

SECOND EDITION

PATHFINDER®



Triumph of the Tusk

ADVENTURE PATH

The Resurrection Flood

By Brian Duckwitz

Belkzen

50 MILES

Realm of the Mammoth Lords

Sarkoris Scar

New Thassilon

• WYVERNSTING

Tusk Mountains

Kodar Mountains

Ustalav

• BLISTERWELL

TORRENTMOOT •

SPLITSKULL FORTRESS •

FREEDOM TOWN •

Varisia

• URGIR

Mindspin Mountains

The Gravelands



Escape Route



PATHFINDER

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Triumph of the Tusk

ADVENTURE PATH

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Campaign Overview

Campaign Background

When Tar-Baphon—an incredibly powerful lich known as the Whispering Tyrant—escaped his prison only a few short years ago, the orcs of Belkzen knew he would try to conscript them for his wars of conquest, much as he had millennia before. Whether past orcs had served willingly or not is irrelevant today. Through his callous treatment of orc soldiers over generations of warfare, Tar-Baphon eradicated much of Belkzen's population, traditions, and history. At least one lesson survived, etched deeply in orcs' minds: the Whispering Tyrant cannot be trusted.

Thus, when Tar-Baphon escaped his prison and commanded Belkzen's inhabitants to rally to him, he heard not acquiescence but defiance. Belkzen returned the lich's messengers headless, with Tar-Baphon's proposals stuffed down their necks. Outraged, the lich dispatched an undead army to punish Belkzen for its temerity only for the orcs to crush the invaders at the Battle of Nine Broken Skulls.

With a patience born of long unlife and captivity, the Whispering Tyrant has since bided his time, waiting for the right moment to bring *his* orcs to heel. This opportunity presented itself a year ago when the gods themselves clashed in what's now known as the War of Immortals. Among the casualties were half of the Belkzen orc pantheon. The mortal orcs Uirch and Mahja Firehair challenged the unholy gods Lanishra (god of subjugation) and Sezelrian (god of fire and revenge) respectively, triumphing and apotheosizing as is orc tradition. From beyond the grave, the late warlord Grask Uldeth defeated and replaced Zagresh (god of brutality and death), and separately, Verex (god of pillaging) fell victim to the mighty Rovagug's fury.

The orcs' disrupted pantheon was opportunity enough, but Tar-Baphon discovered Belkzen had several other vulnerabilities. The god Zagresh did not completely perish; his defeat reduced him to a disembodied spirit furious about his fall from divinity. Some of his priests managed to house their patron's essence in a flesh construct known as the Carcass Man, yet even this powerful body can't compare to his lost godhood. Zagresh craves what he's lost. He's too unsubtle to reclaim it himself, but Tar-Baphon has offered Zagresh council in exchange for his cooperation.

Desperate, Zagresh agreed. Tar-Baphon has directed Zagresh to help channel necromantic power across Belkzen and command the resulting undead at the Whispering Tyrant's behest. If he does this, Zagresh believes Tar-Baphon will help the fallen god reclaim his divinity. This is a useful assumption. In truth, Zagresh is merely a puppet, and once he outlives his usefulness, Tar-Baphon plans to consume his essence to further the lich's own divine aspirations.

The second major ally in the lich's plans is Paskis, leader of the Unbroken Horn Hold. The ambitious orc is happy to serve Tar-Baphon in exchange for the lich granting her rulership over Belkzen once his takeover is complete. Her first task is to undermine her leader Ardax's alliances. After she has done that, Tar-Baphon has promised to help her seize control of Urgir.

As a final piece of his plan for Belkzen, Tar-Baphon hopes to tap into the vast potential necromantic energy that's beginning to flow through the region. Before his fall from godhood, Zagresh largely suppressed these energies through offerings of his faithful, but after his defeat, that protection is gone. Millennia of countless battles means that Belkzen contains the remains of innumerable bodies of those who've met violent ends. With Zagresh overthrown, Tar-Baphon has decided to abandon diplomacy in favor of necromancy. After all, why conscript living, willful orcs when he could command subservient undead?

Even as others plan Belkzen's doom, Ardax the White-Hair attempts to open Belkzen to outside trade and alliances. Ardax has swayed many holds, and he has summoned dignitaries to enjoy a weeks-long festival and safari together called the Torrentmoot.

About the PCs

The 3rd-level PCs are low-ranking representatives from across Golarion, acting as dignitaries for nations, corporations, factions, or their own freelance interests. Most organizations aren't willing to risk anyone especially important for this event, worrying that orcs' reputation for violence could endanger true VIPs. The PCs carry a speck of authority while ultimately being expendable in case the event ends in tragedy. If the event is a success, though, they could become invaluable liaisons, beloved by Belkzen and their patrons alike. This Adventure Path

also supports longtime Belkzen residents, with most orc PCs assumed to be part of a hold sympathetic to Ardax's big plans. Orc PCs might informally be guides tasked with ensuring the other PCs have a good time, yet they could just as easily be representatives of their own holds which Ardax is hoping to recruit into his united Belkzen.

This Adventure Path caters to a wide range of gameplay styles, with ample social, wilderness, and combat challenges. Even so, Belkzen is a rough region whose dangerous terrain will likely attract numerous ranger, druid, and other Nature/Survival-oriented PCs.

Campaign Timeline

The following events precede and contribute to this campaign.

Date	Event
-5102 AR	Orcs first emerge on the surface of Golarion, driven from their homes by dwarves during the latter's Quest for Sky. Beyond occasional skirmishes, the two populations mostly avoid each other thanks to the ample territory available.
-5088 AR	After watching orcs' expansion with unease, giants gather an army to crush the interlopers. The orcs prevail despite great losses, remembered as the First Battle.
-4213 AR	Dwarven prospectors found Jerengoff at the edge of the Kodar Mountains.
-3709 AR	Orc raiders sack Jerengoff. Its pits and tunnels are transformed into the mining city known as Blisterwell.
-3708 AR	Led by the legendary warlord Belkzen, orcs besiege and capture the dwarven sky citadel Koldukar. It's renamed Urgir and becomes a bastion of orc power. Belkzen lives another decade before dying or disappearing (accounts vary).
-3500 AR	Over a few centuries, orcs lose ground to their neighbors and are slowly pushed back to the region now known as Belkzen.
-3500 AR	For the next 7,000 years, there are few major events reliably preserved in the region's lore. It seems likely that great battles, acts of heroism, brief unifications, and cultural triumphs occurred, yet later subjugation purged much of the oral tradition.
3203 AR	The Whispering Tyrant unites the fractious orc holds, using them as an army for his own conquests. Those slain are reanimated to serve even in death. Though delighted to make war, most orcs swiftly regret allying with the merciless lich. Unfortunately, they

now lack the strength and unity to rebel successfully. Generations of orcs live and die at the lich's pleasure, depleting orcs' resources and devastating their culture.

3828 AR The Shining Crusade defeats the Whispering Tyrant, ending centuries of orc servitude. However, the crusaders abhor the orcs, whose soldiers inflicted countless casualties. The crusaders founded Lastwall a year later, and though its primary purpose is to guard the lich's prison, it doubles as bulwark against orc expansion. Hemmed in by Varisia's Shoanti, Lastwall, Ustalav, and Kellid followings, Belkzen's orcs realize they have no friends and are condemned to marginal lands. This could have been a major turning point for orcs, had others shown compassion. Instead, orcs develop a raiding culture to seize what they need to survive—worsening relations with their neighbors and becoming the most feared faction in the region.

4043 AR Memories of the Whispering Tyrant dulled while resentment of neighbors remained sharp. The conditions were perfect for the dragon Kazavon to unite orcs into a new army to conquer the region. Though less exploited than they were under the Tar-Baphon, orcs nonetheless fight and die for a non-orc despot (to their later chagrin).

4063 AR Lastwall and its allies defeat Kazavon. Orcs retreat to Belkzen, promising themselves they'll not bow to an outside ruler again. Nothing good comes of that fealty.

4237-4624 AR Years of raiding punctuated by major orc offensives overwhelm several fortified lines established by Lastwall. Orcs conquer and hold territory south of the River Esk.

4692 AR Grask Uldeth takes control of the Empty Hand Hold, as well as the city of Urgir.

4701 AR Migrating from the Darklands, the Haskodar Hold arrives in Blisterwell and begins fighting the One Eye Hold for control of the city. Haskodar forces gradually gain ground, and other orc holds observe the feud at a distance.

4702 AR Having consolidated power and allied with other influential holds, Grask Uldeth begins instituting reforms to make Belkzen safer for outsiders, limit infighting, and promote trade. Most orcs initially balk at these reforms, though the fruits of reliable trade gradually change minds.

4724 AR During a tumultuous period known as the War of Immortals, several deities are overthrown or destroyed, most of which play an important role in Belkzen. Gorum is shattered, his essence scattered across the cosmos in an event called the Godsrain. In addition, three orc mortals challenge and defeat three of the orc gods, replacing almost half the pantheon.

4724 AR It's no secret in Belkzen that Gorum and much of the orc pantheon have been overthrown. The power they once granted their servants wanes, and many priests convert or perish. Faiths of the new deities—Mahja Firehair, Uirch, and Grask Uldeth—have started to spread. However, in these early months, their faiths are fragile, servants of their predecessors are bitter, and Belkzen inhabitants are still coming to terms with the change.

4724 AR The current year.

Campaign Summary

The campaign's three adventures are summarized here.

THE RESURRECTION FLOOD

By Brian Duckwitz

Pathfinder Adventure Path #207, Levels 3–5

The PCs are minor dignitaries and enterprising adventurers attending a month-long festival kicking off the imminent rain and time of plenty in Belkzen known as the Flood Truce. Early in the adventure the PCs participate in challenges, short expeditions, and socializing, earning themselves clout among the orcs by doing so. They then join Ardax the White-Hair, the most powerful leader in Belkzen, and witness the start of the pouring rains and flood waters the festival focuses on. Excitement turns to horror as thousands of undead rise as the rains fall. The PCs lead a caravan of other dignitaries to the east in a fighting retreat toward the Cleft Head stronghold. When they arrive, they find the gates closed against them, and the occupants unwilling to let them inside. The PCs then work to find a way to defeat K'zaard, the stronghold's leader, and gain entry before the undead arrive.

HOOF, CINDER, AND STORM

By David Schwartz and Shay Snow

Pathfinder Adventure Path #208, Levels 6–8

Impressed by reports of the PCs' initiative and resourcefulness, Ardax invites the PCs to Urgir to contribute to Belkzen's defense. After the PCs settle into

Belkzen and contribute in its war room, they set off to find the Storm-Screamers of Rull, an orc hold whose expertise might help them understand the ancestor storms (supernatural weather afflicting Belkzen) as well as help protect the invaluable aurochs herds that are migrating into an undead-infested valley. Along with allied scouting teams, the PCs find the hold and help the Storm-Screamers redirect the herds, ensuring Belkzen won't starve.

On returning to Belkzen, the PCs learn that many holds have ignored or outright defied Ardax. He sends the PCs to investigate the forge city of Blisterwell, reestablishing contact with the two holds there and restoring manufacturing so that Ardax's forces are fully equipped against their foes. However, one of these holds has betrayed Belkzen and accepted necromantic aid, using the chaos to subjugate the other hold. The PCs must infiltrate Blisterwell, aid the loyal hold, and overthrow the treacherous rivals.

In the aftermath, orc refugees arrive from the northwest, driven by invading Shoanti raiders. The PCs set out to slow the Shoanti, in the process learning that they have a common foe. Once allied, the PCs and Shoanti enter one of the ancestor storms, overcome its occult dangers, and calm its fury.

DESTROYER'S DOOM

By Kendra Leigh Speedling

Pathfinder Adventure Path #209, Levels 9–11

Through Ardax's leadership and the PCs' contributions, Belkzen has rallied against the undead assault and is now prepared to crush its foes. Along with other scouting teams, the PCs blaze a trail north toward Wyvernsting, the stronghold of rebellious orcs who have betrayed Belkzen to Tar-Baphon. Along the way, the PCs help subdue a second ancestor storm, liberate the silt-sailing Drowning Sand hold from its wyvern-riding captors, and infiltrate Wyvernsting to sabotage the traitors' war efforts from the inside. When Ardax's army arrives, the PCs join in the battle, ultimately routing their foes.

Behind the scenes, the overthrown death god Zagresh has been working with Tar-Baphon to reclaim the former's divinity by enabling an undead apocalypse. Now that Belkzen's forces have thwarted these plans, the desperate Zagresh begins drawing the countless specters and ancestor storms to himself, hoping that by consuming enough spirits, he can still achieve victory. The PCs track him into the Tusk Mountains, clash with his remaining cult, and vanquish the death god before Tar-Baphon can swoop in to steal Zagresh's divinity for himself.



The Resurrection Flood

Chapter 1: Torrentmoot8

The PCs gather for a weeks-long celebration of the coming rains that begin Belkzen's Flood Truce season. The PCs must earn their hosts' respect on hunts, tests of strength, unexpected rescue missions, and more.

Chapter 2: Flood of Nightmares..... 30

This year, the floodwaters don't bring life; they reanimate countless corpses dredged from the mud! The PCs are evacuated toward Belkzen's border, yet as the danger increases, they increasingly have to take charge and lead their convoy to safety.

Chapter 3: Splitskull Siege 48

Their host promised the PCs would find shelter with the Cleft Head Hold near the border, yet the settlement is half-abandoned, with its fortress locked up tight! The PCs must infiltrate Splitskull Keep and oust its treacherous leader so the convoy can take shelter. In the process, the PCs uncover other holds' betrayals—and even their forewarning of the recent undead apocalypse.

THE WAR OF IMMORTALS

A conflict known as the War of Immortals recently rocked the multiverse's pantheons. In the resulting conflicts, numerous gods perished or were replaced, including many revered in Belkzen. Beyond several orc gods' demises, the war god Gorum was destroyed, his essence scattering across reality in a phenomenon known as the Godsrain.

This Adventure Path takes place within a year of the War of Immortals' worst casualties. Rather than dealing with the divine war itself, this campaign explores its fallout in Belkzen, including the ex-priests of fallen gods and the region's vulnerability after half its patrons were destroyed or replaced.

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"The Resurrection Flood" is designed for four characters.

- 3** The PCs begin this adventure at 3rd level.
- 4** The PCs reach 4th level by the end of Chapter 1.
- 5** The PCs reach 5th level by the end of Chapter 2.

The PCs should reach 6th level by the time they complete the adventure.



Chapter 1: Torrentmoot

Though the orcs of Belkzen aren't known for getting along with each other, much less outsiders, there's one notable exception to this stereotype: the Flood Truce. Each year, from late spring to early summer, the collected snow and ice in the Tusk Mountains rapidly melts. Flash floods flow down the mountains and arroyos onto the Flood Road, temporarily turning it into a riverbed. The sudden influx of water leads to explosive plant growth, which draws the aurochs from their wintering grounds into the now-verdant area. The aurochs are vital to the survival of the Belkzen orcs; they serve as a primary source of meat and hides. The orcs of Belkzen refer to this annual phenomenon simply as the Deluge.

Dozens and dozens of orc holds establish camps near the Flood Road. These camps can range in size from ten individuals to over a thousand. Unlike the

rest of the year, however, while the orcs are here, they set aside all conflict. They won't necessarily aid other holds, but they stay out of their way and let each hold gather what resources it can.

Ardax the White-Hair, the most influential orc leader in Belkzen, wants to see more come out of the Flood Truce than an agreement for orcs to not kill each other. With Tar-Baphon's recent attempt to regain control of Belkzen, he knows that there must be some deeper cooperation between holds to keep them from getting picked off individually by the lich. To that end, Ardax has personally invited dignitaries from a number of holds, as well as a numerous outsiders, to a place he calls Torrentmoot. Ardax hopes that this time of peace can become a productive way to build new alliances and strengthen old ones.

The PCs are part of Ardax's larger plan. Whether they have orc ancestry or not and whether they're from Belkzen or not, Ardax doesn't care. What matters to him is that they have some experience, skills, and actual—or potential—influence. Before starting the adventure, work with each player to determine at least one reason why they've been invited to Ardax's encampment. A natural fit is that the PC is a member of another orc hold, but they could just as easily be from nearby Ustalav. Ardax might have hinted at mutually beneficial alliances with the residents of Lastwall, and just as the rains flow out of the mountains to the north, so too can travelers hail from the Realm of the Mammoth Lords.

CONNECTING THE CHARACTERS

As 3rd-level characters, the PCs already have some significant experience, but they're still far from the influential, powerful characters they'll be by the end of this Adventure Path. As detailed in the *Triumph of the Tusk Player's Guide*, the PCs represent various interests from across the Inner Sea region. Work with your players to identify each PC's patron (they don't have to be the same) and why those patrons have an interest in Belkzen.

Numerous nations, companies, and guilds could benefit from a closer relationship with the orcs, and these patrons prefer agents who are competent yet expendable; after all, tales of Belkzen's danger aren't exaggerated! The PCs carry some authority or influence, but not so much that they could sign major deals for their patrons. Instead, they're present to gather intelligence, make contacts, and lay the groundwork for potential collaboration. Ardax knows the PCs aren't major dignitaries, yet he still engages with them respectfully and conscientiously, knowing it will take some time to build relationships and overcome Belkzen's unsavory reputation.

WHO'S AT TORRENTMOOT?

There are about 50 visitors at the camp. About 35 are dignitaries from various organizations from across Avistan, including many representatives from Belkzen's orc holds. The others are members of Ardax's retinue, here to help keep the peace, maintain the camp, and keep visitors from getting themselves killed in the unforgiving wilderness. Some of these dignitaries are summarized below, and the GM is welcome to add more to expand the roleplaying opportunities—especially if players show interest in particular groups. In addition, the key NPCs Davorr, Grothlyn,

CHAPTER 1 EVENTS

This chapter includes numerous events and important NPCs, organized here to help you track them. Entries marked "Vital" are important to the story and shouldn't be skipped.

Events: Both Meeting with Ardax (page 27) and Restless Dead (page 29) are Vital events at the camp.

Quests: These are longer expeditions away from the camp, including Aurochs Hunt and Vault (Vital, page 15), Missing Children (page 17), and Airborne Raiders (page 21).

Side Quests: These are short scenes that take place in and around the camp, including Drunken Dumbbell (page 23), Puzzle Box (page 24), Toothsome Quarrel (page 25), and Word Wrestling (page 27).

Key NPCs: There are three important NPCs the PCs can influence, which can affect later events in this adventure. These include Davorr (page 12), Grothlyn (page 13), and Kestrel (page 14).

and Kestrel are detailed on pages 12-14; they play a significant role throughout the adventure, and the PCs can befriend them using the influence subsystem (GM Core 187-189).

Bloodied Gauntlet Hold: Long known for their commitment to Gorum, this hold has become splintered and directionless after the destruction of their god. They sent one dignitary, **Krik Urblin** (female orc warrior) with an entourage of four laborers. Krik is outspoken and charming, albeit with a dark sense of humor. She has a friendly rivalry with the visiting Knights of Lastwall and swaps war stories with them; their predecessors and her ancestors often fought each other along Lastwall's border, but the creation of the Gravelands has helped the two groups focus on a shared enemy.

Death's Head Hold: Already strong allies of Ardax and his Empty Hand Hold, the Death's Head sent two dignitaries to Torrentmoot along with five laborers. **Tashki** (female orc merchant) and **Lakon** (male orc metalworker) are here out of respect for Ardax. Tashki is unsure about Ardax's attempt to bring the holds together, but she's ready to make new trade connections, regardless. Lakon doesn't care about the politics and maneuvering and only cares about Tashki's and his own craft. The laborers spend their days working on projects for Lakon (and partying, which leads to the Airborne Raiders event on page 21).

Empty Hand Hold: Ardax is the leader of this group, and all the scouts and guards mentioned in the

adventure belong to it as well, as do the orcs responsible for general camp maintenance and cooking. They're the most powerful hold in Belkzen, thanks in part to controlling its capital, Urgir.

Golden Wheel Trading Company: A relatively small mercantile conglomerate, the Golden Wheel operates trade routes in and around Nirmathas to the south. They sent married couple **Arion Prent** (male human merchant) and **Korai** (female human jeweler) to listen to Ardax's proposals. Given the many difficulties of trade in Belkzen, even after the reforms Grask Uldeth made years ago, the Golden Wheel doesn't have high hopes for the meeting.

Nevertheless, Arion and Korai are ambitious. They know there's not much to lose if Ardax's plans go awry but plenty to gain if they succeed, especially since they can get in on the ground floor of the enterprise.

Oprak: Ardax worked hard to invite representatives from the hobgoblin nation of Oprak, believing orcs and hobgoblins can find common ground in their shared, historical vilification by human neighbors. Seeing some wisdom in at least exploring this relationship, General Azaersi sent two representatives with a small retinue of guards. The dignitaries are **Subcaptain Nix** (female hobgoblin commander) and **Lieutenant Knarr** (nonbinary hobgoblin soldier). The hobgoblins are polite but noncommittal in their conversations with Ardax. That said, they're genuinely interested to learn about the Flood Truce and make new contacts in the camp. They're formal, militaristic, and curious.

Torrentmoot Staff: A dozen workers busy themselves around the camp every day. Their primary concern is feeding everyone, cleaning the camp, and dealing with any minor wildlife issues that arise. They're all competent at their jobs but a bit disorganized. The closest person to a leader is **Zensh** (nonbinary orc chef) who sees himself as the chief steward. Even when engaged with work, these orcs happily take a break to share a drink or cheer on a good-natured contest.

GETTING STARTED

The PCs begin the adventure as they arrive in Ardax's camp in the late spring (late Gozran to early Desnus), about three weeks before the Deluge happens. Read or paraphrase the following.

A dry, rocky expanse spreads out in all directions. The only visible plants are scrubby bushes that cling to the edge of a flat, dusty roadway, which gently curves to the north. To the east of the road the land rises to a low plateau that's bare except for a sprawling encampment. Beyond that, white-capped mountains are visible in the distance.

Within the encampment, two dozen tents stand in an oblong circle around a large central bonfire. The tent walls are mostly formed from hides on wooden frames, and colorful banners flutter from their peaks. Split logs form rough benches throughout the common space, and at least forty orcs and dromaars are engaged in conversation or friendly contests of skill and strength.



The PCs are each provided space to set up their own tents or, if they didn't bring their own, an unflappable orc named **Balax** (male orc scout) leads them to one of several aurochs-hide tents for them to share with others in the same situation. While not luxurious, these tents each have several pallets piled with aurochs-hide bedding and a thick, aurochs-hair blanket. If anyone complains about these conditions, Balax shrugs and notes that they're unlikely to find creature comforts here. He goes on to explain that the food and drink is delicious, plentiful, and free.

The PCs are housed near each other, and they're told they have complete freedom to wander and explore the camp. This is a good time for the players to introduce their characters to one another and spend a little time roleplaying. Torrentmoot is a busy place, although none of the official activities have begun yet.

Once the PCs and the other dignitaries are settled into their quarters, Ardax gathers everyone near the bonfire and addresses them. Read or paraphrase the following.

A heavily muscled, white-haired orc wearing a well-made coat of aurochs leather and bone jumps onto one of the split-log benches. His voice cuts through the sounds of the camp and all eyes go to him. "Welcome to Torrentmoot," he says. "For those of you I've not met personally, I'm Ardax. I have invited you to Belkzen, and I'm pleased to see you.

"You've arrived during the Flood Truce. For those who are new to Belkzen, this is a time of plenty in which the many holds that make up our glorious nation agree to peace with each other. Soon the floods come," he says, pointing to the north. "When they do, the roadway to our west becomes a river. After that, the quickened plants

along the shore sprout, followed by the herds of aurochs." Ardax smiles slightly. "I'm jealous of those of you who get to see this for the first time. It is truly glorious."

Several orcs in the camp nod in agreement.

"But that's still weeks away. Until then, I ask only that you respect the truce and get to know others in the camp. Some have traveled far, while others have lived here their whole lives. If you are thoughtful and careful, you might just find allies and make friends that can lead to fruitful alliances."

Ardax pauses a moment then raises his voice even louder. "For now, enjoy our hospitality!" The orc deftly leaps off the log and begins speaking with a nearby group.

The PCs are free to explore the camp, meet some of the people there, and enjoy the food and drink the orcs provide. The food is simple, hardy fare, and the drinks are strong. This is a good opportunity for the PCs to chat further learn more about who their new companions are. They can begin meeting some of the NPCs described in the Influencing Dignitaries section, but none of the other activities begin until the next day.

RUNNING CHAPTER 1

This chapter of "The Resurrection Flood" is a sandbox-style adventure that presents the PCs an array of social opportunities punctuated by expeditions into the surrounding wilderness. The PCs have ample freedom to choose what they do and when, except for a few side quests that have an implicit timeline. This also affords the GM flexibility in when (and in what order) to present some of these side quests. The default assumption is that the Deluge (and Chapter 2) begins in about 3 weeks, but you can adjust that to fit your adventure's pacing. In addition, this chapter doesn't require the PCs to do every single quest or encounter. The players can miss an encounter or two and still gain enough XP to reach 2nd level by the start of Chapter 2.

