6 feet), supporting a cap of 12 or more feet, which usually hangs down to cover much of the trunk. The color of the trunk is usually reddish with a brown cap; while it is not fluorescent by itself, it is often infested by colonies of Xyphalax.

Among the native life of Werewood, the Zyzstantha is an exception, because it only lives off of the soil and does not depend on hunting other life like so many other lifeforms in this part of Talislanta. It achieves this by having extremely long, connected roots (Thystram hypothesised that perhaps all Zyzstantha were just one fungus, as it never seems to send out spores), in some cases demonstrably reaching as far as the Green Lagoon or even the Sascasm and Weeping Rivers. While the visible mushroom seems impressive, it is but little more than a prop, as it is hollow with the wall being no more than 8-10 inches thick.

The Zyzstantha is practically inedible; small amounts of it sometimes serve as a hypnotic for the Dhuna, the Weirdlings and those creatures and travellers curious or mad enough to try.

Chapter 6: The “Secret” Secrets.

During my travels through Werewood, I encountered many novel concepts and saw many rites and things new to me. While of course none of them could match my own, the Phaedran culture, which is paramount and unreachable in Talislanta, I always found them worthy of study.

For, how can we understand our uniqueness, if we cannot compare ourselves to others? How can we be unique, without referring to alternatives? It is the other that makes us unique and only by learning about it, can we be sure about that.

- Ninguarda

This chapter is an omnium gatherum of tables, rules and tips a gamemaster might need when running an adventure or a campaign in Werewood. If you are not a gamemaster, you should better not read further; well, of course there is nothing we can do if you do, but it would definitely spoil your fun as a player...

Well, you have been warned.

Please note that this is not a general introduction on running adventures; rather, it provides more background on running adventures in Werewood.

On Creating a Werewood Mood

Assume for a moment that you have invited your friends for a session of Talislanta. You’ve prepared everything, bought some snacks... then your friends come and after some chatting you start your adventure. You’ve just bought that new module for Talislanta called Werewood, and you have come up with the greatest Werewood adventure of all time. You wrote up all the statistics, you prepared for everything.... yet, somehow, your friends just don't come along. You wanted to do this dark, evil adventure, but they just keep laughing and joking... sure, everybody had fun, but somehow you feel

sorry that the evening just had not been what you wanted it to be...

The problem can be summed up in one word: Mood. Personally I think the mood of a roleplaying session can be as important as the adventure itself. You can make up the greatest, darkest horror-adventure of all time, but it won't function, if, say, one of your friends insists on wearing a Santa Cap (don't laugh, this actually did happen to me once).

Of course you cannot control the mood of an evening all by yourself and if one or more of your friends just “can't get into the mood”, all I say here will be useless. Still, there are some things you can do to influence the general atmosphere. In the case of Werewood, usually a mood of mystery and darkness (both figurally and literally) will predominate. How can this be achieved?

Illumination: Werewood is usually cast in twilight, so you should be too. For example, use only one small lamp for yourself and have the rest of the group sit in the dark. Or use colored lightbulbs (green would be best, or try a combination of green, blue and red). Or buy some of those neon starshaped stickers that are used to decorate the ceiling of children's bedrooms. Cut off the points so that only a roughly circular glowing “blob” is left. Decorate the room, prepare a flashlight you can use for rolling the dice and cut out all other light sources. The result – darkness with eerie lights – could be quite similar to

Werewood. Of course this last choice requires a lot of preparation, not the least being that you need to memorize your adventure so well that you don't need to check your notes constantly.

Food: Of course this is only manageable if you as the gamemaster prepare the snacks or if you have influence on your players as to what food they should bring with them. In the case of Werewood, forgo crisps, as the crunching can be quite distracting and if you choose weaker illumination, it can be quite messy to clean up the room afterwards. Instead, rather choose soft, larger food. Cake is fine, or how about something with mushrooms?

Music: This is one of the most important factors to me. Even though it is only in the background, the right music can subconsciously influence the mood of an adventure greatly. If you want to play a funny adventure, play light music, and if you want to go for an action-packed evening, bring in some appropriate music (in this case soundtracks of movies are often particularly useful, as long as they don't start your group off into a discussion on those movies).

For Werewood, dark music serves best (see sidebar). Remember to choose the music for the adventure, not for what you would like to hear generally. And in the case of soundtracks, choose it without consideration of the movie in question. It is surprising how often mediocre films feature fine music for roleplaying use.

Adventure Seeds

Of course, there are many adventures that can be done in the Werewood setting. Remember, the bottom line is not this book, but your imagination and the imagination of your players. You create the adventure together, and as long as you don't run out of ideas, you could spend weeks or months gaming in Werewood. Thus, the ideas presented here are nothing but some points to start from. Use them, or make up your own, just as you like.

The Classics

We have to face it, most stories and adventures follow a basic structure: Do x and y to achieve z. Well, there is nothing bad to that, quite on the contrary, as it is not so much the principle but the execution that makes the difference between a good and a bad adventure.

The Treasure Hunt: This scenario can take place in almost any part of Werewood. The concept is simple. Either on commission for a third party (a Sindaran collector, a Cymrillian mage, a Farad Merchant), or on their own (to find a cure for a sickness/curse, to acquire riches/old artifacts/spellbooks), the party enters the Forest; most of these expeditions probably lead to the Phaedran tombs along the Sascasm, or to Mushroom Forest for a rare fungus, or to other parts of Werewood for herbs. The dangers in such an adventure usually stem from the desired object itself (either it is dangerous in its own right, or it is secured by traps, spells or guards), the predators of the area (Banes, Dobonda, etc.), from Werewoods inhabitants (Boglines and Dhuna) or from another party of adventurers (either hired by some opposition of your characters client or because they seek the target themselves or because they were hired by your own groups employer, who may consider your group too expensive/greedy/curious).

The Secret: The difference between the secret and the treasure hunt lies mainly in the resolution. While the latter, in its classical form, mainly requires the arts of fighting and using force, this kind of adventure requires skill and intelligence. Again either on assignment or for themselves, the party tries to unravel a secret (like a spell, a secret that could bring down an influential enemy of the party or their employer), which could involve seeking advice from the inhabitants of Werewood (mainly the Gnorls and the Dhuna, but some secrets might require contacting the Weirdlings, or even Banes or Fiends. The

value of information gathered from the latter – if gathered at all – should be slim at best, though). Other secrets would require studying remnants found in the Phaedran Tombs, the Ruins of the Dread Forest or the Stone Circles of Witchwood. Often, but not always (for example if the Dhuna are involved), the share of fighting in these adventures should never exceed the part the solving of puzzles or the (comparatively peaceful) interaction with other beings requires.

Some Personal Recommendations

This book gives you the bones and meat for creating Werewood in your Talislanta campaign. But the rest of the work is yours. It is you, who, during your adventures, will really travel through Werewood in your imagination. Some additional research can help to enrich this experience.

During my work on this volume, I consulted several books on forests and jungles. The usual field guide to your local forest, to plants, trees or fungi should serve you well for inspiration. Remember that the difference between normal and dark, normal and scary or normal and dangerous can be very subtle. You could read about, say, an oak, a common oak, and, by adjusting just some details, you could make it something that might scare the hell out of your players in your campaign.