There are, however, a few quests and events that are marked as Vital because they're important to the greater story. Be sure to present all of these, although the order is not as important.

The chapter is organized in a roughly chronological order by default, but don't worry if the order gets mixed up because of the players' actions. The sidebar Chapter 1 Events can help you keep track of what the PCs have and have not done.

Tracking Reputation

Ardax hopes this event will convince outsiders to work with Belkzen, yet he's also determining which allies

are worth his time. Likewise, the PCs should each have reasons to impress Ardax, likely informed by the special backgrounds provided in this Adventure Path's Player's Guide. Maybe they were sent here to help build an alliance or trade route, or perhaps there are ancient ruins within Belkzen's borders that their patron wants to explore. Whatever the case, it's important to track how much of an impression the PCs make on Ardax.

Ardax's appraisal of the PCs is measured in Reputation Points. It's possible for Ardax to have a friendly or even helpful attitude toward the PCs from their use of social skills such as Diplomacy while at the same time be unimpressed by them. The opposite is true as well: Ardax might be unfriendly (with any luck he isn't hostile!), but he could be highly impressed with their actions and achievements.

Earning Reputation Points: The PCs begin the adventure with 0 Reputation Points, increased by 1 for each orc or dromaar PC (maximum 3 Reputation Points). The PCs can gain additional Reputation Points by completing certain encounters and influencing NPCs, detailed in those entries. The PCs might perform extraordinary deeds that aren't specifically called out yet that would grab Ardax's attention and respect. If so, consider awarding them 1 or 2 Reputation Points, though avoid awarding more than 3 Reputation Points in this way per day.

Rewarding Reputation: At the end of Chapter 1, tally the PCs' total Reputation Points. Ardax meets briefly with the PCs to express his growing esteem, accompanied by one or more gifts based on their Reputation Points total. If the PCs earn 9 or more Reputation Points, Ardax awards them 20 gp. If they earn 12 or more Reputation Points, he also gifts them a magic item (page 28).

During Chapter 2, the PCs can potentially earn additional Reputation Points. This doesn't unlock additional rewards. Instead, it provides additional opportunities for the PCs to impress Ardax through the stories others tell later, letting the PCs qualify for these gifts (if not already earned) at the beginning of the next adventure.

INFLUENCING DIGNITARIES

A key element of the PCs' time in Torrentmoot is meeting with other important people to make connections and build future relationships. Three of them are particularly influential with Ardax, and finding ways to impress them helps the PCs grow their standing with the orc leader. If you would rather develop your own dignitaries that fit better with your group, you can simply use the checks and DCs below and replace the names and personalities.

Influence Pacing: After each Event and Quest (see the sidebar on page 9), the PCs have a social round to learn about and Influence these NPCs. You're welcome to provide additional social rounds throughout the Torrentmoot, giving the players more opportunities to build connections and enjoy the event. In addition, the PCs begin the event knowing two useful facts about each of the three NPCs thanks to others' making introductions, equivalent to critically succeeding at a Discover check.

Davorr

A traveling scholar who has been with the Pathfinder Society for the last decade, **Davorr** (male dromaar lore master) is a human dromaar who has come to the region to study the Flood Truce. He is just as comfortable with a pen in his hand as he is with wielding his warhammer. He is inquisitive and bookish, often jotting notes into an ever-present notebook he keeps tucked in his belt or vest. Davorr has considerable knowledge regarding orc customs and history and is particularly intrigued by Ardax, whom he sees as an interesting exception to what most expect from orc leaders. Davorr has often been underestimated as a scholar, and he perhaps finds Ardax to be a kindred spirit of sorts.

Davorr is particularly interested in biology and heredity, especially of those whose parents were of different ancestries. Asking questions about hereditary traits such as eye and hair color will treat the listener to a long and thorough explanation of the topic.

When the PCs first meet Davorr, read or paraphrase the following.

A powerfully-built dromaar sits on a stump in front of a small table. He wears a worn-looking breastplate that seems to have been repaired several times. Books are piled precariously high on the table, and his attention is riveted on whatever he's reading. His eyebrows suddenly rise and he hurriedly dips a quill into a vial of ink and jots a note in a journal.

"Oh, just a moment," he says, catching sight of his visitors. With practiced motions, he places a blotting page in his journal, then closes it before setting his quill aside. He rises and steps over to the group. "So nice to have visitors. I've seen you around but haven't had a chance to introduce myself. I'm Davorr. How can I help you?"



Davorr

Influencing Davorr: Polite conversation, academic discussions, and new information are the best ways to convince Davorr of someone's character. He'll happily chat with anyone about nearly any topic. He's particularly fond of a pebble he owns that can create and extinguish a campfire for him on command. He enjoys sitting around its crackling fire and talking long into the night.

DAVORR

CREATURE 3

MEDIUM DROMAAR HUMAN HUMANOID ORC

Male dromaar lore master

Perception +10

Will +10

Discovery DC 17 Diplomacy, DC 18 Perception, DC 18 Society

Influence Skills DC 17 Belkzen Lore or Orc Lore (to share notes about local culture), DC 18 Arcana, Occultism, or Society (to engage on academic topics), DC 18 Diplomacy, DC 20 Deception, DC 20 Intimidation

Influence 3 Ardax takes note of the PCs' budding friendship; the PCs earn 10 XP and 1 Reputation Point.

Influence 5 The PCs earn an additional 20 XP. Now impressed by the PCs, Davorr offers to create a 2nd-rank scroll of any common spell on the occult spell list for a PC. In addition, when Davorr is traveling with the PCs, he Recalls Knowledge with a +10 modifier to identify one creature at the beginning of any combat. Finally, Davorr provides additional assistance at the end of Chapter 2 (page 46).

Resistances Davorr has quietly weathered peers' well-intentioned dismissals of Belkzen culture as less sophisticated than those of elves, humans, and other "civilized societies." Any PC who perpetuates orc stereotypes of savagery or dim-wittedness earns a withering scowl and lecture from Davorr; the PC takes a -2 penalty Influence him until they earn at least 1 Influence Point for Davorr, at which point he's willing to overlook their earlier faux pas.

Weaknesses Davorr is intrigued by heredity and lineages. If a PC shares stories of their own ancestors and weathers Davorr's questions that follow, they gain a +2 circumstance bonus to their next check to Influence him. This increases to +3 if the PC cites orc ancestors.

PCs who succeed at a DC 15 Diplomacy or Perception check learn about a topic of interest to Davorr; a critical success provides two topics. Once they know the topics likely to gain his attention, a character can spend 1 hour discussing it with him and attempt a DC 12 Arcana, Diplomacy, Occultism,

or an appropriate Lore check. Once they have three such successes (a critical success counts as two and a critical failure subtracts one), Davorr is considered fully influenced.

Grothlyn

Moderate 3

Like the other dignitaries, **Grothlyn Zor** (female orc berserker) can meet the PCs at just about any time during their visit to Torrentmoot. If you decide the orc might be a useful rival (for groups with a strong melee character or two) or an ally (for a group that needs more melee), it makes more sense to have the PCs encounter her early.

Grothlyn is a member of the Gutspear Hold. Ardax is rather nervous about Grothlyn being here, since her hold members seem doubtful that there's much use to Ardax's overtures to foreign dignitaries. Despite her status as a dignitary, Grothlyn outwardly cares very little about politics. Ardax is starting to suspect the Gutspear Hold is trying to send a message about the impossibility of working with outside groups. He worries the whole reason they sent the berserker here was to cause trouble with the other visitors.

Secretly, Grothlyn is a savvy political operator and manipulated her family's fears to get her sent to Torrentmoot. She rather admires what Ardax is trying to do, although she's worried he's not going to be able to pull off this diplomatic event. She's also better able to control her temper than she's generally given credit for, although she does enjoy the way people seems worried she might fly into a rage at any moment.

When the PCs approach Grothlyn, read or paraphrase the following.

The sound of shattering wood fills the area, and the source is immediately clear: a tall, muscular orc woman with a splitting maul strikes powerful swings at nearby logs. A jumbled pile of already-split wood stands nearby, as does a smaller pile of intact logs. She heaves the maul a few more times, each blow splitting the wood easily. She wipes her brow, then seems to notice others are there.

"Well, are you going to help, or just stand there?" she asks.

Grothlyn is happy to let the PCs take over for a bit. Anyone who is trained in Survival or axes can easily take up the task as she watches. A PC who succeeds at

a DC 15 Athletics or Survival check gains a +1 bonus to influence her.

GROTHLYN

CREATURE 3

MEDIUM HUMANOID ORC
Female orc berserker

Perception +9

Will +9

Discovery DC 15 Belkzen Lore, DC 18 Diplomacy, DC 16 Orc Lore, DC 18 Perception, DC 18 Society

Influence Skills DC 17 Hunting Lore, Plains Lore, or Warfare Lore (to share survival notes and war stories), DC 18 Intimidation (to seem imposing enough to

deserve respect), DC 19 Athletics (to show off Strength though stunts or hard work), DC 19 Survival (to demonstrate self-sufficiency through discussion or deeds), DC 20 Deception, DC 22 Diplomacy

Influence 3: Ardax takes note of the PCs' budding friendship; the PCs earn 10 XP and 1 Reputation Point.

Influence 5: The PCs earn an additional 20 XP. Grothlyn approaches a PC with a cursed hatchet she hasn't been able to get rid of. In fact, it's a *+1 returning hatchet* whose property rune makes it seem like the axe is following her. Once the hatchet's identified, she's sheepish about assuming it was a curse. She wants to keep the hatchet but asks a PC to transfer the *returning rune* elsewhere.

In addition, when Grothlyn is traveling with the PCs, she helps fight. At the GM's discretion, she could join as an active combatant. However, it's simpler if her contributions are more narrative. In this case, she makes one ranged hatchet attack per combat when it would help the PCs; it has a +10 modifier, deals 1d6+4 slashing damage, and makes the target off-guard against the next PC's Strike before the end of the turn. Finally, Grothlyn provides additional assistance at the end of Chapter 2 (page 46).

Resistances Grothlyn's hold has experienced (and survived) hardship over the past few years, after being chased out of their historical territory by other holds. She's ready to experience a few wins. Any PC who enters a competition with her and wins without being gracious or ensuring the contest is a close call puts Grothlyn in a foul mood. The PCs take a -2 penalty Influence her for the remainder of that social round.

Weaknesses Grothlyn is a practical and competitive orc. If a PC incorporates impressive or useful physical effort when Influencing Grothlyn, they gain a +1 circumstance bonus to their check.



Grothlyn

Kestrel

With her easy laugh, friendly attitude, and cheerful demeanor, **Kestrel** (female elf champion of Sarenrae) is quite unlike many of her comparably dour comrades. She is a survivor of Lastwall and part of the group who fled south to Absalom after the reemergence of Tar-Baphon. Accompanied by a tribe of goblins who helped the paladins slip past the undead hordes, Kestrel and her companions settled briefly in the city. Before too long, however, the paladin grew impatient waiting for allies that never arrived to return north and drive the undead back.

Instead of waiting a minute longer, Kestrel asked Watcher-Lord Ulthun II for permission to head back north in search of new allies and track down any survivors of the attack on Vigil. Also frustrated that his efforts to raise allies in the city had accomplished little, Ulthun quickly agreed and gave his blessing to her mission. While he didn't give her outright authority to make new alliances, he did grant her wide latitude to forge diplomatic ties.

Kestrel gathered up a small force of like-minded soldiers, most of them fellow survivors of the destruction of Lastwall, and proceeded north. She soon heard rumors of the orcs' actions at the Battle of Nine Broken Skulls, specifically the brazen way Ardax led their efforts. She saw heroism, bravery, and an unwillingness to serve the Whispering Tyrant that she had no idea the orcs of Belkzen possessed. Here were the very characteristics she and her fellow paladins tried to embody, but in a place she didn't expect to see it. Intrigued, Kestrel made her way to Belkzen and sent a message to Ardax in Urgir.

For his part, Ardax was equally interested in speaking with Kestrel. He's aware of these knights and the fall of Vigil, of course, and was sure the group at the very least had a common enemy in Tar-Baphon. Ardax invited Kestrel to Torrentmoot. By the time the PCs have a chance to meet Kestrel, she and Ardax have been meeting regularly and formed a strong connection. While it's not exactly a friendship, it could certainly grow into one. Throughout Torrentmoot, the two continue to meet and discuss how the survivors of Lastwall and the orcs of Belkzen might work together.

When the PCs meet her for the first time, read or paraphrase the following.

Trivial 3



Kestrel

The pennants above a cluster of finely made white and gold striped tents snap in the constant wind. The tents form a circle around a central campfire, where a group of several armor-clad individuals undertake what looks like regular upkeep on armor, weapons, and other equipment. Symbols of Iomedae and Sarenrae adorn the armor, cloaks, and pennants.

A tall elf steps forward and smiles. "Hello fellow Torrentmooters," she laughs. "That's kind of a mouthful, isn't it? Maybe I should just say, 'hello friends' instead." The woman's dark eyes twinkle with amusement. She then makes a formal bow, her clenched fist at her chest. "My name is Kestrel—a Knight of Lastwall, as are my companions," she says and gestures to the people working on repairs. "On behalf of his grace Lord Ulthun II, I am pleased to make your acquaintance."

She smiles brightly again. "A bit stuffy, but we're nothing if not sticklers for tradition," she says. "So, whom do I have the pleasure of meeting?"

When she's not discussing business, Kestrel is happy to enjoy Torrentmoot. She views this celebration of orc culture as delightful, finding it easy to set aside centuries of Lastwall-Belkzen animosity. However, she's encountered cultural barriers that make it hard to make friends and purchase mementos. Whether negotiating a military alliance with the PCs, learning more about the Burning Sun Hold's devotion to Sarenrae (and the ascended orc god Mahja Firehair), or touring the camp's sights, she's a lively companion who's willing to look on the bright side of most challenges.

KESTREL

CREATURE 3

MEDIUM ELF HOLY HUMANOID

Female elf champion of Sarenrae

Perception +9

Will +11

Discovery DC 18 Diplomacy, DC 18 Perception, DC 18 Religion

Influence Skills DC 17 Heraldry Lore (to speak of famous knights), DC 17 Mercantile Lore (to help Kestrel acquire souvenirs), DC 17 Warfare Lore (to share war stories), DC 18 Diplomacy, DC 19 Religion (to discuss the recent Godsrain), DC 21 Intimidation, DC 23 Deception

Influence 3: Kestrel takes note of the PCs' budding friendship; the PCs earn 10 XP and 1 Reputation Point.

Influence 5: The PCs earn an additional 20 XP. Kestrel goes to her tent to retrieve a low-grade silver scimitar. She shares that it belonged to one of her students in the Knights of Lastwall, though he perished and was

reanimated during the undead invasion several years ago. Kestrel tracked him down, put his undead form to rest, and recovered his weapon. She acknowledges that the blade would be better honored in a warrior's hands than among her luggage, offering it to a PC. She's willing to spend some downtime reshaping it into some other weapon that better fits that PC's fighting style.

In addition, when Kestrel is traveling with the PCs, she helps fight. At the GM's discretion, she could join as an active combatant. However, it's simpler if her contributions are more narrative. In this case, she heals a PC once per combat, restoring 2d6+12 Hit Points to that PC between combatants' turns. Finally, Grothlyn provides additional assistance at the end of Chapter 2 (page 46).

Resistances Kestrel avoids vocally disparaging evil deities while at the Torrentmoot; there are enough orc faiths of an unholy persuasion that she would risk undermining her peaceful mission here. However, she softly challenges evil gods' doctrines when she encounters their followers. If a PC is unrepentant or unsubtle in supporting a crueler faith's edicts, they take a -2 penalty to their next check to Influence Kestrel.

Weaknesses Kestrel wants to enjoy the festivities yet has trouble getting invited to participate. If a PC incorporates enjoying some Torrentmoot activity with Kestrel, they gain a +2 circumstance bonus to the check to Influence her.

QUEST (VITAL): AUROCHS HUNT AND VAULT

This quest can happen at any time, though it works best early in the adventure. One of the older orcs in camp, **Hign Bonesnap** (female orc hunter), approaches the PCs and invites them on a hunt.

A tall, muscular dromaar with a high topknot nods in greeting. She has a beautifully made bow strapped to her back and carries gear suggesting she's ready to leave the camp. "Interested in learning more about the Flood Truce and what it means to Belkzen?" she asks, halfway between a question and a challenge. "If so, come with me. I'm leading a hunt to bolster our supplies and teach folks a thing or two about what it means to survive here.

"The aurochs know before we do when the Deluge is going to happen. They smell it, I think. If we can find some of the beasts, we'll get some useful supplies and also a better sense of exactly when the floodwaters will arrive." She pauses for a moment, then says, "Coming?"

The PCs likely have questions for Hign. Below are likely queries and responses.

Do we have to kill them? Hign gives the PC an appraising look. "Hunting the aurochs is vital to survival here, but I certainly don't expect someone to take a life if they don't want to."

How long will it take? "I expect at least three days, maybe a week at most. Make sure you bring enough supplies to support yourself; this isn't some Taldan guided hunt."

What should we expect? "We're heading into flat, dry terrain with low scrub. Visibility should be good, though that works to the advantage of the hunted and hunter equally. I have a few hunters who plan to come along already. If any of you are skilled at tracking and living off the land, you're welcome to pitch in."

If the PCs agree, Hign tells them she'll be leaving within two hours, with or without them. She is true to her word and doesn't wait for stragglers.

The Hunters: The hunting party consists of Hign and two companions, plus any PC who comes along. If the PCs have made any friends in the camp, they're welcome as well. Despite her suggestions to the contrary, Hign doesn't plan to let any of the dignitaries starve to death. Ardax has told her to show the dignitaries what the aurochs hunt is like, but he wants to keep the guests intact. In combat, Hign and her companions do their best to keep dignitaries alive, though she doesn't keep them out of harm; a few bruises and scars make for a better hunt.

HIGN BONESNAP

CREATURE 3

Elite dromaar mountaineer
Pathfinder Monster Core 6, 259
Initiative Perception +13

JINETH AND RASK

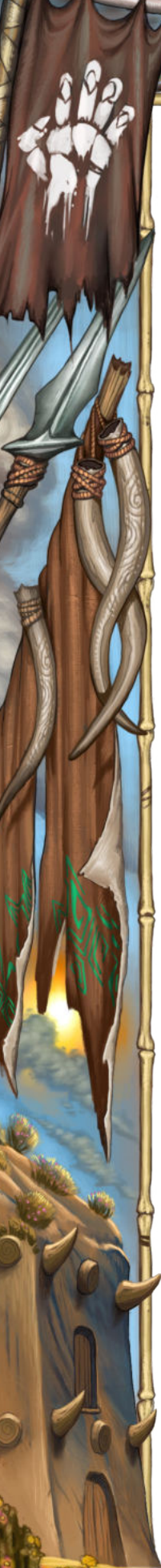
CREATURE 2

Dromaar mountaineers
Pathfinder Monster Core 259
Initiative Perception +11

Survival and Tracking

The hunting party sets out a few hours before midday and heads north. Hign prefers to keep the Flood Road within sight, knowing that aurochs tend to trace its path without walking down its center. The first day passes without incident or any sign of aurochs.

After this first day, the group's progress toward finding aurochs is measured by earning Victory Points (*GM Core* 184). Once the group's point total reaches 10, they begin the Finishing the Hunt encounter. The PCs can earn points by helping track. Socially inclined PCs can instead socialize with the hunters, which doesn't noticeably help find tracks but does make the expedition more enjoyable. The PCs can't



earn more than 4 points per day, and of these, only 2 can be earned by socializing. If the PCs don't reach 10 points by the end of the sixth day, Hign and her team successfully track a few aurochs on their own, beginning Finishing the Hunt encounter.

Tracking: A PC can follow tracks with numerous skills, including Hunting Lore (DC 16), Nature (DC 19), Plains Lore (DC 18), Scouting Lore (DC 16), Stealth (DC 19), or Survival (DC 18). Alternatively, a PC can attempt a DC 21 Perception check. A PC who has the Forager or Survey Wildlife skill feat gains a +2 circumstance bonus to any of these checks.

Socializing: A PC can warm themselves to the expedition with charming conversation, informed questions about Belkzen traditions, a little music while resting, or repairing worn-out gear—at least so long as these actions doesn't ruin the trackers' focus or alert their prey. Suitable skills include Belkzen Lore (DC 17), Crafting (DC 19), Diplomacy (DC 19), Orc Lore (DC 18), Performance (DC 18), or Society (DC 20).

Reward: If the PCs earn at least 7 Victory Points, award them 40 XP. If they earn all 10 Victory Points, they also earn 1 Reputation Point.

Nighttime Ambush

Moderate 3

The following encounter occurs on the second night of the hunt. The Hold of Belkzen is always a dangerous place, and orcs aren't the only creatures who travel to the region to hunt aurochs. Since the campsite can vary considerably depending on the choices of the PCs, there's no map included. If you're looking for a premade map, *Pathfinder Map Pack: Camps & Shelters* works well.

ANKHRAVS (2)

CREATURE 3

Pathfinder Monster Core 20

Initiative Perception +7

Creatures: Large carnivores such as this pair of ankhravs can be found throughout the area. A little early to the feast, these creatures are ravenously hungry. Unless there is a lot of movement in the camp at night for the ankhravs to locate with their tremorsense, the creatures burrow up from the ground 40 feet to the west of the camp. They fight to the death.

Looking for More Trouble: This pair of ankhravs is part of a larger hive several miles to the northwest. While the hive isn't detailed in this adventure, the PCs might decide they need to seek it out. If the PCs discuss tracking down the creatures' lair, Hign says she and her hunters have no interest in going. They see their aurochs-hunting task as vital to the survival of the orcs in the region. If the PCs insist, she and the other

hunters part ways. In such an event, the PCs lose 1 Reputation.

Reward: If the PCs kill or drive off this pair of ankhravs, they earn 1 Reputation.

Finishing the Hunt

Moderate 3

Once the PCs and hunters reach 10 Victory Points, they've found enough information to pinpoint a small herd of aurochs nearby. The orcs prefer a nighttime hunt to leverage their own darkvision, but they time their attack to ensure all the PCs can see clearly. When the group decides to close in on the creatures, read or paraphrase the following.

The land here is rocky and mostly barren except for small patches of tough, low grass and a few scraggly bushes. The Flood Road cuts through a low valley to the north, and low, steep walls give a raised vantage point over the dry riverbed. A dozen aurochs are grazing on one of the patches of grass.

The aurochs are some of the first to arrive in the region before the flooding starts.

Hunting or Jumping: Hign and her companions suggest a two-pronged approach: some members of the party move to the north to cut off that escape route, while the rest of the group moves in on one of the creatures. She makes it clear the goal is to only fell a single aurochs, as bringing down more will likely be wasteful given the distance back to the camp.

If the consensus of the party is that they don't want to kill an aurochs, Hign nods in approval. She notes that the other option is much more dangerous but carries just as much significance as a successful kill. This option is known as "aurochs vaulting" and is outlined in the activity below. Hign pulls out a small vial of white paint and pours it onto the hand of the PC who plans to do the activity. She explains that as the jumper leaps, they must slap their painted hand onto the animal as a sign of success. If the PCs choose to fight the creature instead, a combat encounter ensues.

AUROCHS VAULTING

CONCENTRATE **EXPLORATION**

You attempt to approach an aurochs or other large bovine and leap over it before it can run away. Others can Aid you. Attempt a DC 20 Stealth check.

Critical Success You distract or otherwise foil the creature's senses. Gain a +1 to your next skill check against that creature.

Success You approach the creature without being noticed.

Failure The creature notices you and rolls initiative.

Critical Failure The creature knows you're there but waits until you get close. You are off guard to the aurochs.

The creature makes a horns Strike against you, then rolls initiative.

If you approach the aurochs without it noticing you, attempt a DC 18 Athletics or Acrobatics check.

Critical Success You leap over the animal and slap your painted hand on a prominent part of your choice on the aurochs.

Success You leap over the animal and leave a smeared handprint behind.

Failure You fail to leap over the animal. It rolls initiative.

Critical Failure You stumble before reaching the aurochs. It makes a single Strike against you then rolls initiative.

Creatures: The aurochs are hungry and skittish. Their attitude begins as unfriendly, and they attempt to flee as a group by going north unless herded away from that path. As the rest of the herd moves, two bulls stand their ground and attack. Any aurochs reduced below 10 HP immediately tries to flee.

AUROCHS (2)

CREATURE 3

Page 82

Initiative Perception +9

Rewards: If a character successfully jumps at least one aurochs, award the party 80 XP. As long as they jump or defeat at least one aurochs, award them 2 Reputation Points. In addition, if all three scouts survive, they hand the PCs a flare snare and lesser camouflage dye as a sign of their appreciation.

QUEST: MISSING CHILDREN

This quest occurs at least one week after the Torrentmoot convenes. The orcs of Belkzen rely heavily upon the aurochs for sustenance, but they certainly aren't the only source of food. Young orcs are often tasked with gathering nuts, berries, and plants from the surrounding area, and this camp is no different. Yesterday, a group of three children went off to gather what they could from the hills to the east. They found a secluded hollow formed by the flood in years past. The overhanging rock of the eastern wall created enough shade and damp for mushrooms to grow, and the children excitedly gathered what they could find. They also noticed a concealed cave entrance piled with boulders.