I highly recommend the book *Jungles*, edited by Edward S. Ayensu. Of course Werewood is no jungle, but a forest, but its special features, especially the high level of humidity in my opinion moves it closer to jungles than to forests in some ways.

Of course, many texts by renowned Fantasy writers can serve as inspiration, too. There are impressive descriptions of dangerous forests in many of them. Personally, I can recommend the descriptions given in Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth* and Michael Moorcocks *The Bane of the Black Sword* (the forest of Troos served as an inspiration for my vision of Werewood) or *The Dreamthief's Daughter* (the described world of Mu-Ooria is not a forest but an eerie system of underground tunnels, but the mood is pretty similar to how I imagine Werewood). Also, the forest described in Sheri S. Teppers novel *After Long Silence* can show how relatively easy it is to create a forest that is both beautiful and dangerous. For Witchwood and Gnorlwood, this might be a good starting point.

An important element for creating mood is music; the style is secondary in this context. If you like classical music, use it. And if you prefer rock, pop or techno, that's fine, too. I personally recommend dark, unsettling music. For classical music, try Shostakovich, Rachmaninov, Stravinsky or any other 20th Century composer. To many people, this should usually prove to be unsettling enough. For those of you who have less avantgardistic tastes (as I usually do), try something like some of my favorites, the Requiems by Mozart or Brahms.

I also like to use the music of the Finnish combo *Apocalyptica*. Or try some *Halloween*. Or the soundtrack of *Conan the Barbarian*. I have also used mixed sound effects (there are countless CDs with sound effects for radio dramas in the shops, or you can search the internet): birds songs, death cries, heavy breathing come together to form a background sound of its own kind. This takes some time, but perhaps it is the most effective of all.

Guardians: A variation of the kind of adventures presented above would be for the party to serve as guardians for an expedition into Werewood. If the employer is rather incompetent (a Cymrillian mage who has never left his city before, a group of Zandirans seeking a thrill, a Yitek tomb robber, who would like to give the Phaedran Tombs a try, but has never been to a forest before), it is up to the adventurers to do both the adventure and to please their employer. But even if the guarded persons are powerful and rather capable, the difficulties for the adventure group can be high, for instance because a strong-minded employer could choose a course of action that is far too dangerous; or there is danger from another party, or it was planned from the beginning to use the adventurers as bait, cannon fodder or even as sacrifices.

This kind of adventure is fine for beginning gamemasters, by the way, as the addition of one or more NPCs into the group gives the possibility of exerting greater influence on the group. It is advisable however not to let this influence overpower the player characters, as this might spoil the fun for your players.

The Unusual

Unusual adventures in my opinion involve a higher degree of preparation for both the gamemaster and the players and also a higher mutual trust than usual. Such adventures require more diligence and more concentration than usual ones. They include:

Diplomacy: Similar to the search for secrets described above, adventures concerning diplomacy do not require the party to find out one thing or even a set number of things, but rather indulge in a network of secrets and persons to interact with. For Werewood, add the rather xenophobic attitudes of Boglins and Dhuna, which make any diplomatic missions awkward at best.

Usually such an adventure would involve the adventurers being engaged by an

employer (mages, merchants, politicians, rebels...), who might be honest or obscuring their motives (for example, the employer could really be working for Aaman, trying to find out about the locations of Dhuna Covens); whatever the case may be on the side of the employer, he or she sends the adventurers to contact one or more groups of inhabitants of Werewood (such as Boglins or Covens of the Dhuna), to gain secrets of higher value or to strike a diplomatic deal. After finding the desired group (more often than not an adventure in itself), the players have to negotiate with many people, trying to gain the desired result. Clearly, such adventures will be rare in Werewood, but they might be most interesting.

Magical Research: This kind of adventure, concerning Werewood, would mainly be about research into other spheres and planes. The Stone Circles and Dolmen of Witchwood (and smaller numbers of them in Gnorlwood and Mushroom Forest) offer great possibilities for any mage to reach other planes of existence or to find out pieces of information important for their research. Such magical places might also be found in the ruins of the Dread Forest and in Mordante's Deep.

The dangers for such adventures include the common threats of Werewood, but in addition to that, the length of time such research can take and the meddling with other worlds add more twists. Gamemasters who own the *Midnight Realm* sourcebook should feel free to give the adventurers a taste of it this way; they should remember to provide a way of survival for the adventurers, however.

Also keep in mind that the additional preparation of other worlds and magic can be tough; be sure you don't invent anything that would make the adventurers too powerful (unless this is what you want to do).

Support Your Local Mushroom: Usually, once a treasure or herb is found, the adventure is (nearly) over; the return to their "base of

operations" (in the case of Werewood usually Zandu) and collecting their just reward is handled rather briefly. But, couldn't the journey back become even harder and longer than the adventure centered on acquiring the desired treasure? Suppose the group is employed to bring a certain mushroom from Werewood to, say, Cymril. Alive. After some adventuring, they manage to find it, but while digging it out, they discover it has a huge set of roots. Digging all of them out (remember the employer wants it alive and whole) takes some days. And not only does the mushroom have to be taken along, a lot of earth as well, so the fungus can survive. Then, a new means of transportation has to be built by the adventurers, as the jar they brought along is too small. After some crude chest has been constructed (which can be a challenge for some adventurers), how does one bring it safely out of Werewood? The Mushroom in question is delicate, the crate it is in is heavy, there are no roads in Werewood but many dangers are... what if the group is attacked suddenly? They not only have to defend themselves but also look after the precious mushroom. What if suddenly, the fungus becomes ill? Any Botanomancer at hand (perhaps not)? It might turn out that caring for one demanding fungus might be a heavier duty to endure than fighting with Banes...

The Extraordinary

Such adventures not only demand a greater preparation from both Gamemaster and Players, but also making up characters especially for the adventure. When I have run such adventures, I found it most suitable to have a secondary gamemaster, in order to run and create secondary or even tertiary plots and give each player a high rate of attention. Often such adventures turn out to be of epical proportions; therefore it is advisable to first decide with the players whether they want to have it, before investing huge amounts of time and thought for something your players didn't ever desired at all. Three ideas:

The Mission of the Quan: Years have passed since the strong, ruthless Kang took over the once mighty Quan empire. Nothing has been the same ever since. Where the Quan once ruled like gods, they are now little more than slave pets to the Kang, dwelling miserably in the rotting remnants of their formerly golden city. They dream of their glorious past, but lack the energy to renew it in the future. The players take on the role of a group of these Quan, who, unlike their brethren, have a hope: they vaguely remember stories of people in the far west, called "Gnorls," who are said to know all secrets. Perhaps they know the secret of how the Quan can become triumphant again? Fed by this hope, they try to flee the golden city and attempt to travel to Gnorlwood.

This adventure could either be relatively short, with the Quan never managing to escape their city, or it can become a huge campaign, describing the travels of these hapless beings to Werewood. It can either be a story of hope in bleak times, or it can become a desperate, dark tale, where one of the Quan at best reaches the Gnorls, only to learn that there are no more secrets concerning them. The Quan, he may learn, have fallen, and, whatever they do, they will never be able to come back again. If prepared with enough care and determination by both gamemaster and players (who may have to play multiple and/or successive characters due to the probable mortality rate), this could prove to become one of the most impressive Talislanta-Adventures for you.