Filled with excitement and hoping they'd find more mushrooms, the children stepped inside only to hear

a haunting song echoing throughout the area. They were soon attacked by recently animated skeletons. Fierce even at a young age, the three children smashed several of the skeletons but found their exit blocked by stones that other, intelligent undead had placed behind them. As these more powerful undead, led by a cairn wight, attacked, the orcs fled to a room with a narrow doorway. While two of the children fended off the attackers, the other barricaded the door.

Temporarily repelled, the remaining undead are content to wait patiently for the young orcs to try to make their escape or until they expire from thirst. With their supplies running low, the orcs have little time before they must risk breaking out.

When the children failed to return as scheduled, their parents approached Ardax. The orc leader took their concerns seriously, but with many camp staff having recently set out on a different hunt, he doesn't have enough people to send out additional patrols. He's suggested the parents recruit the PCs for help.

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the quest.

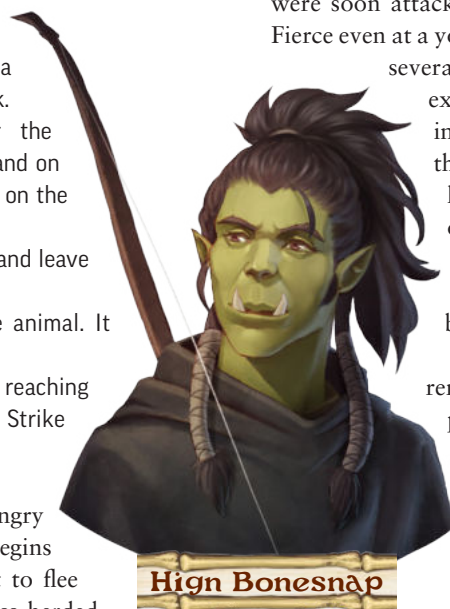
A group of orcs approach, worried and angry expressions on their faces. The woman at the head of the group speaks first. "I'm Therisk. All of us have children who have been missing from the camp for two days. While this is normally not that strange, we aren't from this area and told them all to be back last evening. They told us they were going to forage. Ardax said you can help. Will you look for them?"

The PCs likely have a few questions. Below are some likely answers.

What are their names? "Kar, Xan, and Ilo. They don't have their full adult names yet."

What were they supposed to do? "We sent them to forage for additional supplies for the camp. Kar, the oldest, kept talking about finding mushrooms. It's pretty rare to find such a thing here, especially this time of year."

Why did they go alone? "Part of being a child in Belkzen is testing your strength and determination against the land and its dangers. But they're not old enough yet to be expected to survive real danger, and they know better than to push their limits. Something unexpected must have happened."





THE BARROW
1 SQUARE = 5 FT

What makes you think they're in trouble? "They're properly headstrong, but these three have never failed to return on time. That's part of why we allowed them to come along."

Where do you think they went? "Probably to the east. They mentioned wanting to check that direction later."

Gathering clues about the location: A PC who spends 1 hour asking about the children in the camp learns that the children were talking about the hills to the east and had mentioned some green areas they'd seen from afar that they wanted to investigate. If the character succeeds at a DC 16 Diplomacy check to Gather Information, they reduce the time it takes to find the barrow by 1 hour.

A PC who succeeds at a DC 16 Belkzen Lore, Nature, or Survival check to Recall Knowledge knows there are some low valleys in the east that could potentially have mushrooms growing. This reduces the time it takes to find the barrow by 1 hour.

Development: Several of the parents set out to perform their own searches, having the PCs check one of the search areas. If the PCs refuse to help,

they lose 2 Reputation Points per day with Ardash until the third day, when the children stumble into camp hungry and dehydrated. Xan and Ilo are each quite weak from the experience, but Kar is relatively unscathed. They describe a harrowing escape from the life-draining creatures, and Kar becomes a sort of folk hero in the camp.

Reward: If the PCs learn about the general location of the children's disappearance (the hills to the east), award them 40 XP.

B. The Barrow

The orc children didn't realize until it was too late that the cave they found was one of the many burial sites scattered across Belkzen. Most dead in Belkzen are buried in simple, unmarked graves, their eternal rest formerly entrusted to Zagresh. To be interred in a barrow, even a modest one like this, is unusual and speaks to the importance of those buried here.

If the PCs didn't learn about the hills to the east, it takes a full day to find the barrow. If the PCs know that the children went to the hills to the east, it takes 4 hours of travel to arrive at the barrow. If a PC succeeds at a DC 18 Survival check, this halves the amount of

time. When the characters arrive at the location, read or paraphrase the following.

This narrow ravine is filled with loose stones. The steep walls are somewhat green with tough, clinging grasses keeping the earth in place. The north end of the ravine is shaded by a large boulder, and a dark area beneath it is comparatively lush. A carpet of green moss has numerous mushrooms growing from it.

PCs who get closer to the overhang automatically spot a narrow opening that leads into the barrow. There are also some clues here that show the PCs they're on the right track. A PC who Searches here and succeeds at a DC 16 Perception or Survival check notices many places where the mushrooms have recently been picked. A critical success also alerts the character to a few sets of humanoid tracks that lead into the opening to the north and a piece of torn fabric that indicates someone passed here recently.

Unless noted otherwise, the barrow is dark. Its ceilings are 6 feet tall, and the walls are fitted stone. Bits of loose dirt occasionally fall from the ceiling, although the structure is sturdy.

B1. BLOCKED PASSAGE

The undead moved several large stones to block the passageway and prevent the orc children's escape.

Several large rocks and numerous small ones are piled here, blocking the passage that leads deeper inside.

PCs who Investigate the rocks estimate it will take about 10 minutes to clear the rubble. A PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Crafting, Engineering Lore, or Survival check can reduce this time to 5 minutes. No check is required to move the rocks out of the way and clear the passage.

A PC who Searches and succeeds at a DC 16 Perception check finds more recent tracks of small humanoids in the area; a critical success reveals the tracks go under the rubble and suggest whoever passed here hasn't come back out.

B2. HUNTERS IN THE DARK

MODERATE 3

Huge slabs of stone line the passageways here, with smaller rocks carefully placed between the slabs to create walls. Additional large stones form the ceiling. The construction is rough and unfinished. A cool, dry wind whistles through the halls.

Creatures: While the orc children successfully destroyed several undead during their attempted

escape, some of the creatures still stalk the halls of the barrow, relentlessly seeking the living. They have so far been unable to get past the barricade the orc children put in place, and the presence of new arrivals grabs their attention. If they notice the PCs, some spark of their past gives them enough insight to take a strong position blocking a hallway. Two of the creatures stand in front and fight with claws, while the other two stand behind and use glaives. They fight until destroyed.

SKELETAL SOLDIERS (4)

CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Book of the Dead 147

Initiative Perception +5

Ancient Garb: The skeletal warriors fought in a long-ago battle, and a closer examination can tell the PCs something about the history of this barrow. A PC who Investigates their clothing and armor and succeeds at a DC 19 History Lore or Society check can tell they were likely buried 5,000 years ago, before Tar-Baphon was even born.

Treasure: One of the skeletal soldiers has a *fear gem* wedged into its eye socket.

B3. TRAPPED CHILDREN

The doorway at the end of this passage is jammed with stones and a half-broken door that has fallen off its hinges. Scratches on this barricade show someone on this side recently attempted to break in.

The three orc children have holed up in this room. One of them is always keeping watch. Xan and Ilo are frightened 1 and remain so until they leave the barrow. Having heard the song of the cairn wight and the raspy voices of the other wights, they're initially sure the PCs are more undead coming for them and begin as unfriendly, although they're separated from the group by the barricade and only have small holes to see and talk through. The barricade has AC 10, Hardness 6, 22 Hit Points, and is immune to piercing damage and critical strikes. With concerted effort, the cairn wight could probably break its way in, but it seems to enjoy the fear it's causing and wants it to linger.

The PCs can easily speak to the children through the barrier. Anyone who mentions Torrentmoot, their parents, Ardax, or any other fact about the outside world the undead couldn't know gains a +2 to any checks to Make an Impression. Additionally, they increase their degree of success by one step. Once the children are at least friendly, they believe the PCs and help dismantle the barricade.

KAR

CREATURE 1

SMALL HUMANOID ORC

Elite orc child (*Pathfinder Monster Core* 6, see below)

Initiative Perception +7; darkvision

Items hatchet, explorer's clothing

Melee ♦ hatchet +8 (agile, sweep),
Damage 1d6+3 slashing

Ranged ♦ hatchet +8 (agile, thrown 10 feet), **Damage** 1d6+3 slashing

Biggest Fan! ⤿ (auditory, emotion)

Trigger An ally Kar can see critically succeeds at a skill check or attack roll; **Effect** Kar cheers exuberantly, showering the triggering ally with fawning praise. The triggering ally gains 1d6 temporary Hit Points that last 1 minute.

My Turn! ♦ (concentrate) **Requirements** Kar used Biggest Fan within the last minute; **Effect** Eager to show she's just as strong as her ally, Kar gains a +1 status bonus to attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks until the beginning of her next turn, but only if she performs some activity similar to the action that triggered her Biggest Fan! ability.



part of the world were the same fierce, independent survivors they remain today. They were also often fractious, and when someone who had united them died, they quickly fell back to infighting. One of those temporary, powerful leaders was interred here, their name lost to time, and even the memory of the barrow forgotten.

This rectangular room was clearly built with more care than the others. The stones here are tightly fit, have a smoother finish, and are more consistent in size. A large niche is built into the northern wall.

Creatures: The cairn wight remains in its burial chamber, sometimes standing, sometimes laying in its burial niche, flanked by its skeletal champions. It spends much of its time

singing haunting dirges and trying to remember who it was in life. Those memories are long gone, and only flickers of images remain. The creature's songs are influenced by the necromantic energy flowing through Belkzen with the imminent Deluge. These songs aren't prophetic; rather, they carry suggestions of the power of ancestor storms (page 41) and hints about their origin. The following is just one stanza of the wight's prophetic dirges.

Rising storms, crushing waves

Scrape the land

Darkest will, damned unleashed

Rise and stand

If any of the creatures notice the PCs, they move to attack. They fight to the death but don't pursue beyond the barrow's entrance.

CAIRN WIGHT

CREATURE 4

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 292

Initiative Perception +11

SKELETAL CHAMPIONS (2)

CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Monster Core 312

Initiative Perception +8

Treasure: A long-unused *fighter's fork* carved with images of rivers stands propped in a corner.

B5. LIEUTENANTS' CHAMBER

The two skeletal champions were once interred here. Little remains to mark their lives other than the niches carved into the eastern and western walls.

ORC CHILDREN (2)

CREATURE -1

SMALL HUMANOID ORC

Perception +5; darkvision

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Athletics +3, Stealth +5

Str +1, **Dex** +3, **Con** +2, **Int** +0, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +0

Items dagger, explorer's clothing

AC 14; **Fort** +5, **Ref** +8, **Will** +2

HP 8

Ferocity ⤿

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ dagger +6 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+1 piercing

Ranged ♦ dagger +6 (agile, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+1 piercing

Joining the Fight: Kar is willing to assist the PCs in battle if they allow it. Xan and Ilo have no interest in any fighting and do their best to stay out of danger.

Keep in mind that even though Kar is eager to prove her own strength, combat puts her at considerable risk. Unless the PCs are grossly negligent, she shouldn't face life-threatening harm—particularly if your group finds themes of child endangerment unsettling.

B4. THE RISEN DEAD

SEVERE 3

Before Tar-Baphon, the orcs who resided in this

B6. SECRET TREASURE CHAMBER

The entrance to this room is blocked by a cleverly concealed door that matches the surrounding cobblestone. A PC who Searches and succeeds at a DC 17 Perception check spots the handle and can open the door, which is unlocked. If the PCs enter, read or paraphrase the following.

This room looks like it was once filled with treasures, many of which appear ravaged by the passage of time. Piles of crumbling furs and textiles rest on half-rotted wooden tables.

A PC who Investigates the room and succeeds at a DC 16 Crafting or Nature check can tell water must have leaked into this room several hundred years ago. It has since dried, but the dampness ruined much of the chamber's contents.

Treasure: A few bits of more resilient treasure remain. A PC who Searches the room finds an ancient *drums of war* (*Treasure Vault* 136) made of wood and aurochs hide, as well as gems worth 48 gp.

Returning to Torrentmoot

Once back in Torrentmoot, the PC's exploits become the focus of conversation for several days. If all the children return, Ardax orders a celebration feast with the PCs as the guests of honor.

Rewards: If the PCs rescue the children and return them to Torrentmoot, award them 1 Reputation Point per survivor. The children's parents also give the PCs a well-crafted aurochs-hide bag with a *preserving rune* attached. In addition, if all the children survive, the laborers give the PCs a leather pouch with 30 gp. The PCs also notice the quality of their meals prepared by Ardax's workers noticeably improves as the thankful parents prepare it with extra attention.

QUEST: AIRBORNE RAIDERS

Many of the orcs stay in the camp during the Flood Truce festivities, but several spend time away on any given day. Some need to hunt and continue the necessary work for keeping the camp running, while others simply tire of sitting around instead of wandering. One such group of celebrants, a few members of the Death's Head Hold, have spent the last three days out in the wilds, hunting and exploring. At night they have raucous parties and celebrate their accomplishments.

Last night was no different, and the festivities continued until almost dawn. This morning they broke

camp and continued their travels, slowly meandering back in the direction of the main camp. Late in the afternoon they were set upon by a group of flying creatures—peryttons—who slaughtered many of the group and carried others away. The lone survivor fled back to the main camp, desperate for help and full of rage at the fate of her friends.

The following quest can occur at any point during the PC's stay at the camp. It works best if the PCs have begun to hear rumors of scouts going missing over the course of a few days. A day or two after they first hear these rumors, a survivor from the attack returns to camp, and the PCs are consulted.

A middle-aged orc dressed in torn leather armor approaches. Her eyes are wide, and she is breathing heavily as if she's been running. "You!" she gasps. "We were attacked, and almost all of us were killed. But I saw where they were heading! Time to chase them off and make sure they don't kill anyone else!"

This orc is named Yulen, one of the laborers sent with the Death's Head dignitaries, and after a few seconds the PCs can get the full story from her. She relates the information above, noting there were a total of five companions in her group. A PC who succeeds at a DC 16 Diplomacy check or otherwise finds a way to calm the survivor down learns an important detail about the attack: the wolf-headed monsters tore the heart out of one of the companions.

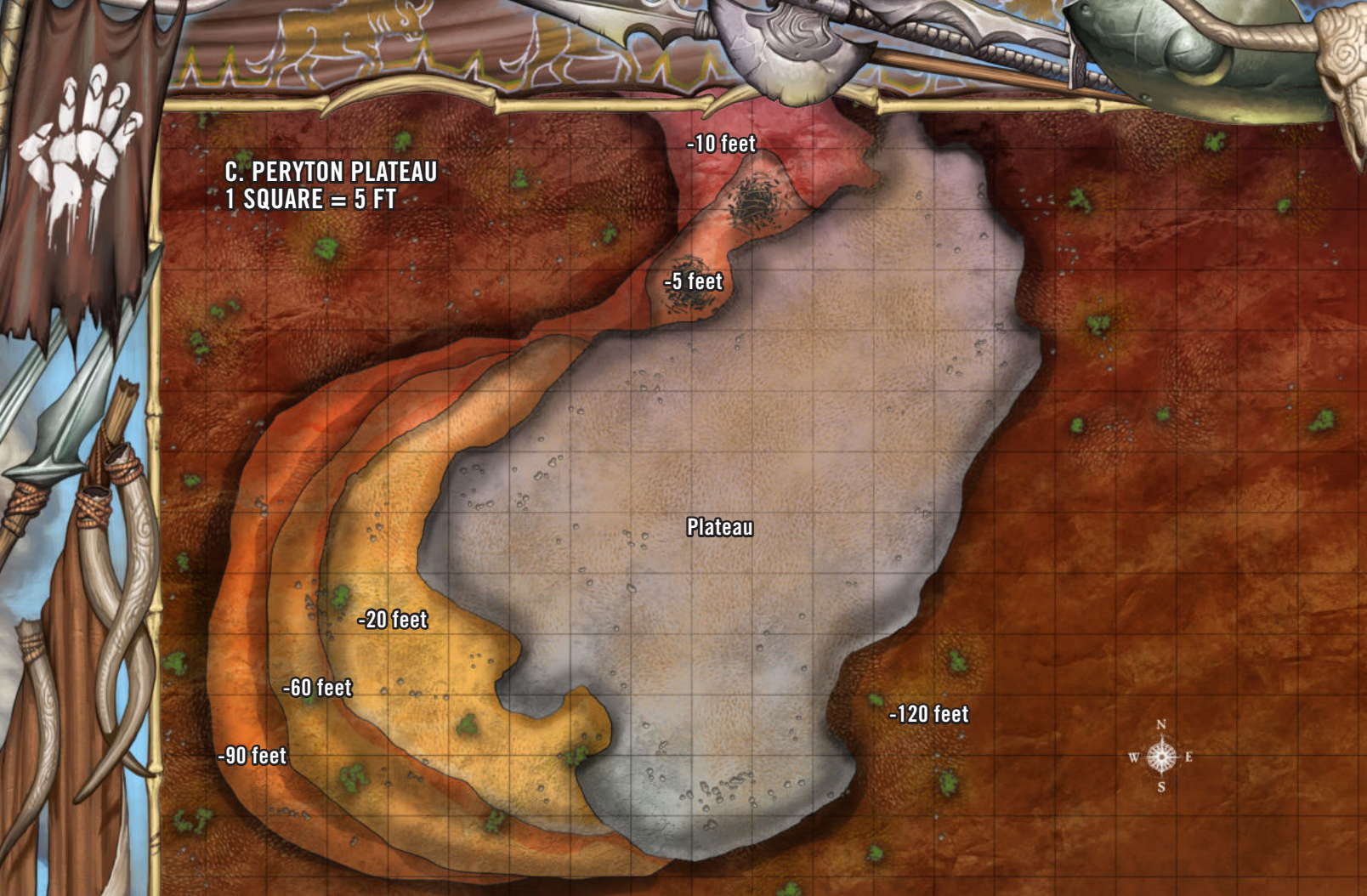
Air Raid

Moderate 3

The PCs don't have much information to go by other than the creatures were flying and that they headed to the east following the attack. Fortunately, the description of flying creatures helps them narrow their search to places with high vantage points. Asking around the camp, talking to Davorr, or succeeding at a DC 18 Belkzen Lore check is enough to realize these kinds of creatures probably dwell near Broken Spears, a badland area about 20 miles away filled with numerous rock spires.

Once they learn the location, traveling to it poses little difficulty until they get within a mile or two. At this point some of the lower-ranking peryttons in the flock spot the travelers and move to attack.

Creatures: With the peryton flock beginning to turn on itself, these two weaker members try to stay far away from the top of the plateau if they can manage it. They have little fear of travelers but flee if reduced to 10 HP, looking for a new nesting ground far from here.



WEAK PERYTON (2)

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 6, 197

Initiative Perception +11

CREATURE 3

C. Peryton Plateau Moderate/Severe 3

Numerous stone spires rise from the surrounding badlands, appearing from a distance to be the broken spears of a gigantic army. As the PCs reach the area, read or paraphrase the following.

Spires of reddish-brown rock rise from a low, shallow canyon. The wind whistles through them, causing a low moaning noise. Above this sound, sudden shrieks and growls echo throughout the area originating from atop one of the spires.

A PC who Searches and succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check can pinpoint the direction of the sound; on a critical success, they also find the corpses of two perytons at the base of a wide spire. Their bodies show signs of combat, although a PC who Investigates and succeeds at a DC 18 Medicine check on the bodies shows the creatures died from the fall after having their wings damaged.

Ascending: The spire where the perytons have nested is 120 feet off the ground and very difficult to access directly. The DC to Climb is 18 and, in addition

to the normal consequences, a PC who critically fails the check alerts the perytons above.

Fortunately for the PCs, the spire is near another cliff face that can be scrambled up without trouble. A PC who Searches or Investigates the area and succeeds at a DC 16 Perception check can locate this other route. Alternatively, once a character starts ascending the main spire, they can spot the other route automatically if they approach from the northwest.

The PCs can also decide to draw the creatures to them. Any sufficient distraction is enough to catch the perytons' notice, in which case they abandon their own squabble and launch themselves at these new enemies.

Creatures: Tahax, a female peryton of considerable strength, managed to pull together a flock of her own children over the last few months. The group has been a deadly scourge in the Broken Spears vicinity, raiding travelers and killing just about anything they can. They have been particularly effective at leaving no witnesses behind until this most recent attack. During their raid on the carousing orcs, one of the warriors landed a strong blow on Tahax. She ordered her flock to finish off the orcs while she fled to their aerie atop one of the spires. In the confusion, the remaining perytons left one of the orcs alive.

When the rest of the flock arrived at the aerie, a confrontation began immediately. They accused Tahax of weakness and cowardice. Tahax expected such behavior from her own children and flew into a rage, tearing apart two of the younger perytons while the others watched. Despite this sudden and decisive violence, the rest of the flock remained suspicious. Over the last few days they have spit curses at each other and been on edge. Several of the flock members simply left, no longer trusting their mother's leadership.

This morning, Achex, the oldest remaining offspring of Tahax, began pushing back against her mother again. While the PCs approach, the two circle each other and combat could break out at any moment.

If the PCs reach the top of the spire without attracting the perytons' notice, read or paraphrase the following.

The top of the spire is remarkably flat and level and grants a spectacular view of the surrounding badlands, the River Road, and the mountains to the north. In the center of the area is a large nest. Two horrific creatures, amalgams of a stag, wolf, and hawk, circle each other near the nest. The smaller of the two speaks in a raspy growl, its eyes intent on the larger creature. "No, mother, your weakness has already ended our flock."

The larger of the two, who looks to have several wounds, replies, "I will find a new mate and raise another flock, daughter. And you will not be part of it."

Once one of the perytons notices the PCs, they immediately shift their attention to the newcomers. If the PCs attempt to speak with the creatures, the perytons listen intently, each trying to find a way to use this development to their benefit. Tahax begins the encounter unfriendly, while Achex is indifferent and more willing to accept outside help. The first peryton to be made friendly or helpful calls for aid from the party and leaps to attack the other peryton. If neither peryton is friendly or helpful within 5 minutes, they join forces long enough to fight the PCs before attacking each other.

TAHAX

CREATURE 4

Peryton (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 197)

HP 60 (currently 45)

Initiative Perception +13

ACHEX

CREATURE 3

Weak peryton (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 6, 197)

Initiative Perception +11

Aftermath: If the PCs side with one of the perytons and the other is killed or driven off, the remaining creature snarls at the PCs before flying away, never to return to the area. If attacked, it flees.

Treasure: The perytons have carried numerous victims (or parts of victims) here. A PC who Searches the nest finds a *wand of widening* (1st-rank spell), an *oil of mending*, and a moderate acid flask in a shredded leather bag.

SIDE QUEST: DRUNKEN DUMBBELL LOW 3

This quest can take place at any time throughout the PCs' stay at Torrentmoot. It's also repeatable until one of the PCs succeeds at the challenge.

Physical strength isn't the only characteristic orcs care about, but it has historically been the most important. With the hard challenges they face living in Belkzen, the near-constant conflicts between orc holds, and threat of attack by dangerous wildlife, most orcs have powerful physiques. But cleverness and insight are also vital to survival, so when Ardax began planning the camp, he encouraged his subordinates to



devise a challenge where strength was necessary but not simply enough.

One of these subordinates, **Chak** (male orc shieldbreaker), devised such a test. He worked with some of the smiths to create what he calls a “drunken dumbbell.” The device looks at first like a rod with weights at either end, but it has two features that make it nearly impossible to lift with one hand. First, the handle of the dumbbell is very thick and difficult to grasp without a powerful grip. Second, the handle is hollow and contains several metal ball bearings that have a unique enchantment: if they all roll to one side, that side of the dumbbell suddenly increases dramatically in weight. When a person lifts the dumbbell, they must keep it level, or the sudden weight shift twists the item out of their hand.

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs approach.

A small crowd of orcs is gathered around a small pavilion. Inside, a heavily muscled orc grabs what looks like a large dumbbell that's set on the ground. He tries to lift it, straining and gritting his teeth before letting out a roar of frustration as his hand slips from the bar. The crowd mutters in surprise. The large orc turns to another orc. “It's impossible, Chak! No one can lift this.”

The second orc grins then stoops down. With a smooth motion he lifts the dumbbell off the ground and holds it over his head for a moment before dropping it onto a pile of

ox hides. “Not impossible,” he says with a raspy voice, “but difficult. Come back again tomorrow and try.”

Attentive PCs might study Chak's successful lift. A PC who Investigates and succeeds at a DC 18 Athletics, Acrobatics, or appropriate Lore check realizes the way he's lifting the weight keeps it perfectly level; this grants them a +1 circumstance bonus on their attempts at the challenge. A PC who critically succeeds can additionally tell the grip Chak is using is a bit peculiar; this insight grants them a +2 circumstance bonus on any attempts at the challenge.

Challenge: During the gathering at Torrentmoot, Chak has set up this space where anyone can test their strength and skill. The rules for the challenge are simple: using only one hand, the person must lift the drunken dumbbell off the ground and hold it over their head for 2 seconds. Accomplishing this feat requires a total of 3 consecutive successes. A critical success counts as two successes, while a failure or critical failure immediately ends the challenge as the character either can't get a grip or the magical weight rips it out of their hand.

Chak allows others to assist the challenger before the test begins (with spells and abilities, for example), but once the test starts, any assistance nullifies the result. There are several ways characters might help. In general, lower the challenge DC by 1 for helpful ideas, or lower it by 2 for particularly clever ideas. The DC can't be lowered by more than 2 from assistance. For spells that grant bonuses to strength or other clear numerical advantages, simply use the spell effect instead of changing the DC.

A PC who wants to undertake the challenge begins by attempting a DC 20 Athletics check to lift the dumbbell off the ground. Next, they must succeed at a DC 19 Reflex save. Finally, they have to attempt a DC 19 Athletics or Acrobatics checks to finish the challenge.

A character can attempt this challenge once per day. If a character succeeds at the challenge, the surrounding crowd breaks out in cheers. The PC likely finds themselves invited to talk with excited spectators and probably offered a few drinks.

Rewards: If one of the PCs successfully lifts the drunken dumbbell, award the group 60 XP and 1 Reputation Point. Chak also gives them 50 gp as an acknowledgement of their accomplishment.



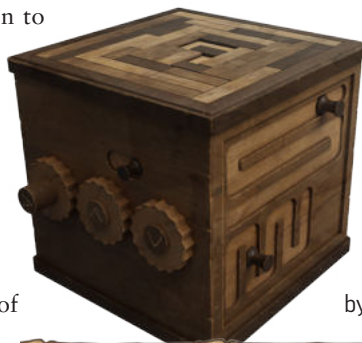
SIDE QUEST: PUZZLE BOX

LOW 3

While the orcs of Belkzen value physical might, they also know that deft hands and cleverness are

important characteristics for survival. Ardax in particular appreciates mental prowess. To that end, the orc leader insisted there be games beyond just feats of strength in Torrentmoot. In addition to giving attendees something exciting to do, he sees these challenges as an opportunity for the fractious orc holds of Belkzen to strengthen their bonds with each other. With that in mind, he personally commissioned a mechanical puzzle box that's impossible to open alone.

The device is kept near the center of the camp. When the PCs approach, read or paraphrase the following.



Ardax's Puzzle Box

A small crowd has gathered around a tall table underneath an awning. Atop the table is a contraption resembling a metal chest. An orc, his eyes narrowed in concentration, pushes a cleverly disguised button on the side, and a section of the box swings open, revealing a glowing pattern within. The orc reaches for the image but lets out a yelp of pain as a jolt of electricity shocks him. The section of the box snaps shut again, and a few of the gathered observers laugh.

The PCs can attempt to open the puzzle box, but simply rushing in and trying to manipulate it is unlikely to work. Though not apparent at first, opening the box requires three characters to work simultaneously in a specific order, and then each must succeed at the appropriate skill check.

Studying the Puzzle Box: A character can spend 10 minutes Investigating the box or watching others try to open it, and then attempt a DC 19 Engineering Lore or Perception check. A PC who succeeds realizes the device requires at least three people working simultaneously to open it; on a critical success, they realize it's possible to replace one of the necessary skill checks with a Strike. A critical failure means the character misunderstands an element of how the box works and takes a -1 circumstance penalty to their next attempt to open the box.

A character can also spend 10 minutes Investigating the box either physically or with magic. A PC who succeeds at a DC 19 Arcana or Occultism check realizes the box is magical as well as mechanical; a critical success reveals that one of the checks to open it can be replaced by targeting it with a spell or ability that has the Electricity trait.

A PC who spends 10 minutes Investigating the box and succeeds at a DC 19 Society check to Decipher Writing finds clues that grant a +1 on one of the checks

to open it; a critical success reveals insights that grant this bonus to all checks to open it.

ARDAX'S PUZZLE BOX HAZARD 4

COMPLEX MAGICAL MECHANICAL

Description A chest-sized puzzle box is covered in intricate designs, with no immediately obvious way to open it.

Disable DC 19 Thievery (trained), DC 18 Thievery, and DC 18 Perception simultaneously by at least 3 characters; one of these checks can be replaced by a Strike against AC 19, and one can be replaced by targeting the box with a spell that has the electricity trait and deals at least 1 damage (this ignores the

box's Hardness).

AC 21; **Fort** +14, **Ref** +8

Hardness 12; **HP** 50 (BT 25); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Shocking Failure **Trigger** A creature fails one of the disable checks; **Effect** An electric jolt shocks all creatures who were attempting to open the box. This deals 2d8+5 nonlethal electric damage, and each creature must attempt a DC 21 basic Reflex save.

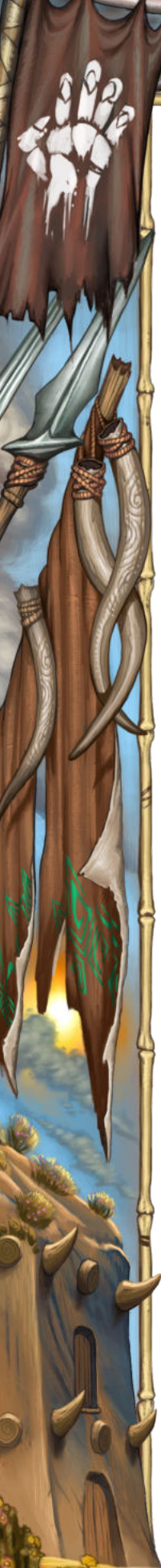
Reset The box resets immediately.

Opening the Box: If the PCs manage to get the box open, award the party 60 XP and 1 Reputation Point. The box contains a *dragon turtle scale* and a blank, flawless parchment scroll whose border has been artfully tooled with geometric patterns; Ardax tells them to keep both as their reward. If they opened the box by breaking it, he's less impressed, earning the PCs the treasure inside but no Reputation.

SIDE QUEST: TOOTH-SOME QUARREL MODERATE 3

Many orcs take great pride in their tusks. The holds of Belkzen in particular are vain about this feature, and almost every orc has a favorite tusk. Some go so far as to band them in precious metals or stud them with gems, although there's lively debate about how much decoration is too much. So, when an orc warrior named Gnarsh awoke this morning to realize his favorite tusk had been stolen right from his mouth, the ruckus he raised got a lot of attention.

This quest can happen on any day, preferably in the early morning. It's possible for it to go on for some time, spread out over several days. The PCs are alerted by shouting from Gnarsh's tent after he wakes up. While some non-orcs may be puzzled or even amused



by the orcs' reactions, PCs who succeed at a DC 15 Perception check to Sense Motive realize the gathered orcs are reacting with something more like scandal and worry. A PC who succeeds at a DC 17 Belkzen Lore, Orc Lore, or Society check knows how important the idea of a favorite tusk is for orcs in the region. On a critical success, they recall that removing a tusk from a fallen foe is considered a huge insult in some holds and the height of battle prowess in others.

While this theft doesn't immediately set off an investigation by Ardax, the PCs can choose to take up the case. If no one investigates, however, the attacks begin to spread. The next day there are four reports of missing teeth, followed by six the day after. This continues indefinitely until three-fourths of the camp has had a tusk or tooth stolen.

The cause of all the trouble is a turf war between two rival gangs of tooth fairies. Unbeknownst to Ardax when he chose this spot, a swarm of the vicious fey considered the area their property. Because of its suitable terrain for camping, this plateau has hosted numerous travelers and merchants for decades. With a fresh supply of travelers, the tooth fairies keep a close eye out for new arrivals who they can attack.

A missing tooth for an occasional traveler is usually little more than a painful nuisance, but the attending members of the Bloodied Gauntlet accidentally brought an entirely separate mob of the fairies who were hiding out in their supplies. These two groups of tooth fairies soon discovered each other and have been secretly facing off just out of sight. In true tooth fairy fashion, these gangs—calling themselves the Cuspids and Cisors—started battling each other for prestige by removing the most spectacular teeth, or tusks in the case of the orcs, to outdo the opposing group.

Investigating the Missing Teeth

If the PCs decide to investigate this mystery, they can learn quite a bit. A PC who spends 2 hours asking around Torrentmoot and succeeds at a DC 18 Diplomacy check to Gather Information hears there are a few people who have lost teeth in the camp. While they found this loss mystifying, none of them thought it worth mentioning to the guards. A critical success reveals the Bloodied Gauntlet has suffered more of these losses than other holds. Additionally, a PC who spends an additional hour of Gathering Information hears several reports of what sounded like angry, squabbling birds at the north side of the plateau.

The PCs can follow up on these clues by investigating the locations where the tooth disappearances happened.

A PC who Searches the Bloodied Gauntlet camp and succeeds at a DC 18 Perception or Survival check finds tiny footprints of ash at one of the tents left by one of the Cuspids who stepped around the edge of a cooking pit before it landed on the tent. A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Survival check to Track can locate the hiding fairies 1 minute later inside a large crate.

The Cisors are more difficult to find, as they live in an abandoned animal burrow just north of Ardax's tent near the edge of the plateau. A PC who Searches that area and succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check can hear the chatter of high-pitched voices coming from a hole in the ground partially covered by a shrub. If a PC approaches within 5 feet of the burrow, the fairies fly out and attack.

Creatures: The two mobs of tooth fairies have settled into a contest of one-upping each other. Each night that passes without being driven out, they find new victims from whom they can steal teeth. The Cuspids are particularly fond of bigger molars, while the Cisors enjoy tusks. Each group has a growing stockpile of teeth hidden away in the camp. At first, they're active only at night and do their best to avoid raising an alarm. The fairies' sense of self-preservation, however, is rapidly dwindling in favor of open warfare with the other mob. If left unchecked for four or more days, their battle spills into the daylight hours as they rampage through the camp yanking as many teeth as they can.

The Cuspids and Cisors keep a close watch on each other. If the PCs locate one of the fairy mobs, that swarm immediately attacks, accompanied by its leader (a stronger tooth fairy wielding a sword made from the stolen tusk). The other swarm arrives 2 rounds later and joins the fray, not wanting to be outdone. In battle, each mob tries to maximize the number of creatures caught in the swarm. If this results in three or more creatures, they use Pinch on each target, while if there are fewer than three, they pick one target and Pry. A swarm flees the area forever if reduced below 10 Hit Points.

TOOTH FAIRY LEADER

TINY **Fey**

Variant tooth fairy (*Monster Core 327*)

Initiative Perception +8; darkvision

Languages Fey

Skills Acrobatics +8, Stealth +6, Thievery +8

Str +1, **Dex** +5, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +2

Items pliers, tuskblade

AC 18; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +11, **Will** +5

HP 35

Plaque Burst (DC 19, *Monster Core 327*).

CREATURE 2

Melee ♦ pliers +11 (disarm, finesse), **Damage** 1d6+5 bludgeoning plus tooth tug

Melee ♦ tuskblade +10 (forceful, two-hand d10), **Damage** 1d6+5 slashing

Primal Innate Spells DC 18; **1st** sleep; **Cantrips (1st)** daze, telekinetic hand

Tooth Tug ♦ (Monster Core 327)

TOOTH FAIRY SWARMS (2)

CREATURE 3

Pathfinder Monster Core 327

Initiative Stealth +10

Rewards: Searching the fairy lairs or interrogating a surviving fairy is enough to locate each mob's stash of teeth. In addition to those that belong to residents of Torrentmoot, there are gold fillings and bits of jewelry from previous victims that total 32 gp, as well as an infiltrator's elixir. As long as the PCs took the lead in the efforts against the fairies, Ardax tells the PCs they should keep this treasure.

SIDE QUEST: WORD WRESTLING MODERATE 3

Orcs have a tradition of brazen bragging, intimidating performances, and storytelling referred to as "word wrestling." These practices have become somewhat formalized into a kind of ritualized insulting in which competing orcs verbally taunt each other in front of a gathered crowd. These contests become particularly important during the Flood Truce since they allow the holds to settle disputes with minimal bloodshed.

Most of these performances spring up spontaneously during meetings between the various orc holds. Ardax, however, has arranged for a series of planned events to give the visiting dignitaries an insight into Belkzen culture. The contests take place several times during Torrentmoot, typically twice per week, although you can adjust this schedule depending on your game's needs. The PCs should have at least 2–3 chances to participate before the Deluge.

The first time the PCs attend one of these contests, read or paraphrase the following.

A small crowd has gathered around two orcs in the center of the campsite. They glare angrily at each other. Ardax steps on one of the log benches and addresses everyone. "What we have here is contest of wits and wills. During the Flood Truce, we don't use combat to settle arguments. Well, for the most part," he admits and the crowd chuckles.

"So we have a tradition of trading insults instead of blows, although some say these can sting just as much. More than one orc hold leader has risen to their position

through cutting words. And more than one relationship has blossomed after one!" The two orcs in the center give Ardax a suspicious look.

"But probably not here," he admits. "Grask and Ohtha, are you ready?" he asks. The two competitors nod. "Good. Grask, you go first."

The older orc stands straight and glares at the other. "They say the greatest orc warriors are like the rushing river, washing their enemies away before them." He pauses dramatically. "I've heard you're a body of water, too: a babbling brook."

A few people in the crowd laugh, and Ohtha smiles as he speaks. "Even a brook can wear away stubborn old stones," he replies. The crowd chuckles and Ohtha continues. "Many of us draw strength from spirit animals like the wolf or bear. I know this is true of you as well. Why, just the other day I saw you conversing with a dove!"

The contest continues like this for a few more minutes, with each orc landing a few insults before Ohtha is declared the winner. Both contestants laugh at each other and are soon acting like close friends.

Ardax then offers the opportunity for anyone who wants to try flyting to take a turn. He certainly doesn't require any of the visiting dignitaries to participate in the contests. He doesn't, however, prevent anyone from trying their skills if they really want to.

How It Works: Each contest is between two individuals, each taking turns at spontaneously creating and delivering insults to the other. Whoever is unable to come up with a response to the other competitor within a few seconds of their last line is the loser. The audience also occasionally declares a winner if a performance is especially clever and decisive.

The battle begins with rolling for initiative using Performance. Then the characters take turns insulting the other participant, attempting one of the following skill checks against their opponent's Will DC: Deception, Intimidation, or Performance. Orc Lore is also a suitable skill against an orc opponent, relying on knowledge of cultural tropes to cut deeply with words. The competitor earns Victory Points (GM Core 184) based on their check's result. Grant a +1 or +2 circumstance bonus if a PC's insult or boast is especially clever.

The first to reach 3 Victory Points wins the match.

Rewards: The first time a PC wins the contest, award the PCs 20 XP and 1 Reputation Point. They're also handed a sinew-shock serum during the party later that night as a gift from Ardax. They can compete and win up to twice more, earning 10 additional XP with each victory.

NPC STATISTICS

Given the number of NPCs the players can interact with throughout the adventure, and the fact that there are battles those NPCs are present for, you might want stat blocks for the NPCs. The assumption of this adventure, however, is that any combat the NPCs are involved in takes place “off camera” at the same time the PCs are fighting their own battles. There’s a balancing act here between making NPCs such as Ardax and Kestrel seem competent and having them rescue the players from trouble. If the PCs are in a situation that requires it, the various orc statistics in *Monster Core* and in the back of this adventure can stand in.

EVENT (VITAL): MEETING WITH ARDAX LOW 3

This event can take place at any time, but it works best if it happens after the PCs have had ample time to influence the other dignitaries.

Impressions

Before you begin this section, also note the PCs’ Reputation Point total. Below is a breakdown of the different levels of impression and how Ardax responds to each. Remember that the PCs can earn RP after Chapter 1, so Ardax’s view can be different at the end of the adventure.

0–5 RP (Unimpressed): Ardax is dismissive of the PCs and their presence at the camp. He isn’t openly rude to them but doesn’t go out of his way to interact with them much, either.

6–8 RP (Mildly Impressed): Ardax makes a point of checking in with the PCs at least once before or after their meeting in this event. He suggests some ways they might become more involved in Torrentmoot.

9–11 RP (Moderately Impressed): The orc leader views the PCs as capable adventurers to be trusted with sensitive tasks, as well as important to the success of his mission to build relationships beyond Belkzen. He occasionally seeks the PCs out in person to learn about what they’ve been doing in the camp. Ardax awards them 20 gp for the services they’ve performed.

12+ RP (Greatly Impressed): Ardax believes the PCs are marked for greatness. He knows they’re still relatively new adventurers and is astonished at their achievements so far. He calls upon the PCs for advice and ideas, speaking about them to others in the camp in glowing terms. The next time he has a chance,

he awards them a +1 *striking warhammer* from his private stores as a sign of appreciation.

A messenger tells the PCs Ardax wishes to meet the following day. Once the PCs go to the meeting, read or paraphrase the following.

Ardax the White-Hair stands at a table where piles of arrowheads, feathers, twine, and straight arrow shafts are heaped. Another orc, one of the guards, drops off a square of wax, nods, and walks away. He smiles grimly and speaks. “Thank you for taking the time to come. I hope you don’t mind if I do a little work as I talk. Making arrows is second nature to me, and I find it helps me relax.”

If the PCs object, Ardax accepts their decision without complaint. If any of the PCs offer to help, he points at the supplies and says, “Go right ahead. There’s always plenty of work for skilled hands.” A PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Crafting or Survival check gains a +1 circumstance bonus to checks to influence Ardax; a critical success provides a +2 bonus and an appreciative whistle from the orc.

Ardax addresses each PC by name. He also notes an accomplishment from the character’s past, even if it occurred before their arrival at the camp. He has very good information about each of the PCs, and tells them these accomplishments are part of the reason why he invited them. This is a good place to build the PC’s connection to the story of this adventure and overall Adventure Path. He then continues.

“As important as these accomplishments are,” he says, “those aren’t the only reasons you’re here. You see, there are plenty out there,” he nods generally at the outside world, “who will never see Belkzen as more than a dangerous land full of cruel orcs.” He chuckles. “Even if they sometimes have a point.

“But you’re here because you see more than that. Maybe you think we’ll be a good buffer to the Whispering Tyrant, that we just have a bad reputation, or that we’re potential allies. Whatever the case, you have the right mindset for building a relationship with us, or at least that is my hope.

“Whatever my personal hopes to shape Belkzen are, it’s always going to be a place where strength and might are needed to survive. But I don’t want it to ever again become a pawn like it was for Tar-Baphon!” he says, his voice gaining an edge of fervor. He visibly calms himself and continues. “As much as it may make the hold leaders shout, this isn’t a task we can hope to do while turning away the outside world. So tell me. What’s your advice for building relationships between the Hold of Belkzen and our neighbors?”

At this point, Ardax listens to the PCs. Give each player a chance to suggest ideas if they like. He pays close attention to their points but is careful not to make any promises to the PCs about relationships between Belkzen and other organizations or nations. The goal of this encounter is to give the PCs a chance to learn more about Ardax and for him to learn about them, so it can be as short or long as you wish.

EVENT (VITAL): RESTLESS DEAD MODERATE 3

This event should occur after the PCs have met Ardax. It makes most sense to happen a week or so before the Deluge.

While the first ancestor storms haven't fully formed, the energies that soon lead to their creation flows throughout Belkzen, gathering strength. The dwellers of the Barrow (area **B**) were animated by these same powers. As the storms grow in power, they begin to lash out and reanimate even recently killed creatures.

This encounter takes place at night after a long party is starting to quiet down. When you begin the encounter, read or paraphrase the following.

The night is chilly, and a brisk wind blows through the camp. Those few who are still awake sit on the hewn log benches that surround the central fire pit and talk quietly. Embers from the pit still radiate a great deal of heat, their deep red coals glowing in time with the wind.

The soft sounds of conversation are suddenly interrupted by screams. A tall shadow from the edge of the clearing resolves into the shape of a lumbering bear. Huge clumps of hair are missing from the beast, and much of its flesh has been torn away. Glowing green eyes regard the camp as it moves to attack!

The undead attack is spread throughout the camp, and the guards are busy handling attacks elsewhere, leaving the PCs to deal with the sudden appearance of these rampaging ursine undead.

Creatures: Before the start of Torrentmoot, Ardax sent out parties of scouts to clear any dangerous creatures from the vicinity. The orcs did a fine job, rooting out several diseased bears. With their meat useless from whatever wasting disease that had infected them, the hunters dragged the corpses far away from the campsite and covered the bodies as best they could with vegetation. Now they are all reanimated by the necromantic energies growing in

Belkzen, and the creatures move through the camp near where they once lived, hungering for the living. They fight until destroyed.

ZOMBIE BROWN BEARS (2)

CREATURE 3

LARGE **MINDLESS** **UNDEAD** **ZOMBIE**

Perception +12; darkvision

Skills Athletics +10

Str +5, **Dex** +1, **Con** +4, **Int** -5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -1

Slow A zombie brown bear is permanently slowed 1 and can't use reactions.

AC 18; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +6

HP 92 (void healing); **Immunities** death effects, disease, mental, paralyzed, poison, unconscious; **Weaknesses** vitality 10, slashing 10

Speed 30 feet

Melee **✦** jaws +10, **Damage** 2d8+5 piercing

Melee **✦** claw +10, **Damage** 1d10+5 slashing plus Grab

Ripping Maul **✦** **Requirements** The zombie brown bear has a creature grabbed; **Effect** The zombie chews and rips at the target, dealing 2d8+5 piercing damage with a basic Reflex save.

After the PCs defeat the undead beasts, they can move to help the other parts of the camp under attack. While such encounters aren't outlined here, you can use the same creatures in other areas as a way to boost the PCs if their Reputation Points are low.

Rewards: Award the PCs 1 Reputation Point for each of the undead creatures they defeat, up to a maximum of 3.



Zombie Bear



Chapter 2: Flood of Nightmares

Three to four weeks after Torrentmoot begins, signs indicate that the Deluge is imminent. Aurochs sightings become more common, a variety of bird species that haven't been seen in the area before start to appear, and the air grows colder. You can time the start of this chapter however you like, ensuring the PCs have enough time to carry out the tasks they want to and that they take advantage by obtaining goods from the many merchants gathered for the event. Read or paraphrase the following to begin the next part of the adventure.

Everyone in the camp gathers around the main fire pit. There is an air of excitement and expectation in the crowd, enthusiastic chatter about the Deluge and the life it brings on everyone's lips. Davorr's explanation of migratory cycles abruptly stops when Ardax steps onto a log bench,

the crowd respectfully falling silent. The white-haired orc gestures broadly to encompass everyone there.

"Friends," he says, "I can call you that, I think, after our time together. It has truly been a pleasure to be here with you. We've faced challenges I did not expect, but that is the nature of Belkzen. The hardships, the pain, the threat of death: these are all ever-present.

"But so too are the joys of testing your strength, of solving challenges and overcoming them with the tools you have at hand. These experiences have shaped us into survivors able to face anything, and soon you'll witness another of Belkzen's wonders: the Deluge is nearly upon us. I have chosen a place to overlook the spectacle where we won't be in danger of getting washed away. The journey is only a couple of hours, and we'll leave at midday. We'll return after nightfall."

The PCs have enough time to gather any supplies they want to bring with them. Most of the others in the camp leave the bulk of their equipment and gear at Torrentmoot, but no one questions someone who decides to carry all their belongings with them.

THE DELUGE

The trip to the overlook is straightforward and poses no dangers for the attendees of Torrentmoot. High Bonesnap leads the way. Throughout the trip, Ardax moves to different parts of the line, visiting with dignitaries and answering questions. During the rest of the adventure, he refers to the camp attendees as the “Torrentmoot Expedition” or simply “the expedition.”

The terrain slopes gently upward at the start of the hike, then becomes steeper after about an hour. Ardax chose a route that would be easy for a large group to navigate, however, and even the steep terrain is not hard to traverse. He and his guards assist anyone who needs it.

The hike is a good opportunity for the PCs to speak with any dignitaries they haven’t interacted with already or to repair any relationships they’ve already damaged. Ardax is pleased to speak with the PCs again as he moves up and down the line of travelers, Davorr is excited to look at the terrain and happily jots down notes every few minutes, and Grothlyn continues to boast to anyone who listens. Lastly, Kestrel chats pleasantly with other attendees; her accompanying knights follow behind, fully armed and armored as if expecting battle.

The Vantage Point

When the PCs reach their destination—the top of a mesa just to the east of the Flood Road—read or paraphrase the following.

The rocky promontory provides a spectacular view of the lands to the north and west. Most of what’s visible are rocky hills and plains, and a few flat-topped mesas dot the landscape. In the immediate area, the terrain is barren and dry, with small bushes and trees clinging to life along the cliff face below as well as in small clusters throughout the plain. Far away to the north are snow-capped mountains.

The sky is filled with dark and roiling clouds, although no rain falls from them. The ever-present winds from the north are strong and carry the scent of water as herds of aurochs graze contentedly in the distance.