Going to the Little War: Imagine the Players are heroes of a far different kind: Caravan Bugs. They and their tribe has lived with the same Gnorl for generations, but now everything has become difficult, as another, new Gnorl has become a dangerous enemy of their mistress, using her bugs to harm the business of the hand which feeds the group. After some short and fruitless discussions

with the other Caravan Bugs, the players decide to go to war...

This scenario (which could incorporate tactics such as guerilla warfare or espionage) might become rather light-hearted, but I can also imagine it becoming dark. Gamemasters with a wicked sense of humour (and players who can take it) could also incorporate the usual characters of their group, for example as targets the Caravan Bugs are trying to spy on.

Settling down in Witchwood: In this adventure set at the end of the Cult Wars, the Players take the parts of the leaders of a Dhuna coven, who, fleeing the falling Phaedran Empire and the Orthodoxists, enter Werewood in order to find refuge. Emphasize the panic and helplessness the Dhuna must have felt when coming from their civilisation to this foreign, dangerous area.

This adventure could include the battles of the Coven against the native life of Werewood, their meeting with the Boglins and, finally, their finding of the Stone Circles. It could end with deciphering the secret of their Circle and settling down. The main theme of this adventure could be hope, even in the darkest hour.

Chapter 7: All the stuff you need...

Judging a Secret

The following system can be used to estimate the value of a secret. Please remember that it is only a rough guide for the sake of giving gamemasters and players a way to conveniently calculate the "exact" amount of gold lumen a secret would cost or bring when sold for money. When a secret is traded for another (or several others), refer to the same column for both sides - either column is fine for this purpose. It is recommended that it is only used when it seems convenient, most of the time it seems to be better for the gamemaster to establish the value of a secret freely. Gnorls enjoy witty conversation and beautiful things more than mere money. Also mark that this list is surely not exhaustive.

To calculate the costs, please calculate one point after another. Subtractions of percentages are always taken from the subtotal, not the accumulated total.



Step 1:

	When Buying	When Selling
Number of persons involved in the secret	20 gl. per person	10 gl. per person
Non-person related secret	20-200 gl.	10-100 gl.

Usually, only the number of important figures is counted. In the case of, say, a love-affair, two persons are counted if both are seen as somewhat important by the Gnorls (for instance two unmarried patricians), one if only one participant is of importance (an unmarried prince involved with a maidservant); consequently, four would be counted if both sides are married and all are of status, or three if one side is single (extramarital affair between a married nobleman and a patrician), or two if it is an extramarital affair of one partner with a servant or the like.

Sometimes, no persons are involved in a secret, like when the secret concerns the functioning of an ancient artifact, or the way inanimated nature is working. Depending on the importance of the secret, its price could rise well beyond any figure given here, especially when it is about the Metaphysics of Talislanta. As a rule by the thumb make anything too far-reaching (like "*Who created Talislanta?*") too expensive to afford.

Step 2:

Status of Main Target	When Buying	When Selling
Low (of low importance/Peasant)	2-5 gl.	1-3 gl.
Middle (of local importance/Citizen)	5-15 gl.	3-9 gl.
High (of regional importance/Nobleman)	15-30 gl.	9-18 gl.
Very High (of national importance/King)	30-300 gl.	18-100 gl.

Of course these are only guidelines. Here, Gnorls raise the price not according to the riches of a client, but by judging how useful the secret would be to him or her. Thus a Prince seeking a secret about a villager would pay only around 3 gold lumen if it holds no real interest for him, but if he needs the secret to force a peasant to submit his daughter to him, it might be rated as “national importance” by the Gnorl in question, charging up to 300 gold lumen.

Step 3:

Kind of Secret	When Buying	When Selling
General (<i>"How is the mood in Zandu this year?"</i>)	10-15 gl.	1-5 gl.
Special (<i>"Who is Ninguarda's secret partner?"</i>)	15-50 gl.	5-20 gl.
Political (<i>"How will the senator vote for X?"</i>)	30-70 gl.	10-35 gl.
Personal (<i>"Who is the lover of Mingio?"</i>)	50-100 gl.	20-75 gl.
Military (<i>"How many troops are in X?"</i>)	Number of Men +100	Number of Men +20

What kind a secret is, is again determined mainly by what means it will be used for. Mark that, apart from military secrets, the guideline is that the more intimate a secret is, the more expensive it becomes.

Step 4:

Topicality of Secret	When Buying	When Selling
Almost out of date	Cost -50%	Cost -70%
Current	Cost -20%	Cost -40%
New	Cost -10%	Cost -30%
Brand-new	Normal Cost	Cost -20%

The topicality is of course determined by usefulness, not age. A secret passed from Gnorl to Gnorl for generations can be considered brand-new if it suddenly becomes important for the current situation, for example when details of an ancient, unrobbed tomb are asked for.

Step 5:

Renownedness of Secret	When Buying	When Selling
Rather Well-known	Cost -50%	Cost -90%
Rather Unknown	Cost -30%	Cost -70%
Mostly Unknown	Cost 0%	Cost -40%
Almost Totally Unknown	Cost +30%	Cost -90%
Unknown Except by the Gnorl	Cost +50%	Cost -90%

Usually all but the young, inexperienced, or desperate Gnorls would never consider selling a secret which is not at least “mostly unknown.” Especially prolific Gnorls are famed for dealing exclusively with secrets only they know.

Step 6:

	When Buying	When Selling
More than one Gnorl knows the secret	+ (number x 5)%	- (number x 7)%

Often, especially in the case of secrets of huge value, more than one Gnorl “owns” it. Much like a stock corporation in our world, each of the Gnorls in question can own shares of the secret, which can differ in percentage from shareholder to shareholder. As more than one Gnorl is testifying for the truthfulness of the secret, this invariably raises the price, while the price for Gnorls to acquire part of the secret lowers considerably, as the competition wanes accordingly.

The Forgotten Gods

Ancient, mighty, powerful... and only properly remembered by the Dhuna, the Forgotten Gods are virtually unknown outside Witchwood, though their names (often in obscured form) sometimes appear in Fairy Tales and other old stories. Also, it may be that these Gods are recorded in the files of the Orthodoxy of Aaman, though Aamanian priests would deny that.

From the few things outside scholars know, the Forgotten Gods form a pantheon living "beyond the nebula of time, across the ocean of worries and the sea of sorrows." Even though they can be roughly divided into white, grey and black gods (corresponding to the Orders of the Dhuna), there are mainly two groups of gods: The Forgotten Gods and the Demiurg. This Demiurg is identified by the Dhuna with Aa, the god of Aaman. This belief of course lies at the core of all battles between Dhuna and Aamanians.

The Forgotten Gods command no idol worship of the Dhuna, nor do the Dhuna erect temples or altars in their honour or even call their names; instead, they are revered in silent prayers and hinted at by gestures. Some of them were reported by Ninguarda and Thystram, but neither of them could ever find out the corresponding names. It is thus rather improbable any non-Dhuna would know them.

Please note that apart from the gods given here, an unknown number of other deities exists; but it is safe to say that these are the most revered. Also note that while the White Gods are usually followed by members of the White Order, Grey Gods by those of the Grey Order and so on, this is by no means a definite fixation. Dhuna believe in a Pantheon of all Forgotten Gods, always praying to the appropriate gods and goddesses.