The group is about half a mile from the Flood Road and elevated 150 feet above the level where the flood will be. It’s clear there is no danger from the floodwaters to anyone at the overlook.

Ardax encourages the dignitaries to find comfortable vantage points. The area of the overlook has been set up as a temporary camp by the staff ahead of time, with numerous stumps and rough benches placed near the edge of the mesa to grant excellent views. While no one knows the exact time the Deluge will arrive, environmental signs have them fairly confident that it will be today.

The PCs have some time to speak again with anyone from the camp, although most are distracted and more interested in watching for the imminent flood than in any in-depth conversations. Any PC who tries to influence dignitaries here takes a –1 circumstance penalty to their checks.

A Whiff of Danger: There are hints that not everything is quite right in the area as necromantic energy builds up in the environment. Allow each PC to attempt a secret DC 18 Perception check; a PC who can cast spells or use abilities with the arcane, divine, or occult traits treats the result as one degree of success higher.

Critical Success As success, and the character feels a terrible sense of foreboding. This foresight grants them a +1 circumstance bonus to initiative rolls for the rest of the day.

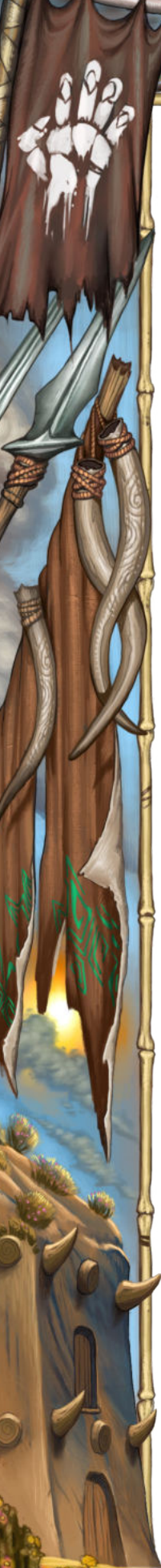
Success The character senses something wrong and notices that no animals, not even birds, are in the area.

Critical Failure The character’s mind wanders into daydreams. Their thoughts are filled with images of skeletal claws erupting from the ground and grabbing them before they suddenly snap out of it. They’re frightened 1 until they earn 2 Escape Points in the upcoming chase (page 33).

Sharing Their Fears: If the PCs tell Ardax their concerns, he listens intently and nods. “I’ve been feeling like something is wrong, too,” he admits. “Like the air is stale or my chest is being squeezed. I’m glad to know it isn’t just me, although I wish it were just in my head.” He frowns. “I don’t want the people here to succumb to some nameless fear, but I don’t want to just ignore this. What do you suggest we do?”

Ardax is willing to follow the PCs’ advice as long as the expedition can stay at least until the main waters arrive. If they leave now, he reasons, the entire purpose of Torrentmoot will be undermined, and he’s sure it will do more harm than good.

Rewards: If the PCs share their concerns with Ardax, he presents them with a *spacious pouch* (type I) that contains a *potion of water breathing* in thanks; additionally, award them 1 RP. If they help Ardax plan in case of emergency, they begin the upcoming chase scene (page 33) with 1 Escape Point instead of 0, reflecting their forewarning.



POINT SYSTEMS

This chapter uses a Chase subsystem and a Victory Point subsystem, requiring the GM to track two different types of points that represents the progress of the PCs.

Escape Points: The PCs will be racing the clock to return to camp as fast as possible so they have enough time to gather supplies for the caravan. Escape Points represent the speed and efficiency of the group, culminating in a starting number of Caravan Points.

Caravan Points: Caravan Points symbolize the amount of supplies the fleeing caravan has access to as well as the state of morale. If the number of CP falls too low, the PCs will encounter conflict from dissatisfied Torrentmoot attendees and the risk of losing members of the group.

The Waters Arrive

After approximately two hours (or earlier if you wish), the first of the flood waters wash down the Flood Road. Read or paraphrase the following.

Shouts and cries of excitement go up around the camp as everyone looks to the northwest. It takes a moment to notice, but the Flood Road itself looks like it's moving. A few seconds later, it becomes clear that this is the leading edge of the flood waters, full of dirt, mud, and large chunks of debris. The water washes down the road a foot or two high, moving slowly in a large trickle.

Several attendees mutter and a few chuckle at this less-than-impressive sight. Ardax calls out to the crowd, "That was just a spillover from a melted lake, like a first sip of ale. Just watch."

Within a few minutes, a low rumbling soon becomes a roar that can be heard even from this distance. A veritable wall of water some 20 feet high crashes and churns its way through the Flood Road, and where it passes, it overflows the banks and spreads across the terrain for perhaps 100 feet on either side.

The main channel of what has become a sudden river rushes past. Uprooted trees, tumbling boulders, and chunks of ice as large as houses are pushed irresistibly along by the flow of the water. Before long, the once dry and parched terrain has been transformed into a rushing river with a wide, waterlogged morass on either side.

The dignitaries are impressed by the sight, and it spawns a great deal of conversation. Ardax entertains questions good-naturedly and does note that this is one of the larger floods he's witnessed. He tells his

guests that the plan is to stay here for a few hours, then return to the base camp.

After about an hour, the waters along the banks of the river are fully absorbed and the river settles properly into its banks. It continues to rush down the Flood Road, but the larger detritus its waters carried was mostly at the front of the main wave.

The Resurrection Flood

Allow the PCs to mingle with the dignitaries and admire the view. Socializing PCs may attempt checks to influence the dignitaries. PCs who are looking at the environment can attempt a DC 16 Nature or Perception check. On a success, they notice signs of movement along the saturated land on the river's banks; if they critically succeed, they realize that creatures appear to be emerging from the ground. The DC of this check is lowered by 2 for every 10 minutes that pass until this movement is plain for anyone to see. Once a PC notices the movement, Ardax also spots it. Read or paraphrase the following.

The movement along the banks of the Flood Road grows more and more pronounced as muddy forms emerge from where the water has touched. Some lumber about, while others move with disturbing grace. Within a few minutes, hundreds of creatures have clawed their way out of the earth. The hordes begin moving away from the river on either side.

Ardax stares for a moment longer, flanked by his guards, as the other dignitaries look on with growing alarm. The white-haired orc's eyes widen, then quickly narrow in determination. His tone commanding, he shouts, "We're returning to the base camp immediately. You will have only a few minutes to gather your most important possessions before we leave. There is no time to waste; GO!"

The PCs can take a moment to study the shapes from a distance. A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Religion check is certain the shapes are undead; on a critical success, they can see that there seems to be a mixture of different kinds of undead, ranging from mindless zombies to intelligent ghouls. If they succeed at an additional Recall Knowledge check with Occultism, Religion, or Society, the PC is aware that there may be floodslain (page 84). A PC who succeeds at DC 18 Warfare Lore or similar Lore check understands that Ardax's plan should provide enough time for the gathered attendees to flee if they don't dawdle; if they critically succeed, they gain the insight that Ardax likely intends to lead the group to Cleft Head Hold in the east to seek shelter and aid.

Reward: If at least one of the PCs shares their observations with Ardax, he nods approvingly. Award them 1 RP.

Extra Responsibilities: If Ardax is mildly impressed or better with the PCs, he asks them to help lead the group back to camp, and they gain 1 Reputation Point with him. If he is unimpressed, one of the NPC scouts (ideally someone they've worked with before) approaches the PCs instead and asks for their help at the front of the retreat.

FLEE!

The need to hurry back to the base camp creates additional problems for the PCs since the most direct route takes them through obstacles they simply avoided on the way to the overlook. The following section details the hurried rush back to the base camp. The more successful the PCs are in this section, the more time the entire expedition has to gather supplies, form a caravan, and flee to the east.

Running the Chase

Flee! uses a modified version of the Chase subsystem rules (*Pathfinder GM Core* 192). Instead of an opposed roll against the pursuers, this is a race against the clock. The PCs are trying to earn Escape Points (EP) rather than accumulating Chase Points to overcome each obstacle. The more successful the PCs are in overcoming obstacles, the more time everyone in the expedition has at the base camp before they leave. This will culminate in Caravan Points (CP), which represent the caravan's inventory; Caravan Points are detailed on pages 38-39.

Unless stated otherwise, each PC can attempt the listed check to bypass the obstacle once to earn Escape Points. A PC who doesn't attempt a check earns 0 points. The following outcomes apply to each obstacle except Stragglers and More Monsters.

Critical Success The PC earns 2 Escape Points and 1 Reputation Point with Ardax.

Success The PC earns 1 Escape Point.

Critical Failure The PC subtracts 1 from the Escape Point total.

As with other chases, obstacles might be overcome by using spells, abilities, or by expending resources. Reward such uses with 1 EP, and reward particularly clever or helpful tactics as if the PC had critically succeeded.

Ardax's Aid: Once during the chase, a single PC who critically fails a check can accept help from Ardax or his warriors. You or the player can describe what form this assistance takes. The assistance changes the critical failure into a success.

NOT SO HELPLESS

During the chase to the main camp, the other members of the expedition are not just standing around and waiting for the PCs to save them! Unless stated otherwise, they must deal with the same obstacles the PCs do. You can assume NPCs pass the obstacles successfully, following the lead of the PCs. Take some time to describe how the expedition NPCs are doing. Ardax and his warriors are the most competent, but they're slowed down by assisting other less-effective expedition members.

Some players may want to stop and help other NPCs who are struggling. This level of investment in those characters is something to encourage. If there is an NPC the characters have grown particularly attached to, you can create a scene where the PCs can provide needed help at an important moment. This can be done narratively or with an appropriate DC 19 skill check. Whether the check succeeds or not, this is likely a good place to reward a Hero Point.

Needledown Cactus

Low 4

Shortly after the expedition begins its retreat, they encounter their first challenge.

Scattered rocks and patches of brown grasses dot the rolling hills ahead. Throughout the area are fuzzy bushes that appear to be covered in soft, downy fluff. Closer inspection reveals that the plants are covered in thousands and thousands of fine, needle-like spines.

Hign Bonesnap puts a hand up and speaks to the crowd. "This is the fastest path, but move carefully and avoid these plants. They'll stab you sharper than any needle, and they have barbs."

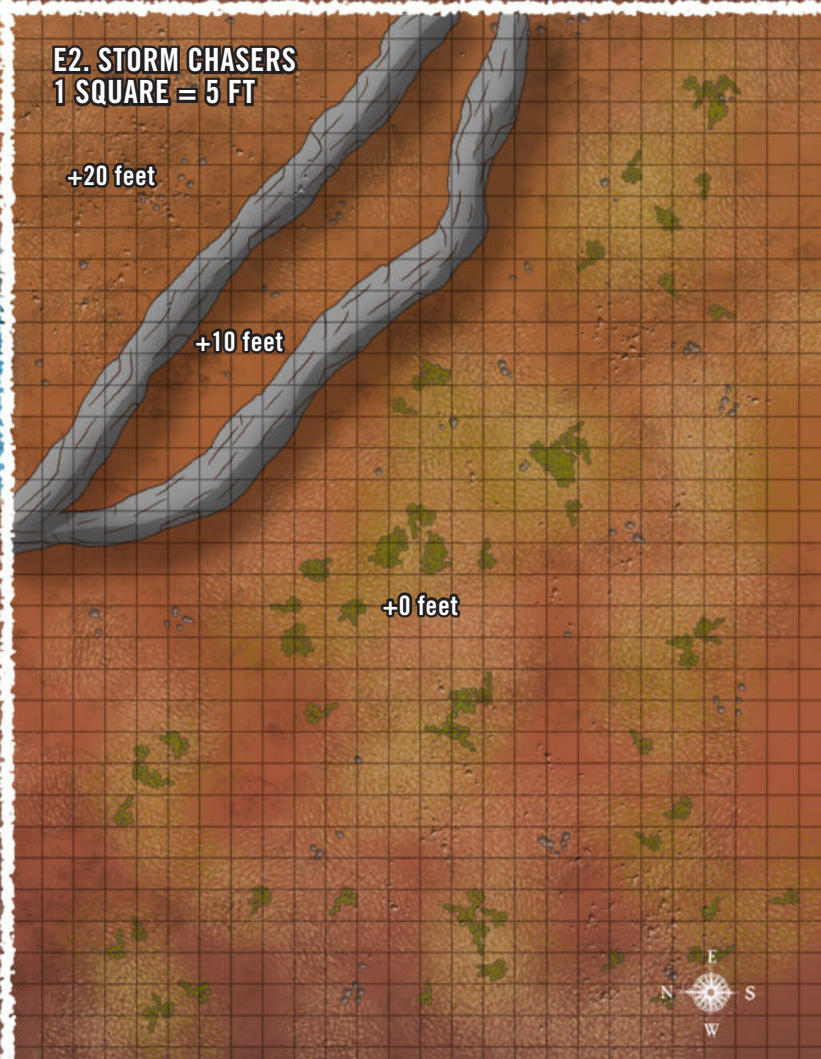
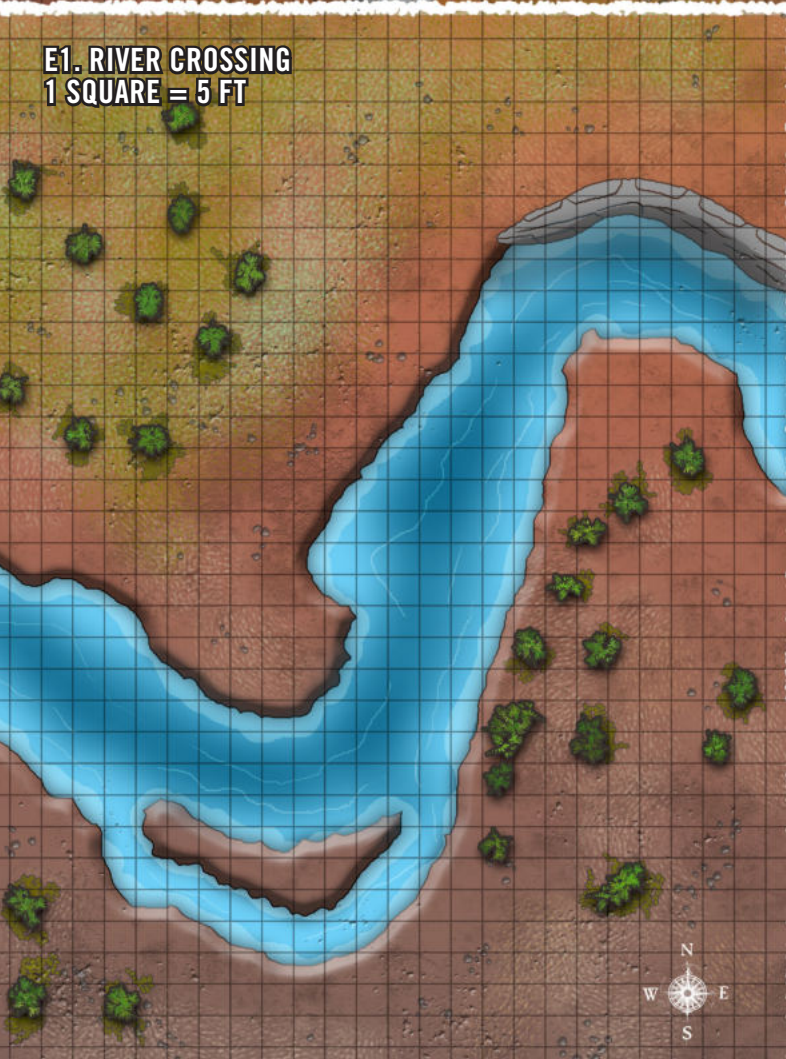
Obstacle: The danger here is a large patch of needledown cacti, which grow in large bushes made up of hundreds of bulbous growths. Even a grazing touch on one of these plants guarantees dozens of barb-hooked leaves embedded in the victim's clothes and skin. Each bulb snaps off easily, and anyone who makes the mistake of stumbling into a patch walks away with clumps of the cactus all over their body.

A PC who Investigates the bushes and succeeds at a DC 19 Nature, Plant Lore, or other appropriate check recognizes the dangerous flora. Their warning grants all PCs a +1 circumstance bonus to bypass the obstacle; a critical success increases the bonus to +2.

NEELEDOWN CACTUS

OBSTACLE 5

Overcome DC 20 Acrobatics or Athletics to move quickly



and dodge the cactus; DC 19 Nature or Survival to carefully pick a path

Special A creature that fails their check takes 1d4 piercing damage (doubled on a critical failure).

Patches of cacti covered in deadly sharp needles spread across the terrain as far as the eye can see.

Fleeing Aurochs Herd Moderate 4

As the expedition crosses into the plains, a frenzied herd of aurochs threatens to overwhelm them.

The land opens into broad plains extending to the south and east. Mesas rise from the plains directly to the south while the east has a few low hills and scrubby vegetation. A huge cloud of dust rises from the north, gliding across the land as it moves south. The dust disperses to reveal a herd of wild-eyed aurochs crushing everything in their path as they bellow in terror.

Obstacle: The growing number of aurochs near the Flood Road is a boon in most years, but with a sudden army of undead emerging from the ground and the looming ancestor storms to the north, the creatures are unpredictable and terrified. Passing through the area requires special effort.

A PC who Scouts or Searches and succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check identifies certain areas of uneven ground that the aurochs seem to avoid, which increases the result of that character's check to overcome the obstacle by one step.

AUROCHS STAMPEDE OBSTACLE 6

Overcome DC 22 Acrobatics or Athletics to avoid the aurochs; DC 21 Nature to calm the creatures

D1. Stragglers Moderate 4

Rain begins to fall, and some of the first undead to crawl from the riverbed have already arrived. While most of the expedition gets past the aurochs before any undead reach them, a slower group is about to be overwhelmed unless someone helps.

Several shapes emerge from the heavy curtain of rain. They are hunched and waterlogged, but rapidly dart forward toward a group of stragglers. Ardax shouts a command and several of his warriors join him in a charge against the undead, valiantly defending the group. A few dark shapes shoot past the warriors, unnoticed as their skirmish continues.



Needledown Cactus

Creatures: The initial waters of the Deluge dislodged the remains of those lost to previous floods, and the necromantic energy in the air granted them unlife. A few flood ghouls have slipped past Ardax and his warriors as they deal with the rest of the horde, threatening to prey on those struggling to keep up.

FLOOD GHOULS (4) CREATURE 2

MEDIUM GHOUL UNDEAD UNHOLY

Variant ghoul (Monster Core 162)

Perception +8; darkvision

Languages Common, Necril

Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +9, Stealth +8, Survival +6

Str +3, **Dex** +4, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +3

AC 18; **Fort** +7, **Ref** +10, **Will** +7

HP 30, void healing; **Immunities** bleed,

death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, unconscious

Stench (aura, olfactory) 10 feet, DC 15

Speed 25 feet, swim 30 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +10, **Damage** 1d8+4 piercing

Melee ♦ claw +10 (agile), **Damage** 1d8+4 slashing plus Grab

Aquatic Ambush ♦ 45 feet

Consume Flesh ♦ (manipulate) **Requirements** The flood ghoul is adjacent to the corpse of a creature that died within the last hour; **Effect** The flood ghoul devours a chunk of the corpse and regains 2d6 Hit Points. It can regain Hit Points from any given corpse only once.

Death Echo ♦ (occult) **Requirements** The flood ghoul has damaged a creature with a melee attack; **Effect** The flood ghoul unleashes a wave of memories of its death by drowning. The targeted creature must succeed at a DC 15 Will save or become paralyzed for 1 round as they relive the flood ghoul's dying moments. A creature who successfully saves becomes temporarily immune for 1 hour.

Forbidden Cravings (curse) **Saving Throw** DC 18 Will; **Stage 1** carrier with no ill effects (1 day); **Stage 2** 2d6 void damage and the target is sickened 1 until it consumes raw meat (1 day); **Stage 3** as stage 2; **Stage 4** as stage 2 unless the target has consumed raw meat in the past 24 hours; then it takes 4d6 void damage and is sickened 2 until it consumes raw meat; **Stage 5** If the creature has eaten raw meat in the past 24 hours, it dies and rises as a ghoul; if not, it returns to stage 4.

Ghoul Whispers ♦ (auditory, linguistic, occult) **Requirements** A grabbed, paralyzed, restrained, or unconscious creature is within the ghoul's reach; **Effect** The ghoul whispers dark thoughts and vile cravings into the creature's ears. The creature must attempt a save against the forbidden cravings curse.

Swift Leap ♦ (move) The ghoul jumps up to half its Speed. This movement doesn't trigger reactions.

Skipping the Encounter: The PCs are free to continue along without helping. If they decide to skip the battle with the flood ghouls, they gain 1 EP but lose 2 RP with Ardax.

Rewards: If the PCs defeat the flood ghouls, award them 1 RP with Ardax and 2 EP; if they defeat the creatures in 3 rounds or fewer, award them an additional 2 EP.

D2. Undead Assault

Severe 4

This obstacle arises about 20 minutes after the previous encounter.

The low mesa where Torrentmoot's camp is based is visible through the rain just ahead. Feral growls and hideous screams suddenly pierce the air, and a mass of bent, misshapen forms emerges through the curtains of rain.

Ardax and his remaining guards move to intercept the oncoming threat, shouting for help from any of the expedition members who can fight. All of the other dignitaries join in the battle, as do about half of the remaining expedition members. The noncombatants flee toward the base camp. If the PCs join the fray, use the following encounter to represent their part in the larger battle.

Bonuses: For each dignitary the PCs have fully influenced, the party (not an individual PC) gains 1 special Hero Point that can only be used in this combat. When they use one of the points, the help takes the form of one of the dignitaries contributing to the PC's efforts before moving to another part of the skirmish. When a PC spends one of these Hero Points, have them describe how a dignitary steps in to help.

Creatures: This small horde of undead is only a tiny fraction of the horrors still emerging from the land as the flood waters seep into the ground. A floodslain mage leads the group and tries to remain at range as long as it can, while ghoul stalkers charge in to clog up the PCs' movements. They fight until destroyed.

Skipping the Encounter: The PCs can leave the fighting to others. If they do so, two of the orc guards die along with four expedition members, reducing the total Caravan Points they gain after calculating the EP results (page 37) by 3. They also lose 1 RP with Ardax.

FLOODSLAIN MAGE

CREATURE 5

Variant floodslain, page 84

MEDIUM **AMPHIBIOUS** **UNDEAD**
Perception +9; darkvision

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Arcana +14, Stealth +13

Str +2, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** +4, **Wis** +2, **Cha** 0

AC 21; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +13, **Will** +12

HP 70, void healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, sleep; **Resistances** fire 5

Sodden Ground (aura, occult, water) 20 feet. Water flows endlessly from a floodslain creature, making the area around it slippery. The ground in the aura is difficult terrain for all non-floodslain creatures.

Speed 25 feet, swim 25 feet

Melee ♦ claw +11 (agile, finesse), **Damage** 2d8+2 slashing plus Drowning Touch

Drowning Touch (occult) The target's lungs begin to fill with water, and they must attempt a DC 22 Fortitude save. A target affected by Drowning Touch can spend a single action coughing in an attempt to recover, which immediately lets them attempt a new Fortitude save against the effect. A success improves the previous result by 1 step. A critical success improves the previous result by 2, and a critical failure decreases it by 1.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is slowed 1 for 1 round.

Failure The creature is slowed 2 for 1 round.

Critical Failure The creature is slowed 2 and drowning.

Floodslain Spawn (occult) A living animal or humanoid killed by a floodslain creature rises as a floodslain if its body is left in water for 24 hours. The new floodslain isn't under the control of the floodslain creature that killed it.

Vomit Flotsam ♦♦ (occult) The floodslain vomits flotsam in a 15-foot cone. Any creature in the area takes 5d8 bludgeoning damage (DC 19 basic Reflex save).

Occult Innate Spells DC 20, attack +12; **3rd** blindness, force barrage, paralyze; **2nd** noise blast, paranoia, telekinetic maneuver; **1st** grim tendrils, ill omen (×2), phantom pain, thunderstrike; **Cantrips** (3rd) daze, void warp

GHOUL STALKERS (4)

CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Monster Core 163

Initiative Perception +7

Rewards: The floodslain mage has a waterlogged leather sack that contains a pair of *obsidian goggles* and 42 gp. If the PCs win the encounter, award them 2 EP; if they defeat the creatures in 3 rounds or fewer, award them 2 additional EP.

Escape Results

The total number of Escape Points the PCs earned determines how much time the expedition has to get ready and form a caravan heading east. The list of

results determines the supplies the expedition has time to gather in the form of Caravan Points.

4 or Fewer: The expedition has only 10 minutes to get ready. Most of the attendees have to leave behind any large, bulky objects such as tents. The caravan begins with 5 Caravan Points, and all checks to Bolster the Caravan take a -1 circumstance penalty for the next 2 days.

5–10: The expedition has 20 minutes to get ready. The caravan begins with 8 Caravan Points.

11–14: The expedition has about 1 hour to get ready. The caravan begins with 13 Caravan Points.

15+: The expedition has 2 hours to get ready, and the PCs have time to make purchases from vendors in Torrentmoot before leaving the campsite. The caravan begins with 16 Caravan Points.