White Gods

These gods value learning and watching over solving problems by force. Their followers mainly form the White Order of the Dhuna.

Badanda is the god of Bounty, of plentiness of food and of health. He is perhaps the most popular god among the Dhuna as survival and security are at the heart of their daily worries. As such the gesture for Badanda is the best reported. It is performed by putting both hands upon the heart.

Mad'rano is the goddess of self-control, calmness and insight. Even though she is among the White Gods, she enjoys particular reverence by Dhuna Protectors of all Orders. Even members of the Black order, while disappointed by Mad'ranos lack of forcefulness, respect her for her ethics, which are suitable to the Dhuna warriors. This goddess has no gesture; instead her followers can be discerned by their attitude.

Sansus commands time and age. She is the goddess of Good Death as well as the ruler over the Old and the Young. Thus both children and old Dhuna wear amulets of Sansus, usually complexely woven pendants worn around the ankles. Her gesture is performed by covering both ears.

Grey Gods

These gods, whose followers form the Grey Order, prefer clever handling of problems and outwitting their opponents over either watching or using force. Generally they value those Dhuna who try to strike a Balance.

Canioros is the ruler of magic. It was he who, according to Dhuna lore, taught them how to decipher the runes inscribed on the Dolmen and Stone Circles. He is especially revered by the Dhuna Listeners, who owe him their

skills. His gesture is performed by reaching out with both arms, the palms facing upwards.

Yambda is the goddess of justice. Unlike other civilisations, who see justice as something definitely true and “white”, for the Dhuna justice is grey; for, as they would say, there is no justice for anyone without injustice to someone else. Thus, when you seek it, you must be prepared to face the consequences. The gesture for Yambda is performed by putting the left hand on the left hip and the right hand to the heart.

Zazaano is the wayfinder and the wife of Canioros. The Dhuna think that this is the goddess who led them into Werewood and Witchwood. Zazaano is usually not revered as a main goddess by a group of Dhuna, but it is typical for them to pray to her before doing any traveling, seeking her blessing to find the right way. Her gesture is performed by pointing towards the earth with the left index finger, while pointing forward with the right one.



Black Gods

Revered mainly by the Black Order of the Dhuna, these gods prefer revenge and force over being too subtle. They don't encourage a stupid use of force, though. Clever use of all resources could best describe the ethical approach of these gods.

Draman is the god of solitary survival. Egocentric and reckless, he is followed by loners among the Dhuna or witches at war or those pursuing a personal vendetta. Even among the Forgotten Gods he is rather unknown and seldomly revered. The gesture used to refer to Draman is performed by pulling apart the corners of the mouth with the little fingers; while those few foreigners who saw this gesture may have thought that the resulting grimace is funny, it is not recommended to laugh.

Kin'go is by far the most popular goddess among the Black Order. She is the wife of Draman and stands for defense by all means necessary. She is respected and revered by all Dhuna who often pray to her together, as she is the goddess watching over the covens. Her gesture is performed by forming a circle over the head with both hands.

Tin'shiana rules over the aspects of blood, war and revenge, but also of erotic love. She delights in pain and desperation. While she is thus often called for in times of war or blood vengeance, she is otherwise shunned even by members of the Black Order. Those Dhuna obsessed with force and bloodshed are sometimes called the “Children of (Tin'shiana).” The gesture of Tin'shiana is made by beating both hands as fists first to the heart and then to the buttocks.

New Equipment

Of course in a setting as unique as Werewood, almost all objects found there are of local origin and decor. Neither Boglins nor Dhuna have any extensive trading connections, so that only few things from foreign countries ever cross the borders.

Still, apart from the usual things, there are some items only found in this region. The list given here is far from complete. Please feel free to expand it as you like.

Bane Fang

The fangs of Banes are a much sought-after ingredient for quite a number of rituals and magical brews. Cymrillian mages claim that digesting a pulverized fang can give energy to even the most tired man and that it also serves an aphrodisiac. One fang can command a price of up to 60 gold lumen.

Dhuna Bow

Made of Whitewood, these ivory-colored longbows combine elegant design with deadliness. Due to the high humidity, they can endure only a few years of use inside Werewood, gradually losing their elasticity and thus their usefulness; thus, there are quite a number of bowmakers among the witches. It is rare to find a Dhuna Bow outside Werewood, thus the stories told about them by far exceed the reality. Still they are better than the usual longbow. Dhuna warriors usually have two of these bows, one left in its ivory colour for (ritual) use at home and one dyed to take a darker color for use in the twilight of the forest.

Dhuna Bow, DR 7, WT 6, STR 0, 50 g.l., 300'.

Dhuna Staff

While the Dhuna usually use bows to deal with intruders, they also employ these staffs made of Whitewood. Ornately carved and usually featuring a larger knob at one end, the

witches use them to deadly effect even in the problematic narrow space of the forest. Due to the knob, a Dhuna staff is swung not in its middle, but higher up, making the Dhuna in question look less dangerous. This is only for looks, not limiting the effect.

Dhuna Staff, DR 6, WT 2, STR -3, 15 g.l.

Exomorph Ink

Gnorls and some Dhuna use extracts from the pigment sacs of the Exomorph to create a special magical ink they use for writing down, yet hiding, secrets; after the ink has dried, it disappears and can only be made visible again by performing some task, gesture, song or speech (one of them or several things combined) defined by the writer. The measures required to make the ink visible again has to be written down at the start of each text. Once made readable again, the magic stops working and the ink will never become invisible anymore. As the magic is in the ink, no magic is required from the side of the user, making it a rare, but rather sought fluid. One ounce of Gnorl Exomorph Ink commands a price of 200 gold lumen.

Gnorl Box

The term "Gnorl box" actually covers a wide variety of boxes, often no larger than the digit of a finger, though they can sometimes reach a considerable size. Made from Amittina wood, they usually bear little or no ornamentation except three seals: of the Gnorl who made it, of the Gnorl who put the Secret inside and of a Gnorl Judge who approved the sale. In those cases where the secret belongs to several Gnorls together, more seals are put upon it, often including those of more than one Gnorl Judge, too.

A Gnorl box is enchanted to secure a secret; thus, should the seals on it be opened in an improper way, or should anything damage it, everything inside would be destroyed, so that the secret in question cannot fall into false hands (even though the

secret, usually written on a parchment with exomorph ink would be secured my magic and codes, too). The “proper” way of opening a Gnorl Box differs from case to case, though; for when a Gnorl sets her seal, she also puts down the measures needed to release it.

It seems Gnorls spend a lot of time thinking for ever-new requirements for their seals. Such measures may range from the exhausting to the absurd, but they always require something extraordinary. Examples may include to jump on one foot while singing an epic song backwards; to take the box inside your mouth for a couple of hours while sitting in the water; to climb a tree and let the light of all moons (or only some of them) fall on the seal.

Unfortunately, once a Gnorl Box is opened, it loses all value apart of being a plain box. Thus it has no price whatsoever (except for at least one Sindaran who collects opened Gnorl boxes).

Kron Feather

The Kron or “Glowing Avir” is one of the rarest birds in Werewood. Feeding mainly on Omphalos Mushrooms, they sport two long elegant ivory feathers (measuring approximately 1.5 feet) on their heads which can glow in the dark. These feathers are much sought after by the upper classes of Talislanta as adornments (which in fact may be the main reason for this birds scarceness). Each feather is worth between 300 and 500 gold lumen; the sale of the two found on one of these birds can already finance a whole expedition to Werewood.