QUICK PREPARATIONS

Once the attendees reach the base camp, there is a scramble to gather everything they'll need for the trip to the east. While most of the people here are seasoned and able to survive in the wilds to some degree, the sudden shift to packing and leaving can potentially cause problems. Read or paraphrase the following to begin this section.

Torrentmoot is abuzz as the attendees prepare to leave. Some work with practiced, grim efficiency, while others seem to be near panic. Davorr crams writing implements into his bags as Grothlyn Zor barks orders at frazzled attendees, directing them to load supplies. Kestrel Windstrike paces the perimeter, her eyes sharp and wary as she grasps a holy symbol tightly in her hand. Everywhere one looks, there are items to be packed, mounts to saddle or hitch to wagons, and supplies to be loaded.

Unless the PCs brought equipment that needs lots of time to prepare, it takes them only about 10 minutes to get ready to leave. If there is time left after the PCs have packed their items, they can help others to increase their total Caravan Points at the start of the journey. Below are a few ways they can provide assistance. You can use these as guidelines for other ideas the PCs might have. Each PC may attempt one of these activities, plus one additional activity per hour before it's time to leave. A PC who succeeds at one of these activities earns 1 CP, and one who critically succeeds earns 2 CP; a critical failure subtracts 1 CP.

Calming and Managing Animals: The animals at camp sense both the tension of the attendees and the growing feeling of wrongness in the air. They act out in various ways that slow down the preparations, from refusing to be saddled to throwing off harnesses or

deciding it's a good time to hide. A PC can attempt a DC 18 Nature or Stabling Lore check to calm the animals down.

Loading and Moving Equipment: Some of the attendees of the camp were less than practical about what equipment to bring along, and there are boxes and barrels with food and drink that need to get loaded. With everyone worried about gathering up their individual camps, it's easy for some important supplies to get missed. A PC can attempt either a DC 18 Athletics check to help load wagons or a DC 18 Perception check to locate important supplies.

Repairing Rigging Equipment: Ropes are tangled, minor repairs that were supposed to be done later need to happen now, and other unforeseen problems slow down the preparations. The PCs can jump in and lend their expertise so that this work is done more quickly by attempting a DC 18 Crafting check to provide repairs.

Managing and Prioritizing: No one had planned on the camp turning into a caravan, so there are tempers and egos to manage as well as practical considerations to account for. A PC can step in and attempt a DC 18 Diplomacy or Mercantile Lore check to streamline the process by mediating or helping to prioritize supplies.

Planning a Route: Ardax has had several conversations with his scouts about the best route to take so that the dignitaries reach Cleft Head Hold safely. A PC can contribute, using their knowledge of the landscape and trade routes with a DC 18 Belkzen Lore, Mercantile Lore, or Nature check.

Once preparations are complete, read or paraphrase the following.

Ardax stands on a log bench in the center of what was, until a few minutes ago, Torrentmoot. A tangle of carts, pack animals, and people are still arranging themselves into a line. His voice carries through the sound of the rain and over the business of final preparations.

"My scouts have confirmed that swarms of undead threaten to overtake the area. Traveling to Urgir is too risky for a group of this size." A worried muttering ripples through the crowd, though it stills as Ardax raises a hand. "I will go to Urgir and raise the alarm, while some of my warriors escort you to safety. They will take you east to Cleft Head Hold; the ruler there, K'zaard, has a fort with strong defenses near the border with Ustalav.

"It's important for us to work together. The countryside is filling with undead, and there have always been other dangers in Belkzen. But we will find a way to get through this if we stand united, as we were meant to. 'Til we meet again, friends!"

TRACKING CARAVAN POINTS

If the number of Caravan Points drops too low, fights begin to break out between members of the group. Worse still, at a low enough point, the caravan starts to break up, making it much more difficult for everyone who is a part of it. At the end of each day, roll a Caravan check. Use the following guidelines to represent how well the caravan is doing during the trip. For ease, assume the caravan begins with 50 members (a total that also includes the PCs).

9 or fewer: The Caravan check is DC 14. The caravan members are unhealthy, unhappy, and rapidly losing hope. They become certain they'd be better off on their own. On a critical failure, 2d6 people leave during the night, and the Caravan check DC increases by 1. If the caravan loses 35 or more people, it collapses.

10–18: The Caravan check is DC 11. Tempers are rising, supplies are getting low, and distrust runs rampant. On a critical failure, a fight breaks out, dropping morale, and some supplies are wrecked.

19–29: The Caravan check is DC 7. Grumbling is minor, and the caravan's members know they need to work together to survive.

30+: The Caravan check is DC 3. Good spirits, plentiful supplies, and strong cooperation make the caravan's task much easier.

Reward: If at least 2 PCs attempted to help get the caravan ready, award the group 60 XP.

SECOND RETREAT

The trip to Cleft Head is roughly 60 miles and takes 3 days when traveling under normal circumstances. With the storms now moving through Belkzen, several carts not meant for quick travel, and the roaming swarms of undead, the effective distance the caravan can cover is 16 miles per day, putting the caravan at Cleft Head Hold after 4 days of travel. The following timeline assumes all these factors continue to hold true.

If your PCs make choices that would radically change the distance covered each day, adapt the encounters appropriately. The PCs can try to influence other dignitaries, but any checks take a –2 circumstance penalty due to the challenging situation.

Running the Caravan

Given the skill and determination of its members, the caravan can keep moving through most challenges. This doesn't mean the trip goes smoothly or that the entire expedition is guaranteed to make it to Cleft

Head Hold. As the caravan encounters the many challenges of the journey, a PC rolls a Caravan check at the end of the day to determine how well the caravan does as a whole. This is a flat check whose DC is determined by the current Caravan Point total. Use the following table to determine the outcome of the check.

Critical Success: The caravan's members pull together in an impressive show of unity, gaining 2 CP.

Success: The caravan overcomes the obstacle or challenge sufficiently and gains 1 CP.

Failure: Lack of skill, poor teamwork, or just plain bad luck make the caravan struggle through the obstacle or challenge. The expedition moves past the obstacle but loses 1 CP.

Critical Failure: The caravan has severe problems with the challenge or obstacle, resulting in flared tempers and a loss of supplies. The caravan moves past the obstacle but loses 2 CP.

These rules apply to the caravan as a group, not to the PCs specifically. The PCs still use encounter mode to overcome the challenges in the chapter.

Slow and Steady: On a failed Caravan check, the party can choose to delay the journey by one day per in order to keep their current CP total. On a critical failure, the caravan still loses 1 CP.

Narrating the Results: Each situation when the Caravan check is required is slightly different, so what the result represents changes each time. After the result is rolled, ask the players what they think happened to lead to that result, then add your own description to wrap up those events.

CARAVAN SUPPORT

PCs can use an exploration activity to bolster the caravan, improving morale and gaining Caravan Points to aid the group.

BOLSTER THE CARAVAN

EMOTION EXPLORATION

Frequency: once per day

You spend your time caring for the sick and injured, searching for supplies in the countryside, or cheering the spirits of your fellow travelers in an effort to help the caravan get through the challenges it faces. Attempt an appropriate DC 20 skill check.

Critical Success: Your efforts provide enough help to noticeably improve the state of the caravan. Gain 2 CP.

Success: You manage to improve the general welfare of the expedition. Gain 1 CP.

Critical Failure: You do something that causes trouble or creates a new problem. Lose 1 CP.

Special: Skill feats and abilities that amplify a character's ability to find sustenance (such as Forager for Survival) or affect the attitude of large groups (such as Group Impression for Diplomacy) improve a Success to a Critical Success. At the GM's discretion, clever use of appropriate spells, items, or abilities can have this effect as well.

CARAVAN COLLAPSE

With enough bad luck or as a result of poor choices, the caravan falls apart. If the Caravan Points total reaches zero, most of the members have abandoned the group to set off on their own and try their luck. If 35 or more people have left, the caravan automatically collapses. In such a case, any remaining guards prove loyal and remain with the group.

Important NPCs are likely to stay but you should decide this based on their interactions with the PCs, their personalities so far in the adventure, and whether remaining makes narrative sense. Once the caravan collapses, only about 15 people, including the PCs, are left to continue on to the Cleft Head Hold.

Caravan checks: If the caravan collapses, there is no longer a need to track Caravan Points or use the Caravan check mechanic. Instead, each time a Caravan check is called for, a caravan member leaves or dies (this can't be a PC). You can randomly roll who is lost, decide for yourself, or—if you want to really drive home the tragedy—have the PCs choose and narrate the loss.

Reputation with Ardax: If the PCs stay with the caravan even after a collapse, they gain 2 RP with Ardax for their dedication to the group.

Modifying the encounters: If the caravan collapses, later encounters become much more difficult for the PCs. Raise the Challenge Rating by one step (Low to Moderate, Moderate to Severe), but don't raise any encounters past Severe.

Caravan Point Encounters

The following encounters are triggered when the caravan reaches certain CP thresholds and can happen at any point during the journey.

13 CP OR LOWER: CRABBY TRAVELERS LOW 4

This encounter is triggered the first time the CP total drops to 13 or lower. This discord is preceded by several arguments among the caravan members over the course of a few hours. None of these arguments lead to violence, but Kestrel has her hands full trying to smooth these disagreements over and soon becomes overwhelmed without help, approaching the PCs the next morning. Read or paraphrase the following.

Grumbling and snippy comments can be heard about the camp as foul expressions reflect the glum weather. Kestrel approaches with a gentle but strained smile.

"I'd like your help," she says. "You might have noticed tempers are starting to flare, and the expedition members are very unhappy. I'm doing what I can to calm everyone and keep them focused, but I can't untangle every problem at once. I'm afraid people will try to go off on their own and endanger both themselves and the rest of the caravan. Morale is crucial to our survival, and fear is an infectious plague that spreads quickly in times of strife. Could you try to find those with concerns and ease their worries?"

A PC who Gathers Information for two hours (DC 18) learns of the various sources of complaints among the caravan in the form of fearful diplomats, angry merchants, and overwhelmed attendees. If no PC succeeds at the check, Kestrel approaches the PCs at the end of the day with the information; this increases the DCs of the checks below by 1.

Once the PCs identify the sources of discontent, they can address them by attempting the following DC 19 skill checks. Below are the most obvious examples, but you should reward creative ideas and allow for other approaches. A success is worth 1 point, while a critical success is worth 2 points. A critical failure subtracts 1 point.

A PC who succeeds at a Performance check entertains the expedition members and distracts them from their fears. This takes 2 hours.

A PC who succeeds at a Diplomacy check listens to complaints, makes assurances, and generally cheers everyone up. This takes 4 hours.

A PC who succeeds at an Athletics or Crafting check assists with issues the expedition members are having, such as by repairing broken equipment and damaged carts. This takes 4 hours.

Lastly, a PC who succeeds at an Intimidation check finds and threatens the biggest complainers into quieting their complaints. This takes 2 hours.


Development: Once the PCs earn at least 5 points, the grumbles and complaints subside.

Reward: Once the PCs earn at least 5 points, grateful caravan members give them a *oak potion* and a total of 85 gp in assorted gems; award them 60 XP. If the PCs reach the end of the chapter without triggering this encounter, award them 60 XP as well as the treasure.

25 CP OR HIGHER: IRON SPEAR BANDITS

MODERATE 4

The Flood Truce is not only a time when the largest holds of orcs travel to the Flood Road; it is also when smaller bands that normally roam Belkzen



hunt for aurochs. Many of these groups are simply opportunistic bandits who chafe under the commands of the larger holds. One such group, the Iron Spear, has been fleeing the oncoming undead and consider the caravan an enticing opportunity for profit.

Creatures: The Iron Spear bandits have no regard for authority and prefer tactics of brute force. If the PCs defeated two of the trio they're facing, the remaining orc attempts to flee.

Caravan check: As in other large battles, the PCs only deal with a part of the larger skirmish. The rest of the caravan defends itself, and the PCs must roll a Caravan check.

Reward: One of the iron spear bandits wears a set of +1 *stanching chainmail* and a purse containing 57 gp.

IRON SPEAR BANDITS (2)

CREATURE 3

Orc vagabond (page 86)

Initiative Perception +10

IRON SPEAR GRUNT

CREATURE 2

Elite orc veteran (*Pathfinder Monster Core* 258)

Initiative Perception +9

Travel Day 1

The rains continue to fall sporadically throughout the day, and many of the dried-out riverbeds begin to flow with water. A PC who Investigates the weather and succeeds at a DC 18 Nature check knows that these kinds of sustained rains are very rare in Belkzen. A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Arcana or Occultism check can tell there is some other force at work behind the weather patterns; if they critically succeed, they notice an unusually strong amount of necromantic magic permeating the storms.

E1. River Crossing

Moderate 4

About three hours after setting off from Torrentmoot, read or paraphrase the following.

The rain has abated, the ground greedily absorbing most of the moisture. Even so, the terrain remains mostly dry with little mud or plant life. Up ahead is a shallow ravine filled with a rushing torrent that splits off from the annual flood waters. Debris and scattered items flow down the churning waters, evidence of those who attempted to cross unprepared.

Grothlyn works to direct the more cumbersome and awkward parts of the caravan, putting her fearsome reputation to good use, but she can't handle so many issues at once. She asks the PCs to find a way across

and help make the crossing safer for the rest of the group.

The river is ten feet wide. Within 5 feet of the shore, the water is 2 feet deep and counts as difficult terrain. Beyond that, it rapidly drops off to a maximum depth of 7 feet. A PC who ends their turn swimming in the water must succeed at a DC 16 Athletics check to remain in the same place. On a failure, they are pushed 10 feet south, and on a critical failure, they are pushed 10 feet and submerged 3 feet in water.

Crossing the ravine: The PCs should develop a strategy that addresses the following issues: transporting carts, coaxing pack animals across, and helping those too weak or injured to cross on their own. This should involve about three total DC 19 skill checks for the entire party, though especially clever spellcasting, gear use, or schemes might grant a circumstance bonus to a check or even an automatic success without a roll at the GM's discretion. Likely skill checks include Athletics to push carts or people, Crafting to create a bridge, and Survival to determine the safest path to pursue.

Creatures: When the PCs first start crossing the river, they gain the attention of a skinslough freshly unearthed and animated by the waters. It moves to attack whichever PC is nearest and fights to the death.

Caravan check: Other undead climb out of the river and move to attack the caravan, keeping the warriors busy protecting the noncombatants until the PCs are done fighting. The PCs must roll a Caravan check.

SKINSLOUGH

CREATURE 4

Page 88

Initiative Perception +12

Reward: A +1 *underwater striking battle axe* is embedded in the skinslough's back. Additionally, if the PCs successfully implement a solution that makes crossing the river easier, award them 40 XP.

A Furry Problem

About half an hour after the river has been crossed, a guard named Segrek approaches the PCs. Segrek has the curse of the stormblood tiger (page 89); normally, he wears a pendant that helps him stay in control of his transformation, but the pendant is missing.

Finding the pendant requires a PC to succeed at a DC 19 Perception check. On a failure, the journey is delayed by half a day. If the PCs help Segrek recover the pendant, they gain a +1 circumstance bonus to their next check to Bolster the Caravan. If they refuse, the GM rolls a DC 20 Will save for Segrek (with a +9 bonus) each night, or he transforms and rampages

throughout the caravan. Killing Segrek, even in self-defense, dampens morale, and the caravan loses 1 CP.

WEAK STORMBLOOD TIGER CREATURE 6

Page 89 (*Pathfinder Monster*

Core 7)

Initiative Perception +17

Travel Day 2

Throughout the centuries, the orcs consistently made offerings to Zagresh, that he might ward the dead against reanimation. This mostly worked; only a handful of battlefields in Belkzen are truly haunted. However, with Zagresh's recent overthrow, Belkzen's dead are more vulnerable than ever to necromantic influence. Tar-Baphon is exploiting that vulnerability by both reanimating hordes of corporeal undead, as well as provoking and manipulating these haunted battlefields to ravage the region. The returned lich has effectively untethered and weaponized the region's worst haunts, forming them into a new kind of terror.

The day breaks with a roiling darkness in the clouds that presages the terrors to come, low thunder echoing. Read or paraphrase the following as the caravan begins moving on the second day.

To the north, the horizon is filled with low, dark clouds moving across the skies in several directions, either due to unpredictable wind patterns or some other unseen force. There are no birds in the strange skies, and what little can be seen of the sun quickly vanishes behind the gathering storm.

A PC who Investigates the clouds and succeeds at a DC 19 Nature check realizes there are several independently moving cloud banks that don't appear to be tied to the wind patterns of the other clouds. They notice that some of these patches of clouds are headed to the southeast and that the caravan is likely to be under them later today. If the PCs tell an NPC their observations, the NPC agrees with their concerns and decides to go about finding some shelter for the caravan before the clouds arrive.

Reward: Sharing their observations with the caravan earns the party 1 CP. In addition, all PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus to skill checks made to navigate the ancestor storm in the upcoming encounter as the caravan makes adjustments to prepare for inclement weather.



Electric Ancestor Storm

Riding Out the Storm

Moderate 4

About 3 hours after the caravan sets out, the ancestor storm arrives. Read or paraphrase the following.

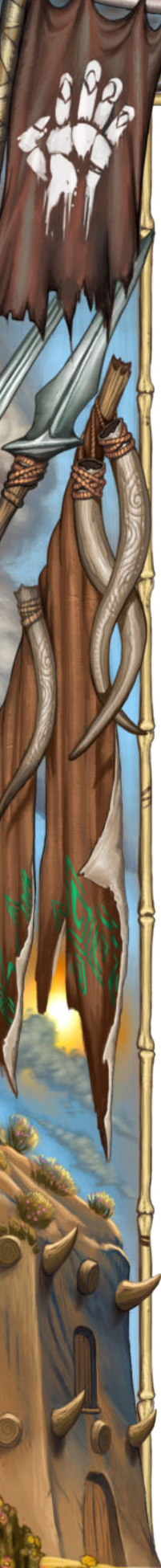
The strange phenomena in the air culminates in a bulbous, green-tinged cloud spreading out over the area, carrying with it the smell of ozone. Lightning creeps across the sky as if crawling on the underbelly of some massive beast, each spark of light illuminating skull-like shapes up above. Long, crooked tendrils emerge from the bizarre cloud, grasping at the ground below, and lightning flickers between them before suddenly lashing out at the ground.

"Up ahead!" someone shouts. A rocky outcropping can be seen in the distance, curving upward to create a large, natural shelter. Animals bray and shriek in terror as ghastly screams fill the air alongside the sounds of thunder and the howl of unnatural winds.

"Get to the rocks! Run, everyone! Run!"

A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check sees ghostly faces and shapes moving through the clouds, outlined in sharp relief as lightning flickers around them. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Nature, Occultism, or Religion check recognizes that the storm is an unnatural phenomenon and likely a haunt.

Ancestor Storms: The haunts that Tar-Baphon has untethered from their physical sites are moving through the skies to form what is soon called an "ancestor storm." At a distance, a typical ancestor storm resembles a sandstorm, mini-hurricane, tornado, or other powerful weather event. Up close, an observer can spot humanoid phantoms and spirits



hiding within or being whipped about by the storm. These spirits call out to the living, especially to any of the spirits' descendants, to lambast travelers, challenge the living to duels, or even lure listeners to join these spirits' upcoming battle against an unspecified foe. An ancestor storm has a vague collective intelligence comprised of its spirits' prevailing emotions, desires, and cultural values. Each storm's effects differ slightly, shaped by the origins of the haunt and its spirits.

Escape: The PCs don't yet have the knowledge or ability necessary to stop an ancestor storm (that comes in the next volume of the adventure!), so for now, they have to settle for getting the caravan safely to the rocky outcrop with minimal damage.

This encounter uses the Victory Point subsystem (GM Core 184-186) to track the progress of the caravan as it overcomes obstacles to evade the terrors of the ancestor storm. Each obstacle has a threshold of Victory Points required to overcome it. Actions are made in phases where each PC can attempt a check to earn Victory Points. If their VP total equals or exceeds the threshold of the obstacle, they overcome the issue and continue on. Keep track of the total number of phases the caravan takes to get safety, as the total determines if they outrun the storm or suffer environmental harm.

PACK ANIMALS

OBSTACLE

Threshold 4; Overcome DC 19 Nature, DC 17 Stabling Lore
The pack animals with the caravan become frenzied with terror, either refusing to move or bucking wildly in an attempt to escape.

Special A PC able to communicate with animals (such as with Wild Empathy) can instead attempt a DC 15 Diplomacy or Intimidation check.

GHOSTLY LIGHTNING

OBSTACLE

Threshold 4; Overcome DC 19 Arcana, DC 18 Occultism, DC 17 Religion

Lightning threatens to strike the caravan as the storm draws near. The spiritual essence of the storm makes it possible to redirect its energy away from the caravan.

Special If the PCs don't overcome this obstacle in a single phase, some of the animals run off in a panic and supplies are destroyed by lightning, costing the caravan 1 CP.

SANDSTORM

OBSTACLE

Threshold 4; Overcome DC 19 Perception, DC 17 Survival
Sand and dirt are whipped up by the oppressive wind, obscuring the path toward safety.

PANICKING CARAVAN

OBSTACLE

Threshold 4; Overcome DC 19 Diplomacy, DC 18 Performance

Panicked members of the caravan begin to swerve in the wrong direction. The PCs must calm and distract the caravan members to keep them on track.

Special If the PCs don't overcome this obstacle in a single phase, terrified caravan members are lost in the storm. The caravan loses 1 CP and takes a -1 circumstance penalty to Bolster the Caravan that day.

TORMENTED SPIRITS

OBSTACLE

Threshold 4; Overcome DC 19 Occultism, DC 17 Religion

Spirits within the storm fly amongst the caravan, wailing threats and pleas.

Development: Once the caravan has overcome the tormented spirits, they reach the outskirts of the rocky outcropping that can shelter them from the storm. Tally the number of phases the group used to overcome the five obstacles.

3-5 phases: The caravan makes it to safety without serious damage.

6-7 phases: The caravan is caught up in the storm before they finally reach safety. Each PC takes 4d6 damage from the storm's various effects.

8+ phases: As 6-7 phases, plus 1d4 CP is lost.

Reward: If they lose less than 4 CP, thankful caravan members give the party a universal solvent (moderate) and a *viper arrow*.

E2. Stormchasers

Severe 4

This encounter occurs about 2 hours after the storm passes. The caravan continues on its southeasterly route, and the hills to the south grow steadily closer as the day wears on. By late afternoon, the caravan rattles along next to those tall hills. As it passes near a stone outcropping, a band of orcs step out with their bows trained on the caravan. Read or paraphrase the following.

A band of at least twenty orcs look down on the caravan, their bows ready. Several of them bear crude holy symbols of Zagresh cobbled together from scrap or carved into piecemeal armor. A tall, armored figure in a frayed brown tabard steps forward and calls out to the caravan below.

"Greetings, fellow sufferers of the tribulations!" she shouts, a fanatical gleam in her eyes. "I am Zeral of all the holds and none, here to enlighten you of the truth: our world is near conclusion, and only Zagresh will lead us to salvation in the journey beyond this life. You look to have experienced the glory of the end. Have you passed through the storms? Have you walked with the spirits of the land? I have!"

Zeral bares her arms, revealing fractal scars spread across her skin in fern-like patterns. "I have felt the lightning in my bones and the winds on my flesh. I have

heard our ancestors speak of horror, and they speak true, that we stand before the very ending of our world! But I promise you, there is an endless comfort that awaits us if you surrender your souls to the Destroyer. Now, abandon your physical possessions and join the Stormchasers in spreading the glorious new gospel of Zagresh!"

Grothlyn (or another appropriate NPC) tries to drive the group off with commands, threats, or a polite refusal to abandon their supplies. In turn, Zeral serenely insists that Zagresh is bringing about the end of the world, and it's time to come to salvation. When Grothlyn sees she's not getting anywhere with the stubborn fanatic, she asks the PCs to talk them out of the situation.

Creatures: The Stormchasers are a small cult of Zagresh worshippers led by Zeral, who preached the end even before Zagresh's demise. Zagresh's death has not swayed her faith or message, which remains staunchly belligerent. Recently, Zeral was caught in an ancestor storm where the spirits of the storm whispered to her about the end of the world, the end of all life, and the need to spread the gospel of annihilation. Emerging from the storm relatively unharmed, she is convinced that the experience was a divine message from Zagresh.

Zeral begins as unfriendly but isn't quick to violence, perceiving this as an opportunity to recruit members to her cult. If it comes to battle, Zeral targets clerics, champions, or anyone who bears holy symbols not of Zagresh. She fights fanatically to the death, and her cultists follow her example.

Debating Zeral: The PCs have the chance to resolve things peacefully. This encounter uses the Influence subsystem (*GM Core* 187–189) to structure the PCs' progress. Influencing Zeral reduces her will for violence. The encounter is broken up into 4 rounds of 5 minutes each, ending early if the PCs' Influence Point total reaches 8. If the PCs have less than 6 Influence Points when the encounter ends, Zeral loses her patience and tries to threaten the group into converting, resorting to violence if they continue to resist. If the PCs opt to try an aggressive tactic instead of talking, Zeral and the Stormchasers attack.