Leka

Produced by lactating Nandato moss, this thick pinkish fluid is popular among Dhuna and Boglins, but little known outside Werewood. Children are especially fond of it, as it is very sweet and milklike. While a buyer has to be found first, a pint of Leka can bring up to 100 gold lumen from the rich or curious customer.

Nefkrago Whelp

The apelike Nefkrago is among the best-adapted creatures in Werewood. Intelligent and dangerous, their whelps can be caught and tamed to serves as watchers for rich customers in Talislanta. Catching such a whelp is not so easy, though, as the group of Nefkrago it belongs to will fiercely defend its young. Killing all the grownups is thus the least problem a hunter has to deal with. Most customers are only interested in a trained Nefkrago and there are only few animal handlers, mainly to be found in Zandu, seeking Nefkrago. Thus the taming and training would be part of the hunter's job.

A wild Nefkrago whelp brings only a meager sum of 120 gold lumen, while a tamed and trained one commands up to 800 gold lumen, enough to finance a larger expedition to Werewood.

Paykel Brew

Made by the Weirdlings of the mushroom with the same name, this slightly alcoholic, spicy drink is a favourite of the Wishgnomes, who sometimes sell it to Zandu or the rest of Talislanta. As the recipe is widely unknown, there are quite a number of friends to this brew, which, as only relatively little is exported, has a rather steep price of 150 gold lumen per barrel.

Sorcerer Tree Wood

Even though it is actually not magical by itself, many people superstitiously think the wood of the Sorcerer Tree has many magical virtues, like changing colour when traitors step on it or venom is spilled on it, or that it eases childbirth pains of women in labor. Thus, floors, tables or beds made of this wood are highly prized. But even among mages or other persons not falling for such stories, it has a certain popularity because of its colourfulness and rich texture. The wood gained from one tree may bring up to 5gold lumen per board foot.

New Magic

The following spells and rituals are unique to Werewood denizens. While in most cases it is not impossible for foreigners to acquire them, it would be rather improbable at best. For it would require a Gnorl or Dhuna to teach them and this would be a rare event indeed.

Deciphering the Runes

(Witchcraft Ritual)

This ritual was taught to the Dhuna by the Goddess Zazaano according to the witches' lore. It requires one priestess or person of knowledge and a larger number of other participants. While the priestess first sits in the middle of the circle, the other participants form a circle, touching each other and all stones forming the circle in question (including those who bear no inscription). It is the same case with a Dolmen. The general idea is to form a circle of people where the stones take part.

After a suitable period, which can take from some minutes to several hours, the priestess starts the incantation to Zazaano, begging her to reveal the secrets of the runes to her. The period this incantation takes depends on the number of inscribed stones, the magic level of the priestess and the level of the other participants (three levels and hours added for each inscribed stone, the witchcraft level of ability of the priestess and the average witchcraft ability level of the other participants reduce the required time by two hours each).

Once the incantation is completed, the runes shine with eerie light, detaching from the stones and burning themselves into the skin of the priestess. Once this happens, the priestess instinctively learns the content of the runes, though not the exact words and signs. As long as the reverse Ritual is not performed, the runes stay visible on her body. In times when the Dhuna feel danger to a Stone Circle,

a priestess takes the precious runes to her body and is then concealed by the coven.

Reverse: Restitute the Runes

Cast in reverse, the ritual makes the runes peel off the skin of the priestess and return to the stones of their origin. It is not possible with this ritual to bring the runes to other stones or objects; if the stone in question is destroyed by some means, the runes disappear.

Different from the original ritual, the reversed one can be performed alone by the priestess in question, by singing an incantation while touching the stone she wants to return the runes to (no game mechanic necessary).

Inscribing Runes

(Witchcraft Ritual)

This ritual can only be done by Dhuna Listeners, those rare individuals who can not only know the general meaning of runes, but who can actually read and write them. Unlike the Sepharans of the Lower Planes, who can perform a wide range of spells and rituals using their own art of Symbolatry, the runes as the Dhuna can inscribe them serve only to one end: creating a gate to another place, either on the Material Plane of Talislanta or to one of the other planes.

What would happen if a Listener was able to study samples of the slightly different but interintelligible runes of the Sepharans is another story; it is quite possible he could pick up rudiments of Symbolatry from enough samples even without a Sepharan tutor, but whether this magic conforms with the beliefs of the Dhuna is improbable at best; if any Sepharan Sect should learn of the existence of these runes they might well consider them part of their lost Sepharan Codex – even though the Werewood runes are not of demonic origin – and would attempt to conquer them.

This ritual is done by one or more Listeners, who, while singing incantations, walk from stone to stone, inscribing the runes with their hands. This is done instinctively, with closed eyes. The duration of this process is dependant on the number of Listeners, the number of stones and the destined place the gate should lead to (a location on the Material Plane requires a level 20 Summon spell, a transdimensional location a level 30 spell; The duration of the ritual is at least one hour per level; each additional participant lowers the level of the spell by one, a number of assistants not exceeding the the Summon mode level of the leader of the spell can take part; a mishap has repercussions for all participants).

Only uninscribed Stone circles (or circles cleared of their usual runes by priestesses) can be inscribed this way and the runes fade to uselessness after only one use. The Dhuna Listener can determine the place of destination provided she knows it well, either from tales or own experience; or she can lay her place of destination in the hand of Zazaano, the Wayfinder.

Reverse: Conceal the Runes

The reverse of this ritual is rarely performed. When it is achieved, the Listener magically erases the runes inscribed on Stone Circles. But runes inscribed by Listeners wane after one use and to destroy the ancient runes of the existing Sone Circles would be seen as blasphemy by the Dhuna, who see it as their divine mandate to guard and preserve them (Works as a Reversed Summon Enchantment: The level of the runes is five per inscribed stone at least; some circles have runes of almost unheard of power).

Special Abilities

Both Dhuna and Gnorls have a special ability not detailed enough in the rulebook. Thus, they are elaborated on here.

The Dhuna Kiss

Only female Dhuna have the ability to catch the heart of any male with her kiss. This ability was given to Dhuna herself by Tin'shiana, the goddess of love and revenge, in exchange for fealty of her and all her followers. The kiss can be put anywhere on the body of the victim, but usually it is delivered mouth to mouth, where it is most effective. It is said to be a most arousing sensation and comparable only (if at all) to the effect a Batrean could have with her scent, but more intense. The victim is allowed to make a Willpower roll to resist with the Dhuna's skill level in Witchcraft as a negative modifier (this modifier is halved when the kiss was not given on the mouth and quartered when it is given without knowledge of the victim). The effect of the kiss is the number by which the resistance roll failed in days; during this time, the kissed male tries his best to do everything he can to please "his" Dhuna, though he would do anything (physically) harmful to himself only after another failed resistance roll.

The Dhuna kiss can be activated by the Dhuna witch at will and it functions on the male Dhuna, too, which gives them their distinctively weaker position in the witches' society. (Aamanian) propaganda has transfigured the Dhuna Kiss to a truly (male) nightmare, warning of it with gravest words; in fact the Orthodoxy requires victims of the kiss undergo strict fasting and self-abasement for at least two months.