ZERAL

UNIQUE MEDIUM ORC HUMANOID

Zealous cult leader

Perception +14

Will +15

Discovery Perception DC 19, Religion DC 21, Society DC 22

Influence Skills DC 19 Religion (discussing Zagresh and the apocalypse), DC 20 Diplomacy, DC 22 Deception

Influence 2 Zeral is absorbed in the conversation, and the PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus to initiative if a fight breaks out.

Influence 4 Zeral's enthusiasm carries over to her followers, and one of them leaves to pray to Zagresh in private, reducing the number of enemies by 1.

Influence 6 Zeral respects the PCs' dedication to the caravan, allowing them to leave if the caravan abandons 2 CP worth of supplies.



Zeral

Influence 8 Zeral is convinced the PCs have a separate fate from hers and wishes the caravan a glorious death worthy of Zagresh, leaving peacefully with her acolytes.

Resistances Zeral is staunchly loyal to Zagresh.

One of her prime doctrines is to cast off all earthly possessions except what one can carry. Comments that cast Zagresh in a poor light, or any attempts to entice her with material goods, increase the next Influence check's DC by 2.

Weaknesses Zeral's fanaticism has her quick to believe others would accept Zagresh's apocalyptic gospel. Agreement with any part of her message and praise of Zagresh decreases a check's DC by 2.

Background A true believer, Zeral has devoted her entire life to Zagresh and was ousted from multiple holds for her aggressive methods of proselytizing, gaining a reputation for causing issues even among priests of her own god. Zagresh's death has not shaken her faith, and her experience in the ancestor storm has only strengthened her devotion.

Appearance Zeral's piecemeal armor shows traces of her hard living, and various symbols on the scavenged pieces have been scratched out and defaced.

Personality Intense, devoted, unyielding

ZERAL CREATURE 5

Orc doomsayer (page 87)

Initiative Perception +14

DROMAAR MOUNTAINEER CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Monster Core 259

Initiative Perception +11

ELITE ORC VETERAN CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Monster Core 258

Initiative Perception +8

ORC COMMANDER CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Monster Core 259

Initiative Perception +8

Reward: In one of her pouches, Zeral carries a *shark tooth charm* she took off of someone who rejected her message. If the PCs defuse the situation without violence, award them xp as if they'd defeated Zeral and her followers.

Travel Day 3

More storms break out during this day, although none of them are the dangerous ancestor storms.

Nevertheless, rainy conditions make travel uncomfortable.

Haunted Village Low 4

In the morning, the caravan passes near a wrecked village that was attacked by Zeral and her zealots. Read or paraphrase the following.

The caravan wends its way through a relatively flat valley dubbed the Pass of Ryaxe, though no one

remembers who or what Ryaxe was. The ground is dry and parched, untouched

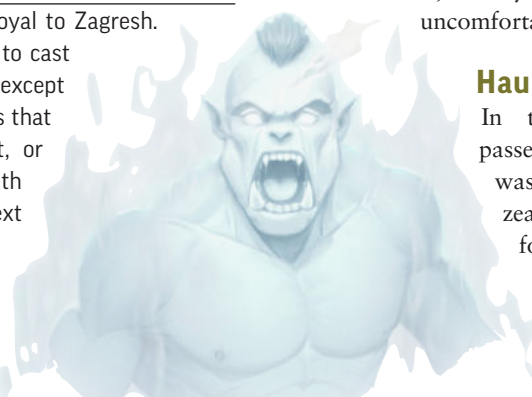
by the recent rain. There are numerous scrubby bushes and the occasional spindly tree, but there is little wildlife of note. A few narrow columns of smoke rise from what was once a small settlement, though the flames seem to have gone out. Most of the buildings are black with ash, and some structures have partially collapsed from the damage. Stray motes of ash float in the air, the area choked with the noxious odor of char and death.

If the PCs don't go to investigate, Kestrel or another appropriate NPC approaches them to see if they're willing to take a quick look; if they aren't, she sends her own scouts.

Whisperwell: This small settlement was occupied by an extended family who are technically part of Cleft Head Hold. The town sprang up near the minor trade route running from Freedom Town to Urgir, and the residents here collected "fees" from merchants passing through on behalf of the Cleft Head.

Zeral and her group of zealots visited the town the day before they encountered the PCs. After a fight broke out, the zealots demolished the town and most of its residents.

Ghostly Echoes: The spiritual essence of the massacred residents has infused Whisperwell with echoes of the dead. The few surviving residents beg the group to free the spirits of their families and are distressed by the echoes of their loved ones. These budding haunts are not dangerous yet, but if the PCs don't deal with them, the village will become overrun with angry spirits. All spirits can be dispersed with a DC 19 Occultism or Religion check, or by completing the associated challenge. On a failed check, the PC can try again, but the DC increases by 1.



Orc Ghost Warrior

If the PCs opt to ignore these spirits, they are ambushed by an elite ghost commoner (GM Core 161) who believes them to be the invaders who murdered them. The ghost commoner can be defeated in combat or put to rest by the PCs who agree to aid the other lost spirits roaming the village.

WOUNDED WARRIORS

Spirit Pale echoes of proud warriors take up arms to defend the doomed village and challenge any non-residents of Whisperwell to fight.

Challenge A PC can dispel these echoes by taking the role of an attacker and allowing the echoes to “win” the battle with a DC 17 Performance check or by attempting a DC 19 Deception or Diplomacy check to convince them they’ve come as backup.

SCREAMS OF TERROR

Spirit Shrieks and wails emanate from a crumbling house, piercing the air with terrified cries.

Challenge A PC can enact driving off the invaders with a DC 17 Deception or Performance check, or comfort the spirits with a DC 19 Diplomacy check.

OTHERWORLDLY FLAMES

Spirit Figures wreathed in heatless fire roam the town, reaching out desperately for help.

Challenge A PC can “put out” the fires by using actual buckets of water with a DC 17 Acrobatics, Athletics, or Survival check, or they can convince the spirits they’ve done so with a DC 19 Deception or Performance check.

LOST BODIES

Spirit Bloody footprints stalk the townsfolk, then run off into the rubble.

Challenge A PC can locate the spirits’ undiscovered bodies with a DC 17 Survival check to Track the footprints or with a DC 19 Society check to determine which parts of town people were likely to hide in.

Survivors: Five of the villagers survived the massacre and beg to join the caravan. The PCs can influence the decision on whether to bring them along with a DC 20 Diplomacy check. The DC is lowered by 2 for each dignitary still traveling with the caravan that the PCs have full influence with. Adding the villagers to the caravan earns 1 CP and a +1 circumstance bonus to Bolster the Caravan on that day.

Reward: If the PCs successfully dispel all of the spirits, the thankful survivors present them with an *oil of mending* and 60 gp; award them 30 XP. If they convince the caravan to follow their advice regarding the survivors, award them 30 XP regardless of which decision is made.

E3. Shattertop

Moderate 4

This encounter happens in the late afternoon or early evening, likely near the time the caravan is going to stop for the day. As the day wears on, the caravan approaches a small thicket of trees, and the route follows a rough path through its center.

As the caravan approaches the area, read or paraphrase the following.

The low, rocky hills are bare except for a sparse copse of thin, reedy trees that provide meager shelter as they cluster around the path. Their spindly branches are naked, and the only sign that they are still alive is the spray of dry green needles near the top, as there is otherwise no evidence of any wildlife in the area. One of the largest trees stands with its trunk broken halfway up. It is the only tree without any leaves.


A PC who Investigates the broken tree and succeeds at a DC 19 Nature or Survival check discover it is dead, likely from a lightning strike many years ago.

If a PC Searches the area and succeeds at a DC 19 Perception check, they find a small wooden figure, roughly humanoid in shape, that looks like it was made by tying a few branches securely to each other with strips of bark. On a critical success, the PC also spots what appear to be humanoid bones sticking out of the shattered part of the broken tree.

The Stick Figure: The top of the stick figure lacks a head, and the part of the branch where the head and neck would be is split down the middle. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Religion check believes it to be a religious symbol of some kind; if they critically succeed, they realize it doesn’t match any known religious practices.

Creatures: A bramble of twigjacks lives in this copse of trees and worship the broken tree as a deity they call Shattertop. The tiny fey mostly keep to themselves and have little interaction with other creatures. The one exception is a merchant who passed through years ago; when the man cut some wood from their forest for the night, the twigjacks murdered him in his sleep and painstakingly carried his body up into Shattertop as an offering.

When the caravan arrives, the fey hide in the underbrush, carefully monitoring what the newcomers are doing. The size of the group keeps them at bay unless anyone from the caravan begins harvesting their trees or disturbs Shattertop. Regular harvesting of wood angers the creatures, who seek vengeance during the night, but disturbing their god-tree sends them into an immediate frenzy.



Caravan check: While the PCs deal with their own combat, the rest of the caravan takes up arms to defend itself. The PCs must roll a Caravan check.

ELITE TWIGJACKS (2)

CREATURE 4

Pathfinder Monster Core 6, 332

Initiative Perception +11

Treasure: A PC who Searches locates the remnants of the merchant's belongings hidden under a brush pile. Most of the mundane gear and goods are ruined, but an *emerald grasshopper*, *oil of mending*, *potency crystal*, and 56 gp remain.

Travel Day 4

Floodslain

Moderate 4

With the persistent rains caused by the magical upheaval in Belkzen, areas that were little more than dirt paths have become swampy morasses. As the day wears on, the path the caravan follows becomes more and more slippery and muddy. Read or paraphrase the following around mid-morning.

Rain continues to fall, drenching the ground and turning dust to mud. The path seems to grasp at the feet of travelers, sucking every footstep deeper and deeper into the mire. Rivulets of water stream down hills in the east, carving new paths and pooling around their bases. To the west, the flat plains seem to be soaking up the water rapidly, transforming into sodden expanses of silt and sludge.

The change in environment slows the caravan down as it struggles through thick mud. As its members continue their journey, they become vulnerable to undead predators. Read or paraphrase the following.

Feet sink into mud and curses pierce the air as members of the caravan struggle against their surroundings. There is a sudden cry of terror that echoes amongst the caravan as dark shapes approach, undeterred by the rain and muck. Large humanoid figures with bloated dead faces and wide, cold eyes lumber forward with an unrelenting determination to kill.

Creatures: A pack of floodslain orcs assaults the caravan, ravenously seeking to destroy the living. If the caravan lost members through abandonment of the group, the PCs are horrified to recognize some of the floodslain as attendees of Torrentmoot, revived as drowned undead monsters.

Caravan check: The caravan tries to fend off the attack. The PCs must roll a Caravan check.

FLOODSLAIN ORCS (3)

CREATURE 3

Page 85

Initiative Perception +9

Travel Day 5+ (optional)

These encounters can be used if the PCs take longer than 4 days to make it to Cleft Head Hold. It becomes clear that the caravan is vulnerable to attacks from undead assailants for as long as it hasn't arrived at a secure location.

NPC help: The dignitaries the PCs have built relationships with provide great help in dire situations. Each NPC remaining with the caravan can provide a special bonus once during the final stretch of the journey.

If Davorr is still with the caravan, the PCs gain one additional action to make a Survival check to forage or hunt.

If Grothlyn is still with the caravan, the PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus to initiative in one battle.

If Hign is still with the caravan, the PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus to Scout.

If Kestrel is still with the caravan, the PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus to Bolster the Caravan. If the caravan has collapsed, this bonus is instead to cast a 2nd-rank 3-action *heal* on the PCs.

Caravan check: Combat encounters require the PCs to roll a Caravan check unless noted otherwise.

Ancestor Storm

Moderate 4

An ancestor storm draws near, forcing the caravan to find shelter. The PCs can lead the group to safety with three successful checks from the options below or by using other creative solutions. Each PC may attempt one check.

A successful DC 19 Perception or DC 17 Survival check locates suitable shelter.

A successful DC 19 Athletics check transports any carts and supplies quickly.

A successful DC 19 Diplomacy or Intimidation check guides the rest of the caravan towards safety.

A successful DC 19 Occultism or DC 17 Religion check redirects some of the storm's effects away from the caravan.

If the PCs do not succeed on three checks, they lose 1d4 CP.

Floodslain Wolves

Moderate 4

The surge of necromantic energy from Tar-Baphon's machinations created even more floodslain than usual. Undead stalk the caravan, hunting them ruthlessly.

FLOODSLAIN WOLVES (4)

CREATURE 2

Variant floodslain, page 84

MEDIUM **AMPHIBIOUS** **UNDEAD**

Perception +10; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +6, Stealth +8, Survival +8

Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +3, **Int** -4, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +0

AC 17; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +11, **Will** +7

HP 34, void healing (*Monster Core* 360); **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, sleep; **Resistances** fire 2

Sodden Ground (aura, occult, water) 20 feet. Water flows endlessly from a floodslain creature, making the area around it slippery. The ground in the aura is difficult terrain for all non-floodslain creatures.

Speed 35 feet, swim 35 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +11, **Damage** 1d8+4 piercing plus Knockdown and Drowning Touch

Drowning Touch (occult) The target's lungs begin to fill with water and they must attempt a DC 17 Fortitude save. A target affected by Drowning Touch can spend a single action coughing in an attempt to recover, which immediately lets them attempt a new Fortitude save against the effect. A success improves the previous result by 1 step. A critical success improves the previous result by 2, and a critical failure decreases it by 1.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is slowed 1 for 1 round.

Failure The creature is slowed 2 for 1 round.

Critical Failure The creature is slowed 2 and drowning.

Floodslain Spawn (occult) A living animal or humanoid killed by a floodslain creature rises as a floodslain if its body is left in water for 24 hours. The new floodslain isn't under the control of the floodslain creature that killed it.

Pack Attack The floodslain wolf's Strikes deal 1d4 extra damage to creatures within reach of at least two of the floodslain wolf's allies.

Vomit Flotsam ♦♦ (occult) The floodslain vomits flotsam in a 15-foot cone. Any creature in the area takes 2d8 bludgeoning damage (DC 18 basic Reflex save).

Boar in Need

Trivial 4

An injured bristle boar struggles to free itself from a crevice before a pack of floodslain wolves finishes it off. If the boar is rescued, a PC can make a DC 17 Nature check to befriend it and add 1 CP to the caravan. If the caravan has collapsed, the bristle boar digs up edible tubers for the group. The bristle boar also grants a +1 circumstance bonus to Survival checks to Forage or Track.

BRISTLE BOAR

CREATURE 3

Page 83

Initiative Perception +9

FLOODSLAIN WOLVES (2)

CREATURE 2

Page 47

Initiative Perception +10

Drowned Dead

Moderate 4

Even the most waterlogged undead have begun to enter the area by this time.

FLOOD GHOULS (4)

CREATURE 2

Page 35

Initiative Perception +8

Stilt Town

The caravan comes across an abandoned town of stilt houses. Searching the town (DC 19) reveals evidence of an undead attack and a hasty escape. Scattered goods and supplies can be gathered up to gain 1 CP (a day's worth of supplies if the caravan has collapsed).





Chapter 3: Splitskull Siege

Only a few days ago, the Wingripper ambassador ordered K'zaard, the devious leader of Cleft Head Hold, to pull his people back into their fortress and bar the gates. Despite its impressive size, Splitskull, the Cleft Head's fort, doesn't have enough supplies or space to accommodate more than a small portion of the hold. K'zaard therefore made "strategic" choices to only select members who were particularly loyal to him or vital to the operation of the fort. By the time the caravan reaches the gates, K'zaard and his chosen Cleft Head orcs are entrenched in Splitskull.

The lands controlled by the Cleft Head lie on the border with Ustalav, and Splitskull itself is the easternmost fortress in Belkzen. The Whispering Tyrant devised his invasion strategy knowing the most likely escape route from his undead horde would be

in this direction. The Unbroken Horn's deal with the Cleft Head thus ensured that few refugees could make it safely to Ustalav.

CLEFT HEAD HOLD

The Cleft Head orcs are less nomadic than most orc holds, rarely venturing far from Splitskull Keep. For decades, Cleft Head has overseen (and collected tribute from) Freedom Town, an eclectic settlement occupied primarily by non-orcs. A portion of this is supposed to go to Urgir as tax, though it's an open secret that K'zaard skims from the top for his own enrichment. PCs may already have some information about the Cleft Head Hold. Below are examples of what they might learn.

Historical Knowledge: A PC who succeeds at a DC 19 Belkzen Lore or Society check to Recall Knowledge

knows the location would have been a logical place for dwarves to build an outpost when they ruled this area millennia ago. With a critical success, the PC also knows of a network of interconnected tunnels between Koldukar and its outlying settlements.

Local Knowledge: A PC who succeeds at a DC 17 Belkzen Lore or Orc Lore check (or a DC 19 Society check) to Recall Knowledge knows the Cleft Head Hold is led by K'zaard, widely regarded as a clever leader with a gift for persuasion and diplomacy. This contrasts with other orc leaders who are often better known for their strength and intimidation. While diplomacy isn't considered a weakness in Belkzen society, K'zaard hides behind politics, rarely risking himself or his own forces in battle. With a critical success, a PC recalls old rumors that K'zaard has maintained control through kickbacks and alcohol, suggesting his forces wouldn't stay loyal to him if bribed or routed.

Political Knowledge: A PC who succeeds at a DC 19 Belkzen Lore or Society check to Recall Knowledge knows Grask Uldeth ordered the Cleft Head Hold to move from their ancestral territory in the northwest, relocating to Splitskull Keep to keep an eye on Freedom Town. With a critical success, the PC knows that this fort was not built by orcs but was repaired by the Cleft Head Hold. It supposedly has spirits haunting its lower depths.

OSSOGARD

While repairing Splitskull, the orcs built the nearby village of Ossogard to house the rest of the Cleft Head Hold. There's no large-scale industry here, with inhabitants instead relying on hunting, horticulture, and tribute kickbacks earned from Freedom Town. Treasures and tools originating from Ustalav, Lastwall, Nirmathas, are commonplace.

Normally, most of the Cleft Head Hold lives in the village. Even those who serve in the fort rotate between sleeping there and in Ossogard. Although many of these orcs have spent their whole lives in the village, some still cling to an idealized image of their ancestors' nomadic ways. They simply don't see the village as a permanent settlement.

When K'zaard and his followers first closed the fort, the excluded hold members assumed it was temporary and continued their lives as normal. Recently, however, the village's hunters reported frequent undead sightings, and inhabitants began demanding

entry behind the keep's walls. The guards refused. Survivors to the core, scores of villagers packed up their belongings and dispersed into the countryside. Some headed for the mountains to the north, while others planned a route to Freedom Town and perhaps farther east. Those few who remain feel betrayed but simultaneously hopeful that K'zaard will change his mind.

Arriving in Town

After a 60-mile journey, the caravan arrives just outside Ossogard.

Several hundred adobe houses surround the base of a large hill, atop which towers a stone fortress. Though built for at least a thousand residents, the town appears nearly abandoned, with smoke from only a dozen hearths wafting skyward.

As the town comes into view, the caravan's surviving members begin muttering worriedly. Splitskull was supposed to be their haven, yet it seems almost vacant. Ardax's surviving guards share a worried look before urging the group onward. While passing through the town, the PCs see small groups of orcs packing up their belongings, salvaging abandoned properties, or reinforcing homes to create makeshift forts. They aren't eager to chat, acknowledging the new arrivals with grim humor.

If pressed, residents summarize recent events.

"When the Deluge clouds appeared, the dead rose in small numbers. The hold crushed those easily, so we assumed it was over. Then scouts came, warning of even more undead closing in. And what did K'zaard do? He took his favorite warriors into the fortress and closed the gates! We called on him to let us in, yet he scoffed and told us there wasn't enough room or food for everyone. Folks tried reasoning with him and his guards—our neighbors! But they told us to scatter and come back with reinforcements." The orc pauses, giving the caravan a disapproving look. "I'm guessing you aren't the reinforcements."

Most inhabitants took K'zaard's taunting advice to heart and retreated into the wilderness. Only about a hundred orcs occupy the town now, uncertain whether to flee, barricade themselves in their homes, or hope that K'zaard shows mercy once the undead arrive. Whatever the case, the PCs' tired convoy stands little chance of surviving if left outside, and the group is too exhausted to outrun the approaching undead.



Cleft Head Banner



GETTING INSIDE EARLY

This adventure assumes several of the caravan's guards enter Splitskull shortly after arrival, leaving the PCs to concoct their own way of getting in. If any PCs accompany the guards seeking an audience with K'zaard, the soldiers at the gate welcome the orc guards, but chase off the PCs with insults (and arrows if necessary). But what if the PCs are (or appear to be) orcs? It might be those PCs are welcomed inside, which could split up the party!

Not to worry! Getting inside at this stage bypasses only a few obstacles involved in the upcoming infiltration. With a split party, there's even more pressure for the other PCs to catch up and find a way in. Consider creating an additional obstacle or opportunity in the infiltration that involves the PCs inside the fort making it easier for the other PCs to sneak inside.

Worried, Ardax's surviving guards ask the PCs to oversee setting up camp in several abandoned buildings so the group can rest. The guards then split up, with some gathering information around town and others demanding an audience with K'zaard the Drover, the Cleft Head Hold's leader.

For the next several hours, the PCs are free to rest or explore as they like. The following are several activities they might perform in the meantime.

Gather Information: A PC can coax the town's remaining residents to share reports and rumors with a DC 20 Diplomacy check to Gather Information. Share three of the following on a success, starting with the Catacombs, Morale, and Ustalavic Visitor rumors. Share them all on a critical success.

- **Catacombs:** Splitskull sits atop haunted dwarven tunnels. None of them extend beyond the fort itself—at least not anymore. However, the tunnels might allow someone to move from one part of the fortress to another without being seen.
- **Fortress Layout:** A resident sketches a crude map of the fortress and its courtyard for the PC, indicating a few noteworthy sites from area F.
- **Morale:** The garrison seemed reluctant to shut the gates and lock out their neighbors, but they followed K'zaard's commands. The fort's defenders will put up a fight, but many might be willing to defy K'zaard (and follow their consciences) if he shows weakness.
- **Resident Drake:** A large drake arrived at the fortress shortly after the gates were shut. The creature circles high above the town several times per day.

- **Sally Port:** The fort has a small gate along the east wall—or at least it had a gate there. It was destroyed ages before the Cleft Head settled here, and K'zaard had the hole plugged up. It's still blocked, but only by debris and vines that could be removed.
- **Ustalavic Visitor:** A human traveling from Ustalav in a covered wagon arrived several days before the undead appeared. He was welcomed into the keep and wasn't seen again until guards threw his corpse at the desperate townsfolk to chase them off.

Scavenge: A PC can Seek abandoned tools and treasures left behind by inhabitants. The PC attempts a DC 18 Scouting Lore check, DC 18 Survival check, or DC 22 Perception check. If successful, they find several level 0 items worth up to 2 gp; if the PC is looking for something specific, they likely find it along with several miscellaneous treasures. If the check critically succeeds, the PC also finds assorted coinage worth 15 sp.

Scout: A PC might scout the fortress, studying its design and looking for a way in. The PC attempts a DC 18 Scouting Lore or Warfare Lore check, DC 20 Stealth check, or DC 22 Perception check. If successful, they make enough observations to learn the Fortress Layout, Resident Drake, and Sally Port information above. On a critical success, the PC also finds the body of the Ustalavic visitor who arrived recently (and was thrown over the walls). He's a middle-aged man with a jagged bite mark in his shoulder, and the body appears drained of blood.

Vanishing Guards

After a few hours, only one of the guards returns; the ones who approached the fortress are missing. If the PCs didn't shadow those guards, they're able to learn what happened from eyewitnesses: their guards approached the gate, shouted back and forth with the sentries about speaking with K'zaard, and then entered the fort after the gate was partially opened for them. They've not reappeared.

Nobody witnessed what happened next. Though invited inside under friendly pretenses, these guards were surrounded and disarmed once inside. K'zaard demanded their allegiance if they wanted to survive the coming invasion. One guard refused, demanding K'zaard honor Ardax's demand that the caravan be granted shelter. K'zaard had that guard thrown into a gibbet as an example, after which the other guards agreed to serve. The PCs can find the first guard in area F6. The others might be encountered throughout area F, where the PCs might cajole them into working with Ardax again as part of their infiltration.

Next Steps: The sole guard who returned carries grim news: it seems like the undead are approaching and could be here within a few days. There aren't enough fresh mounts and supplies to make a run for Ustalav, so if the caravan can't get inside the fort, they'll likely die in the town or on the road.

This is beyond the remaining guard's skill set, especially when this news causes an uproar among the caravan's survivors. Up until now, the PCs have been honored guests or precious cargo. If they haven't done so already, the PCs must step up and take charge for everyone's survival. That involves infiltrating and seizing control of the fortress to protect those stranded in town. The guard can help the PCs make plans, but intends to stay with the caravan and ensure nobody robs them.

SPLITSKULL KEEF

Seven thousand years before it was occupied by the Cleft Head Hold orcs, this fort was a minor outpost of Koldukar, the dwarven sky citadel that orcs later conquered and renamed Urgir. The outpost's name, if it had one, has been forgotten. From atop a low hill, the fort provides a commanding view of its surroundings, and the large, weathered dwarven face carved into the keef makes it seem like the fortress itself is keeping watch. Despite the ages that have passed, the fortress remains mostly intact thanks to its impeccable construction and orcs' periodic repairs since. The most prominent damage is a long gash that mars the dwarven face, inflicted by an orc assault generations ago.