The female Dhuna, on the other hand, see their ability not only as a blessing, but also as a calling. "Because Tin'shiana has granted us with this power," they say, "she has also given us the burden to care for our males, too. It is we who have advantages over them, so it is us

who have to care for them, too.” It is no wonder this point of view arouses suspicion at least among most male-dominated societies of Talislanta.

Rhodomancy

This special ability is native to all Gnorls; no one else can ever learn it, not even Weirdlings, who belong to the same people. It is Rhodomancy which made the Gnorls what they are; it is through it that they acquire most of their secrets, but it is also like an addiction, for, as Ninguarda the traveller put it, “a Gnorl who has one secret feels the need to gain a second, and a third, until she is totally into it. I think their Rhodomancy is at least partially to blame for it, because through it Gnorls feel and learn more than by anything else that secrets are power, and power bring more secrets. I doubt that there is any Gnorl who would not use their special ability as often as she could. This is worse than any other drug abuse I have ever seen, and this includes even my good friend Buffos, who can really be called addicted...”

Basically, Rhodomancy is about talking to spirits, forcing them to gain a desired secret and share it with the Gnorl. Like everything else in the life of Gnorls, this power is founded on a secret they all share and they would not reveal to anyone not of their number. What this secret is, nobody knows, though Thystram suspected it to be a pact with a demon or other entity. Ninguarda, on the other hand, believed that it is less of a pact and “more likely some dirty secret of that aforementioned entity. Whatever it may be, it forces spirits of all kind to cooperate with the Gnorls without payment and without ever thinking about revenge. This is all we know and the rest is a secret, as usual.”

Using special candles and incense, Gnorls can summon a spirit and give it one question to research. The question has to be exact, and the spirit will only fulfill the literal sense and nothing more (See Talislanta Rulebook page 107 for the technical details).

New Archetypes

The archetypes presented here are meant to broaden the view on Werewood denizens as given in the rulebook. They are not meant to present all possibilities of people that live in this area, though. Whether one of these can be picked as player characters is up to the discretion of the Gamemaster, who should feel free to allow or disapprove of them as he likes.

The categorization as NPC or PC is to be seen as just a recommendation only. The decision to allow an archetype as PC or to use it as NPC is, of course, up to the discretion of the individual Gamemaster or playing group.

Bane Slave (NPC)

"You say you adore me, you say your love me. You besiege me with gifts as much as you love to show me around to your friends or to touch me where no one should touch me. But whatever you say, whatever you do, my hate for you is endless... I will wait for my time, to achieve my only desires: freedom – and revenge."

Once you were free, roaming around Werewood, hunting whom you pleased, when you pleased. But these days of wild sweet madness are now no more than a distant shadow in your memories. People came and hunted you with nets and magic. They caught you when you least expected it, bound you, forced your mouth to open and then they filed your teeth, filed until you felt too humiliated to resist anymore.

Now you are a slave for a rich man somewhere in Talislanta. He gives you what he thinks you need and he takes from you what he thinks he requires. You know many of your kind succumb in this stage, as you know that with your filed teeth and your body reeking of men, you have no chance of survival in your native forest, among your own kind. Thus, they feel too helpless and humiliated to think of anything but a quick, merciful death. But you are of a stronger kind. You obey – for now. But you will never forget the wild strength that ran through your veins. So you are learning language and manners, and how to escape. The time for your revenge will come and once it is accomplished, you will flee and become free again, to wander Talislanta in search for a better place.

Appearance: 5'9" – 6'2', 120-200 lbs. pitch-black skin, glossy black hair, golden eyes, beautiful sleek stature.

STR +2	PER +5	CR +5
DEX +2	CHA -1	MR +1
CON +1	WIL -3	HP 20
SPD +2	INT +3	

Skills: Preternatural Mimicry +1, Brawl +3, Evade +2, Artificer (Bone Carving) +2, Artificer (Weaving) +1, Guide +2, Stealth +5, Survival +4, Bane, native.

Special Abilities: Preternatural Mimicry: mimic any sound at Ability Level (mimic spells at Ability Level – 10), night vision (even in magical darkness), immunity to spells of illusion. Claws and fangs have been removed.

Equipment: Gaily coloured, usually useless but effectively arousing clothes; Necklaces and other jewelry worth 50 gold lumen.

Dhuna Listener (PC)

"If you don't listen to the stones, they won't talk to you. And if they don't talk to you, you will never guess what you are missing."

Zazaano the Wayfinder has been kind to you, to bless you with an unique gift; many of your fellow Dhuna will forever envy you, especially the Dhuna priestesses. They know the rituals to learn from the runes, but only you know not only how to understand them, but also to memorize and write them. All your life is centered around the runes. The runes speak to you, and you listen. You leave no time to other magic or other things at all, instead wandering around Werewood and beyond, wherever Zazaano may lead you, to see and learn new signs. Even while travelling, while walking, while sleeping, you continuously memorizing rune after rune. You feel that there is more to it than everybody thinks. Somehow, with each new rune, you get closer to that secret, closer and closer...

Yet others should not mistake your somewhat adsent-minded habits for weakness. Whatever may happen, you know you are chosen among the persecuted and as a Dhuna, you know how to protect yourself.

Appearance: 4'5" – 5', 80-120 lbs. Olive skin, black hair, expressive features, lean stature, romantic, melodramatic or just absent-minded demeanor.

STR *	PER +1	CR 0
DEX 0	CHA *	MR +5
CON 0	WIL +1	HP 18
SPD 0	INT +2	

Skills: Witchcraft <5 modes of choice> +3, Doctrines +4, Staff +2, Alchemy (Elixirs) +5, Healer +5, Herb Lore +5, Seduce +2, Artificer +5, Ride +4, Elder Tongue, native, Low Talislan, fluent.

Special Abilities: STR -1 (females), +1 (males); CHA +6 (females), +1 (males); Ability to memorize and write the Runes of the Ancients; females can employ the Dhuna Kiss.

Equipment: Linen robe and tunic, sandals or boots (females); shirt, breeches, knee-high boots of soft leather (males); long cloak, pouches with elixir vials, pouch with herbs, Whitewood Staff and/or Bow, greymane steed, 50 gold lumen in rare herbs and precious stones.

Dhuna Prophetess (NPC)

"I can see the will of our Gods everywhere. Listen to me and you will learn to listen to those above yourself."

Other Dhuna may be far mightier than you in witchcraft, but you know this is just superficial, because it is you who command the power to interpret the will of the Forgotten Gods. You know all of them, the nine most important as well as the countless others; they send you dreams every night and consequently, every morning you spend a lot of time contemplating your dreams, trying to decipher them and extract the message from the gods.

You know that your fellow Dhuna look on you with more or less well-hidden contempt. They almost never listen to you, something that often makes you sad. It is never good to be a prophet in your own country. But you also know that they need you for certain rituals and prayers. And you are aware that it was the will of the gods that made you their priestess. You will never stop trying

to bring their wisdom to your people, whether they like it or not. For this is truly their will and who are you to resist it?

Appearance: 5'1"- 6', 90-160 lbs. Olive skin, black hair, expressive features, sleek stature, romantic, melodramatic or just absent-minded demeanor.

STR -1	PER +1	CR 0
DEX 0	CHA +6	MR +5
CON 0	WIL +1	HP 18
SPD 0	INT +2	

Skills: Witchcraft <5 modes of choice> +3, Doctrines +8, Alchemy (Elixirs) +5, Healer +5, Herb Lore +5, Seduce +2, Artificer +5, Ride +4, Elder Tongue, native, Low Talisman, fluent.

Special Abilities: Ability to remember all her dreams; Can employ the Dhuna Kiss; CHA-5 when dealing with Dhuna of Grey and CHA-7 when dealing with Dhuna of the Black Order. Decipher and Restitute the Runes (see magic section).

Equipment: Undyed linen robe and tunic, sandals or boots; long cloak dyed in complicated patterns of white, grey and black, pouches with elixir vials and herbs, clay bowl, knife. Dhuna Prophetesses are not allowed to bear weapons or possess other valuables.

Dhuna Protector (PC)

"I came, I saw, I killed."

Let others perform the major rites of witchcraft, the herb gathering, the rituals, the easy work. You do the hard work. You walk, you ride, you climb, you fight, but especially, you watch. If you would not guard your coven, they could never sleep as tight as they do. You never sleep tight. But such is your fate. You never had a chance, your future was determined by the priestesses right after your birth. You never sucked from your mother's breast and in fact, often you are not even sure you know who your mother is. It was the Coven who raised you, trained you, gave you a right to live. Now it is your time to pay back these debts by doing your duty.

Right when you were fed the first milk from a skull of a Bane, you sipped your first drop of Sarassos Potion; it tasted bitter, but it was necessary. Now you are among the few who can drink it without dying. It ruins your sense of taste, but while its effect lasts, you feel no pain nor do you tire. It is your duty to drink it, so that you can protect your coven. You do not like it, but you will never complain. Words are rarely necessary for a Protector, and you have a certain dislike for unnecessary things.

Appearance: 5' - 5'10", 90-150 lbs. Olive skin, black hair, expressive features, strong, matter-of fact demeanor.

STR *	PER +1	CR +3
DEX +1	CHA *	MR +3
CON +1	WIL +1	HP 18
SPD +1	INT +1	

Skills: Witchcraft <3 modes of choice> +2, Doctrines +3, Staff +4, Bow +4, Stealth +4, Tracking +4, Traps +3, Survival +4, Alchemy (Sarassos Potion, Elixirs) +4, Healer+4, Herb Lore +4, Artificer +4, Ride +4, Elder Tongue, native, Low Talisman, fluent.

Special Abilities: STR 0 (females), +2 (males); CHA + 3 (females), +1 (males); can use the Sarassos Potion (side-effect: no sense of taste, PER -10 for taste only, sense of smell unaffected); when confronted with the Dhuna Kiss, the negative modifiers to the Willpower roll are automatically halved (males); females can employ the Dhuna Kiss.

Equipment: Shirt and breeches of earthen colour, knee-high boots of soft leather (males and females); long dark cloak, pouch with three vials of Sarassos Potion; Whitewood staff and bow, dyed in dark colors; soft leather armor, greymane steed, 50 gold lumen in rare herbs and precious stones.

Gnorl Bargainer (PC)

"Speaking of secrets, it seems I could have an offer you might not want to refuse..."

You never were among the successful Gnorls. Of course you love secrets like every Gnorl does, but... well, you never had a chance to gain one of those big, valuable secrets, or even a bunch of moderately important ones, either because you are too young or too absent-minded or you just never had a chance. You never managed to get a house in an Amittina tree, so you still dwell in a hole in the ground, and whenever you meet a successful Gnorl, you are invariably looked down at.

You don't know why you're so unsuccessful in gathering secrets, but you know that there is one thing you can do and that is bargaining and talking. And, as you have little prestige in Gnorlwood, you don't mind leaving it for other countries. So now you have become a Bargainer, travelling through Talislanta representing the interests of one or more more successful Gnorls. You look for new secrets for them, or you sell their secrets to the highest bidder. You only do the walking and talking: all decisions are made by your employers, who, of course, will never trust you completely. But you don't mind. No customer is tough enough for you, no job too difficult. And with each job fulfilled, you earn a share in secrets and money and your self-confidence rises. Some day soon you might find enough secrets of your own to return to Gnorlwood with a raised head. But for now you don't mind to continue your business.

Appearance: 3' – 4', 60 – 80 lbs. Wrinkled, dark-brown skin, deep-set, green or yellow eyes, wizened features, squat physique, always female.

STR -2	PER +2	CR 0
DEX 0	CHA 0	MR +3
CON 0	WIL +2	HP 18
SPD 0	INT +1	

Skills: Witchcraft: <6 modes of choice> +4, Cryptomancy: <4 modes of choice> +2, Staff+6, Arcane Lore +5, Cryptography +6, History +4, Antiquarian +5, Healer +4, Herb Lore +4, Linguistics +6, Merchant +4, Low Talislan, native dialect, Gnorl secret tongue, native, High Talislan, fluent [note – can be improved via Linguistics].

Special Abilities: Night Vision, Rhabdomancy.

Equipment: Voluminous, often violet robes, veiled headdress, colourful scarves and sashes, assorted rings, bracelets and necklaces, wooden staff, leather-bound spell book with lock, crystal ball for communication with employers, satchel (for assorted medicinal mixtures, vials of incense, herbs, quill pens, vials of ink and parchments), magical personal seal, several Gnorl Boxes for sold or bought secrets, 80 gold lumens in assorted gems and coins, a small number of minor secrets.

Gnorl Judge (NPC)

"You call – that – a valuable secret? Really, that's nothing but rubbish. Trust me."

May others collect the secrets, you have a far better fate. You are a Judge, supervising the rules and traditions of secret-mongering, approving trades with your seal, checking that no secret is ever overpriced or forged. True, many secrets are traded without your participation, especially when business is conducted with non-Gnorls, who mostly never hear of you. But should a rule be broken, somebody will tell you sooner or later. You are not only a Judge, but a detective too. You see it in their eyes, you see it in their movements. And once you have a suspicion, you never stop until you find out the truth and punish the Gnorl who did improper business.

Other Gnorls dislike you and think you are far too evil-minded and nosy for your job, but to you, you are just perfect for your assignment. Sure, you are not allowed to own secrets of your own, and if you would ever tell about what you see and hear, it would have dire consequences for you (and you are sure the other Gnorls would delight in seeing you fall), but then, this is of minor concern to you. All secrets must be open to you, all Gnorls, no matter how proud they are, must follow your rules. You are strict, you follow the rules. They may even call you evil, yet they cannot prove you wrong on anything.

Appearance: 3' – 4', 60 – 80 lbs. Wrinkled, dark-brown skin, deep-set, sharp green or yellow eyes, wizened proud features, squat physique, always female.

STR -2	PER +1	CR 0
DEX 0	CHA -1	MR +4
CON 0	WIL +3	HP 18
SPD 0	INT +1	

Skills: Witchcraft <6 modes of choice> +8, Cryptomancy <4 modes of choice> +6, Staff +6, Arcane Lore +14, Cryptography +14, History +8, Antiquarian +12, Analysis +4, Litigator +4, Healer +8, Her Lore +8, Linguistics +8, Low Talislan native dialect, Gnorl secret tongue, native.

Special Abilities: Night Vision, Rhabdomancy, CHA-5 when dealing with other Gnorls.

Equipment: Voluminous, often green robes, veiled headdress, colourful scarves and sashes, assorted rings, bracelets and necklaces, wooden staff, leather-bound spell book with lock, ceremonial scales for "measuring" secrets (used as the material component for a Move level 1 spell used to show the opinion of the judge nonverbally to the negotiating parties), satchel (for assorted medicinal mixtures, vials of incense, herbs, quill pens, vials of ink and parchments), magical personal seal, collection of art, trinkets and antiques, 80 gold lumens in rare herbs or artifacts.

Gnorl Outcast (NPC)

"You should – never – ask a lady that!"

You trespassed against the rules of the Gnorls. Not once, but thrice or more. Thrice was just the number they could verify. You would never have thought it would so much annoy them, but they kicked you out. Literally. They took away your seal and, even worse, they put a spell upon you, forcing you to tell the truth, always. Whenever you have a secret, you have to go and tell someone... How could they ever do this to you?

Banished from Werewood, you still didn't lose your spirit. Rules are made to be broken, after all. When you find a secret, you go to someone nobody would believe to tell him and where you once had to lie, you now just maneuver around the truth. After all, who would ever believe that what you're saying is true? And some day you will find the secret as to how to break that accursed spell for sure. After all, you are a Gnorl.

Appearance: 3' – 4', 60 – 80 lbs. Wrinkled, dark-brown skin, deep-set, green or yellow eyes, often jaded; hardened features, squat physique, always female.

STR -2	PER +1	CR 0
DEX 0	CHA -1	MR +4
CON 0	WIL +2	HP 18
SPD 0	INT +2	

Skills: Witchcraft: <6 modes of choice> +4, Cryptomancy: <4 modes of choice> +2, Staff+6, Arcane Lore +5, Cryptography +6, History +4, Antiquarian +5, Healer +6, Herb Lore +6, Linguistics +6, Low Talisman, native dialect, Gnorl secret tongue, native. *[Gamemasters note: The skills are reduced compared to the Rhabdomancer Archetype reflecting separation from reference material no longer accessible to outcasts]*

Special Abilities: Night Vision, Rhabdomancy, CHA-10 when dealing with other Gnorls, must always say the truth (but can twist it) and tell each new secret to three people.

Equipment: Voluminous but shabby robes, veiled headdress, colourful rags as scarves and sashes, assorted cheap rings, bracelets and necklaces, wooden staff, leather-bound spell book with lock, satchel (for assorted medicinal mixtures, vials of incense, herbs, quill pens, vials of ink and parchments), small and rather worthless collection of small art, trinkets and antiques, 40 gold lumens in assorted gems and coins, a small number of minor secrets.

Weirdling Saint (PC)

"If you do as I tell you, I can fulfill your dearest wish."

Most of your brethren are content to live in the Dread Forest, drinking Paykel, gathering food for themselves and sometimes every few decades taking part in the mating carnival with your female counterparts, the Gnorls. Most are content in their burrows and secret dwellings full of stuff. Most are, you are not. Somehow you have managed to realize that many people outside Werewood call you and your brethren "Wish-Gnomes" and long to have you fulfill their desires. Somehow you have also realized that what you need is something eccentric and rare and precious: memories or other things unavailable in Werewood, but plentiful in other lands. So you have left your native forest to help poor people with their things if they help you with your desire.

Of course, you only have a certain number of wishes you can accomplish, and surely it is not the Thirteen you started with. Perhaps not even one wish is left you could grant. But this doesn't

stop you. You have become an entrepreneur, marketing yourself, promising many wishes, but giving none. You think that giving the feeling that you give them what they like is enough. Of course after some time you have to make a hasty exit, but you know how to play your game and after some weeks or even months in the same place, you don't mind turning your back and never return. Sure, afterwards, the people who once called you a Saint call you a demon evermore, but there is little you could care less about, after having a good time and taking what you yourself desired.

Appearance: 2'-3', 25-80+ lbs. Gnarled, brownish, hairless skin, extremely wrinkled face with deep-seated malicious green eyes.

STR -3	PER +2	CR 0
DEX +5	CHA -3	MR +4
CON +2	WIL +5	HP 18
SPD +4	INT +4	

Skills: Wizardry <5 modes of choice> +4, Weapon <choice> +4, Barter +6, Survival +2, Stealth +3, Herb Lore +2, Traps +3, Locks +2, Legerdemain +2, Deception +6, Bribe (with promises of wishes) +6.

Special Abilities: Ability to grant up to 13 wishes (similar in power to a spell cast at the 20th level of ability, from any Mode of the Magical Order, Wizardry), the last one invariably a potent curse reversing the desired wish. No Weirdling can ever reveal the number of wishes he can still grant. Weirdling Saints are regarded as madmen by their fellow Boglins. Strong natural disgust for money (people offering money instead of things automatically gain CHA-10 in the eyes of the Weirdling).

Equipment: colourful robe made of most inapplicable rags (often female clothing), and pink slippers; knife; sling; 50 gold lumen in gems or jewelry; Desired objects worth 500 gold lumen in diverse hiding places.

Zandre Boatman (NPC)

"Say, sirrah, you wanta ride up the ol' Sascasm? I see no sense in that, but I can bring you there, no problem, you will be as safe as in your mothers womb. For I am the best. With my fat lady here we can give you a heavenly ride right into hell..."

You have always been a Boatman, like your father and grandfather and great-grandfather, even though it is almost paradox that in your family, no one ever tried not to become a boatman... it must be the call of the Sascasm that runs down your veins. Yeah, you have been wet with many a water indeed. Only boatmen can understand that. Together with your three friends you own one of the bulky boats that run up and down the Sascasm in huge numbers. You call your boat "your lady" and indeed she is the one you really have married, all the other ladies are fine for a night, but not for a lifetime. You don't mind what you transport or where, whether goods or passengers; you're not so much doing it for the money, but for the fun (or, rather, for both of them). You would find it annoying to spend more than a few hours on land in a row.

Unlike other people who live on water, you are a lover of talking and dirty jokes, though. You can never shut up and never stop finding everything funny that is not connected to your river and your lady. Even when you have just cut down someone who insulted you (and that is easily achieved), you would never forget to tell him a joke before he goes. You would not wish a different death for yourself when your time is due; for life is a joke, only the river is true.

Appearance: 5'5" – 5'9", 100-200 lbs. Copper or cinnabar skin, dark hair, dark green eyes, no skin enhancements except for some (waterproof) tattoos.

STR +1 **PER** +1 **CR** +3

DEX +2 **CHA** -2 **MR** +1

CON +2 **WIL** +2 **HP** 20

SPD +1 **INT** 0

Skills: Spear +4, Weapon <choice> +2, Brawling +3, Artisan (Boats) +3, Pilot (Row boat) +5, Guide +7, Tracking +3, Survival +5, Swim +4, Ride +3, Low Talislan (native), High Talislan (fluent).

Special Abilities: None, except if telling bad jokes counts.

Equipment: Sturdy oiled leather tunic and trousers, dyed in blue and black patterns, simple boots or barefoot feet; hair confined in silver bands; sabre, knife and a third weapon of choice; share of a river boat worth 44 gold lumen and 50 gold lumen in Zandir crescents.