Gate: Iron-banded, 10-foot-tall wooden doors seal the fort's main entrance. Opening the gates involves lifting the heavy bar from inside (DC 26 Athletics) and pushing the doors from inside. Sentries are most watchful near the gate, and they don't mind verbally sparring with anyone who approaches. By interacting with the sentries, a PC can attempt a DC 20 Perception check to Sense Motive, ascertaining on a success that these orcs aren't pleased with K'zaard's orders to prohibit anyone else from entering. That said, the sentries are resolute in keeping the gate closed until given new orders. After a short discussion, they tell visitors to go away, nocking arrows in their bows as incentive.

Sally Port: A narrow, ancient sally port enters through the east wall. Damage from the original orc invasion exposed the wall to the elements, causing the sally port to fill with rubble and overgrown vegetation. When K'zaard took over the stronghold, he ordered workers to make sure this route was impassible. They filled it with additional rubble and iron bands, but they

weren't thorough about the vegetation. The plants, which are accustomed to breaking through the hard earth of Belkzen, weakened these defenses over time.

Walls: About six orcs patrol the fortress walls at any time, watching over the 100-foot expanse between the walls and nearest cover. A 10-foot-wide parapet atop the walls provides an easy walkway between the guard towers. The walls rise between 15–20 feet in height, varying with the hilltop's contours.

Underground: Below the fortress are various storerooms and catacombs. Narrow tunnels once stretched toward Urgir and other fortifications, allowing covert movement in times of crisis. Most of these tunnels have since collapsed, and a only a fraction of the basement remains intact. By digging into these chambers, the PCs might access the keep from below (see Catacombs on page 64).

Infiltrating Splitskull Keep

The Cleft Head Hold values fortifications more than most orcs, having largely abandoned their semi-nomadic lifestyle. To them, thick walls are a sign of strength, as valid as muscles or scars. K'zaard has encouraged this, which suits his reactionary and scheming personality.

Saving the caravan and the remaining inhabitants of Ossogard isn't as simple as opening the keep's gates; K'zaard's warriors would still fight and chase off any refugees. Instead, the PCs need to undermine K'zaard's authority to the point that his forces defy his orders and welcome everyone else inside. Doing this involves earning Infiltration Points (IP), enabling their confrontation and defeat of K'zaard. The PCs can earn some IP from outside the fort, but most opportunities are inside the fort, requiring the PCs to break inside through one of several methods.

Exploring Splitskull Keep's courtyard (see the map on the inside back cover) includes several encounter areas the PCs can explore in any order, all woven together with infiltration subsystem mechanics (*GM Core* 196–199). When the PCs' IP total equals or exceeds certain thresholds, they gain benefits and access several ways of infiltrating the main keep (areas **G** and **H**). Note that each individual obstacle (rather than group obstacles) cannot contribute more than 3 IP toward this total.

8+ IP: As K'zaard's authority slips, his subordinates look for distractions more than enemies. Reduce the check DCs of all infiltration-related challenges by 1.

15+ IP: Discontent spreads among the Splitskull garrison, with many vocally questioning K'zaard's strategies and competence. Unnamed orc combatants surrender or flee when reduced to one-quarter of their maximum Hit Points (or half their maximum Hit Points if they have the frightened condition, such as when

TRACKING TIME

The approaching undead horde's distance and the time required to infiltrate Splitskull Keep are purposefully ambiguous. The goal is to keep the PCs focused on their goals while allowing them a little leeway to explore, make mistakes, and rest to regain daily abilities at least once. As a rough estimate, attempting checks to overcome an obstacle or opportunity takes about an hour. This might encourage the PCs to approach several non-combat challenges at once, with any resulting combat enabling nearby PCs to join the fray within a round or two.

Demoralized). Patrols are so lax that the PCs can access the sinkhole (X inside back cover) that leads to the catacombs (area I page 64) allowing them to bypass the gate guards and enter the keep.

20+ IP: The Cleft Head orcs are on the brink of mutiny. The PCs can move about the courtyard unchallenged, and a guard inside the main keep unbars the doors to join their complaining comrades, letting the PCs enter area G with ease.

28+ IP: The PCs are unlikely to reach this threshold, instead moving to confront K'zaard and his lieutenants in areas G and H. However, if the PCs continue rabble-rousing to this point, the fort's garrison takes up arms against K'zaard and drags him (along with his cyclops and boar companions) to the courtyard to air their grievances. Nobody is eager to challenge K'zaard physically, but the mob happily cheers on the PCs if they volunteer to duel K'zaard and his retinue from area H2. Due to K'zaard's level, a one-on-one duel would be tremendously difficult. That said, if a player craves such a duel and you feel it would be an equally satisfying experience for your group, apply the weak adjustment (*Monster Core* 7) to K'zaard. Once K'zaard is defeated, the surviving orcs welcome in the refugees, and the PCs can freely explore the keep; only the encounters in areas H3 and H6 remain.

Reward: Once the PCs reach 20 IP, award them 60 XP. If they reach 30 IP, award them XP for any encounters in areas G and H that they bypassed.

Obstacles

The following obstacles present likely challenges the PCs encounter, each of which might earn them Awareness Points (page 54) while also enabling them to sneak into the fortress and gain allies.

Winning Fights: Unlike a typical infiltration, starting and winning fights can earn additional Infiltration

Points for the PCs—within reason. Many combats grant 1 IP, though each fight also risks earning more Awareness Points.

APPROACHING SPLITSKULL KEEP **OBSTACLE**

Infiltration Points 1 (individual); **Overcome** DC 20 Acrobatics, DC 19 Plains Lore, DC 18 Scouting Lore, DC 19 Stealth, or DC 18 Warfare Lore

The Cleft Head Hold has removed the shrubs and large debris from Splitskull Keep's periphery, making it difficult to approach without being seen. By timing the patrols and exploiting what little cover remains, the PCs might approach unnoticed.

Special Though each PC needs to earn 1 IP to overcome this challenge, the party does not earn more than 3 IP from this obstacle when calculating the group's IP total.

EXCAVATING THE SALLY PORT **OBSTACLE**

Infiltration Points 3 (group); **Overcome** DC 20 Athletics, DC 18 Crafting, or DC 20 Thievery

This obstacle is mandatory if the PCs decide to enter through the sally port. The small entrance is blocked by rubble and plant growth, requiring careful labor to partially clear it without causing further collapses that could attract attention.

OVER THE WALL **OBSTACLE**

Infiltration Points 1 (individual); **Overcome** DC 18 Athletics or DC 22 Stealth

This obstacle is mandatory if the PCs decide to climb over the wall. The curtain wall is chipped and worn with age, providing hidden handholds for those able to find them.

Special Though each PC needs to earn 1 IP to overcome this challenge, the party does not earn more than 3 IP from this obstacle when calculating the group's IP total.

RUIN SUPPLIES **OBSTACLE**

Infiltration Points 3 (group); **Overcome** DC 20 Crafting, DC 20 Medicine, DC 18 Mercantile Lore, DC 22 Survival, or DC 20 Thievery

Ample supplies ensure K'zaard and his forces can remain holed up for many weeks. If the PCs access and ruin some of the provisions or sabotage other equipment, the orc guards' rumbling bellies drown out any loyalty they have toward K'zaard.

SOW DISCONTENT **OBSTACLE**

Infiltration Points 3 (group); **Overcome** DC 20 Belkzen Lore, DC 20 Deception, DC 22 Diplomacy, DC 20 Orc Lore, DC 20 Orc Pantheon Lore, DC 20 Performance, DC 22 Religion, or DC 22 Society

This is an open-ended challenge while inside the keep that can be repeated once to earn additional Infiltration Points. The keep's occupants are nervous and skeptical about

K'zaard's cowardly strategy, though they'd rather be safe here than exposed to undead in the wilderness. As the PCs interact with the orcs here, they can sow rumors, encourage mistrust of K'zaard, create subversive songs, prophesy how recent events are a condemnation of K'zaard, and other tasks that play upon these orcs' anxieties and values.

The PCs can repeat this obstacle to earn additional Infiltration Points. However, each time they repeat it, the DCs of its skill checks increase by 1.

Special A PC who has the Group Impression or Streetwise skill feat gains a +2 circumstance bonus to checks to overcome this obstacle. Other skill feats might apply a similar bonus at the GM's discretion.

SUBDUE GUARDS

OBSTACLE

Infiltration Points 3 (group); **Overcome** DC 20 Athletics, DC 22 Deception, DC 20 Intimidation, DC 20 Stealth, DC 20 Warfare Lore, or a successful Strike against AC 22

Inevitably the PCs need to access an area guarded by orcs they can't easily trick or sneak past. The PCs must get close enough to these guards to swiftly subdue them without raising an alarm. If this obstacle is not overcome after each PC present attempts a check, begin a combat encounter against a Splitskull patrol (page 55).

For each Infiltration Point earned toward this obstacle, give the PCs one of the following advantages: each orc rampager's Hit Points are reduced by 4d6, the PCs receive a +2 circumstance bonus to their initiative rolls, or a PC begins the encounter in a particularly advantageous position (such as within melee range or atop significant high ground).

Complications

Once inside, the PCs can blend in among other occupants, but these complications expose them to more scrutiny.

TUSK CHECK

COMPLICATION

Trigger The PCs have recently attempted checks to Ruin Supplies, Sow Discontent, or otherwise blend in among the keep's occupants. This complication targets one of the participating PCs, prioritizing one who isn't an orc or dromaar.

Overcome DC 20 Belkzen Lore, DC 20 Deception, DC 22 Intimidation, or DC 20 Orc Lore

Splitskull Keep's current occupants don't all know each other, but they know that non-orcs shouldn't be here. Several orcs intercept the PC, trying to determine if they belong here. A cunning lie, a menacing retort, or evidence of being raised among orc cultures is enough to allay their suspicions—or convince these orcs that investigating further would risk a fight they don't want.

Special If an orc or dromaar PC is targeted by this complication, they gain a +5 circumstance bonus to their skill check.

Critical Success The PC allays the orcs' concern and even makes a friend, earning them an Infiltration Point they can use only when trying to earn other orcs' trust.

Success The PC successfully deflects suspicion.

Failure The orcs decide to leave, but they spread rumors of the weird visitor, earning the party 1 AP.

Critical Failure As failure, but the party accrues 2 AP.

WYVERN TAKES WING

COMPLICATION

Trigger The PCs are moving about the courtyard.

Overcome DC 22 Acrobatics, DC 20 Crafting, DC 22 Deception, or DC 18 Stealth

Murshek's wyvern mount roosts in one of the keep's towers, bored and hungry. It takes flight in search of food, but not before circling and studying the courtyard. If it spots someone suspicious—including the PCs, if they don't squeeze behind cover or blend in among other bystanders by keeping busy—it reports back to Murshek later. Its hunting trip is brief, with the wyvern likely returning before the PCs storm the keep.

Each PC must overcome this complication unless, at the GM's discretion, they're spending extensive time in one of the buildings. The PCs can't earn more than 3 AP from this complication.

Success The wyvern doesn't notice the PC.

Failure The wyvern becomes suspicious but then departs to eat, earning the PCs 1 AP.

Critical Failure The wyvern's suspicions override its hunger, and it returns to its roost to report immediately. This earns the PCs 2 AP.

Opportunities

The PCs have several optional ways to earn additional Infiltration Points. These include Angry Cook on page 56, Boar Rampage on page 57, Left Out to Dry on page 57, and the Spread Terror opportunity below.


SPREAD TERROR

OPPORTUNITY

Requirements The PCs conclude a fight against three or more orcs, at least one of which surrendered, fled, or was taken captive.

Orcs are culturally conditioned to respect strength, and after defeating several foes, the PCs can boast, flex, and display quiet ferocity in a way that spreads their legend among the survivors and makes K'zaard look weak by comparison. Each PC can make a DC 19 Intimidation check, DC 20 Orc Lore check, DC 20 Performance check, or DC 19 Warfare Lore check.

The PCs cannot earn more than 2 Infiltration Points each time they perform this opportunity (even if multiple PCs succeed at their checks). However, the PCs can repeat this opportunity after each qualifying encounter. Consider limiting the PCs to 6 IP earned with this opportunity



to encourage them to complete other obstacles and encounters.

Critical Success The PC's display leaves the survivors in awe. Once they escape, the survivors spread useful rumors that earn the PCs 2 IP.

Success As critical success, but the PCs earn only 1 IP.

Failure The PC's display makes no impression, earning no IP.

Critical Failure The PC's display turns a scary situation into a farce. The survivor mockingly identifies the PCs to several friends, earning the PCs 1 Awareness Point.

Awareness

Awareness Points represent the attention the PCs attract as they overcome obstacles and deal with complications. They are usually accrued as the result of a failed skill check, but other actions might generate them as well. Compared to a typical infiltration in which any attention is bad attention, exploring Splitskull Keep allows for some brawling and loitering without serious repercussions. The following are a few examples of how the PCs might earn Awareness Points.

- The PCs earn 1 Awareness Point if a combat lasts at least 2 full rounds. Brief scuffles in Splitskull Keep don't attract much attention.
- The PCs earn 1 Awareness Point whenever they carelessly draw attention to themselves, such as by performing exceptionally flashy or noisy actions.
- The PCs earn 4 Awareness Points if they take actions that are nigh-impossible to ignore, such as starting a fire, indiscriminately murdering noncombatants in public, or loudly assaulting the fort's walls. Note that brawling, acts of self-defense, and even "justified" violence (usually preceded by culturally expected threats, glares, and escalating body language) usually just earns 1 Awareness Point.

Effects: The PCs' Awareness Points total has the following effects.

- **5 AP** Rumors circulate that there might be intruders. The garrison becomes slightly more alert, increasing the DCs of checks for obstacles by 1.
- **10 AP** An orc patrol (page 55) confronts the PCs, challenging them about their identities and intentions. This very likely results in combat, but the initial confrontation provides enough warning that PCs in nearby locations can rejoin their companions to help in the imminent fight. Shortly afterward, one of Azdroni's minions approaches the PCs to arrange a meeting with their patron (see Spies, right).

- **15 AP** All patrols now include an additional combatant, noted in their encounter descriptions. The PCs encounter a second patrol, as above.
- **20 AP** Murshek (area H6) grows suspicious of all the noise and takes flight, landing with her wyvern in the courtyard. She demands the intruders show themselves. Not wanting to get drawn into the conflict, the garrison provides the PCs no shelter, shoving anyone they find toward the fearsome rider. A fight against Murshek and her wyvern follows. If victorious, the PCs earn 3 Infiltration Points for their combat prowess.

SPLITSKULL KEEP

The fortress (Area F inside back cover) has thick stone walls with an assortment of stone, adobe, and hide outbuildings in its courtyard.

Garrison: The fort is prepared for a siege, yet most of the garrison is restless and bored, preferring to gamble, wrestle, sing, drink, sleep, and complain while waiting for whatever invasion is on the horizon. Many have lived in the area for years; some were recently recruited to bolster K'zaard's forces, but nobody knows everyone else here. Meanwhile, K'zaard and his personal retinue spend most of their time sealed inside the keep (areas G and H). The limited oversight and dozens of unfamiliar faces create a serious security risk, allowing the PCs to navigate the outbuildings without being challenged by everyone who sees them. What's worse, there are enough daily scuffles and brawls that sounds of combat don't immediately raise the alarm (see Awareness Points, left).

Spies: One of K'zaard's guests is **Azdroni** (male orc vampire), one of several advisors dispatched to ensure the Cleft Head Hold remains neutral in the coming undead invasion. Azdroni maintains two spies—**Rusgar** (male orc weaponsmith) and **Nireshki** (female orc boar trainer)—who have both critically failed saving throws against his Dominate ability. Azdroni has ordered them to report anything out of the ordinary and keep meticulous records that he reviews every two days.

Once the PCs earn 10 Awareness Points, Azdroni sends one of his spies to arrange a nighttime meeting to discuss possible cooperation (see area H3). A PC can discern that the messenger is under the effects of mind-controlling magic with a successful DC 25 Perception check to Sense Motive.

Patrols

Clusters of orcs casually wander the fort on patrol. The following two patrols represent typical encounters for when the PCs pick a fight or are identified as intruders

(usually due to earning too many Awareness Points). Each patrol provides special rewards the first time it's defeated, after which the PCs don't earn additional treasure or Infiltration Points.

Splitskull Patrol 1

Moderate 5

These wandering patrols can be encountered almost anywhere. If the PCs have earned at least 15 Awareness Points, add an additional elite orc veteran to the encounter. If three of their companions are incapacitated, the remaining orcs flee or surrender.

Reward: The first time the PCs defeat this patrol, they recover an *oil of swiftness*^{TV} and a *copper penny*^{TV} as treasure. In addition, the PCs receive 1 Infiltration Point.

ORC VAGABONDS (2)

CREATURE 3

Page 86

Initiative Perception +9

ELITE ORC VETERANS (3)

CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Monster Core 6, 258

Initiative Perception +8

Splitskull Patrol 2

Moderate 5

This patrol tends to be encountered close to the keep, such as the northern half of the courtyard or in area G. If the PCs have earned at least 15 Awareness Points, add an additional elite orc veteran to the encounter. These warriors surrender or flee only when defeat is absolutely certain.

Reward: The first time the PCs defeat one of these patrols, they find a *grim ring*^{BotD} and a *climbing bolt*. In addition, the PCs receive 1 Infiltration Point.

ORC RAMPAGER (3)

CREATURE 4

Page 86

Initiative Perception +12

F1. Courtyard

The curtain wall surrounds a long, open courtyard cluttered with an eclectic array of buildings. It's built from large, carefully cut stone blocks fitted such that there's virtually no seams where they meet. However, millennia of weathering has chipped the fortification, giving it a haggard appearance that the repairs since only partly disguise. Even so, it remains sturdy.

A cobblestone path leads from the main gate at the south to the keep's doors to the north. To either side stand various warehouses, barracks, pens, and workshops, with most of the occupants making camp here. It feels much like a village, with smiths operating the forge, cooks preparing food, and even a few children dashing around. Some important buildings

are detailed below, but there are also numerous smaller buildings the resident orcs have built to use as personal dwellings. These are octagonal tents with wood-and-bone frames covered with hide.

F2. Barracks

Moderate 5

The walls of these long buildings were assembled from the same gray stone as the stronghold's fortifications, though the irregular size of the blocks suggest part of the fort was dismantled to build these. The roofs consist of wooden beams supporting clay tiles.

This was one of the first structures salvaged when the Cleft Head took over the stronghold. They gathered chunks of broken wall where the fort had been breached long ago, fitting them together into new buildings. In addition to housing various warriors, one end of the barracks serves as an armory and storehouse for siege provisions.

Infiltration: The concentration of provisions and heavily armed witnesses makes this a high-risk, high-reward location to infiltrate. PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus to Ruin Supplies here. The first time a PC earns an Infiltration Point toward that obstacle here, they also recover a *fear gem* and *potion of leaping* from among the goods. However, critically failing to Ruin Supplies here earns a PC 2 Awareness Points, not 1.

F3. Communal Longhouse

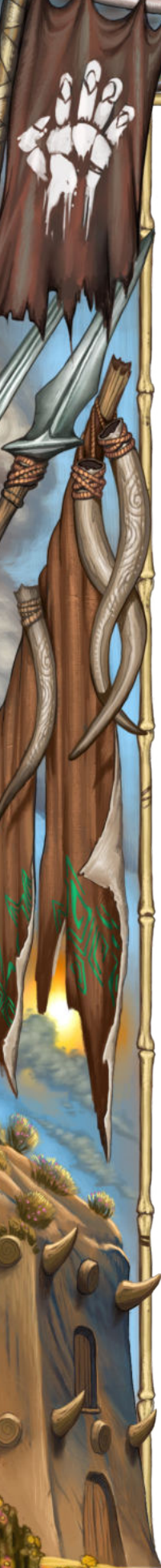
Stone pillars etched with graffiti support this building's roof: a wooden lattice covered in aurochs hide that arches from north to south, giving the interior the appearance of a giant tent. Windows admit a steady breeze, causing the fire pit in the building's center to spark cheerfully. Low wicker seats surround several low tables made of rawhide and stone.

By far the busiest building in Splitskull, the longhouse serves as a combination community center and feasting hall. It's occupied at all hours by at least a dozen dining, drinking, fighting, or relaxing orcs.

Infiltration: Given the relaxed atmosphere, PCs gain a +1 circumstance bonus to Sow Discontent in this area.

F4. Outdoor Kitchen

Smoke from open roasting pits mingles with the smell of raw meat being butchered in this open-air kitchen. A muscular orc sweats as he pivots between cutting boards, stew pots, fuel for the fire, and supplies.



Proprietor of the Butcherblock, a tavern in Ossogard, **Berik** (male orc cook) was allowed to take shelter in the fortress in exchange for managing its kitchens. However, he's quickly become frustrated in three ways. First, he resents K'zaard's order to exclude most of Ossogard from sheltering here. Second, he chafes at the tight rationing and limited ingredients that hamper his culinary artistry. Third, he harbors a grudge against K'zaard for criticizing a recent meal that Berik worked hard to create and customize. K'zaard has clearly forgotten that the last person anyone should insult is their cook.

The cook doesn't freely gossip with strangers, not wanting to risk retaliation. That said, one or more PCs can befriend him with some combination of charm, cooking aid, or combat. Once he's more friendly, Berik shares his frustrations more openly, giving the PCs access to the Angry Cook opportunity (see right).

Charm: Berik spends hours at a time making each meal. Spending some time chatting with him or providing entertainment helps pass the time and relieve his stress. A PC can befriend him over the course of an hour with a successful DC 20 Diplomacy or Performance check.

Cooking: In theory, several orcs are supposed to be helping Berik at any given time. However, camp discipline is so lax that most of his assistants don't show up. One or more PCs can help for an hour by succeeding at a DC 15 Cooking Lore check or a DC 18 Crafting, Hunting Lore, or Survival check. Even menial labor is appreciated, so an unskilled PC can help for an hour to automatically succeed at their check to Aid another PC's check.

Combat: There are two different ways that the PCs might fight their way into Berik's esteem. First, the PCs might decide the best way to help Berik is to track down the orcs who were assigned to help him. After inquiring around camp, the PCs find these orcs lazing about with no interest in peeling potatoes. Cajoling the orcs makes them defensive, and they begin posturing and taunting the PCs to show their own strength and defiance. With a DC 10 Belkzen Lore or Orc Lore check (or a DC 15 Perception check to Sense Motive), a PC realizes this is an invitation to brawl to determine who's correct and in charge. This is a combat encounter against a patrol group (page 55), though consider reducing the number of participating orcs if not all of the PCs are present. The combatants use mostly nonlethal tactics, such as surrendering when nearing defeat, demanding heavily injured foes capitulate, and sometimes just throwing aside weapons to wrestle.

The alternate combat approach involves the fort's rationing guidelines. Throughout the day, orcs stop by to bully, cajole, or steal extra food from Berik. He's grown frustrated with this behavior. A hungry group might arrive at the kitchen while the PCs are there, trying to steal a snack while dodging Berik's knives. If the PCs intervene, fight, and chase away these orcs (using the guidelines above), the PCs earn Berik's approval.

ANGRY COOK

Requirements The PCs have befriended Berik or learned of his disdain for K'zaard.

With proper persuasion, Berik could be convinced to poison K'zaard's food. Alternatively, a PC who spends an additional hour preparing food with Berik could covertly process or substitute the ingredients in such a way that it would inflict food poisoning. The PC attempts a DC 18 Crafting check, DC 20 Diplomacy check, or DC 20 Thievery check to enact the plan.

Critical Success The poisoned food earns the PCs 2 Infiltration Points, and K'zaard soon develops serious indigestion. The next time the PCs begin combat with K'zaard, he experiences loud and uncomfortable abdominal gurgling, becoming sickened 1.

Success As critical success, but the PCs earn only 1 Infiltration Point.

Failure Berik either refuses the idea or catches the PC before they can spoil the food, but he laughs off the incident as a joke or mistake. PCs can try again, but the check DC increases by 1 each time.

Critical Failure Berik reacts poorly, chasing the PC away from the kitchen and preventing that PC from attempting this opportunity again.

OPPORTUNITY

F5. Boar Pens

Moderate 5

A stout paddock here is surrounded by a strong-looking fence. The dirt inside has been churned up so that clouds of dust swirl constantly in the area. Low grunting and squeals fill the air along with the occasional shout.

Though selfish and sometimes cruel, K'zaard has a soft spot for animals. He has encouraged his hold to rear and train the famously irascible bristle boars. At the beginning of this endeavor, the trainers suffered grievous injuries in their attempts, but K'zaard was unmoved. These trainers have mostly learned how to deal with the animals by now, and K'zaard keeps eight bristle boars penned in the fort. Aside from their ferocity in battle, the boars are excellent at snuffing out the rare yellow truffles that grow in the surrounding area.

BOAR RAMPAGE

OPPORTUNITY

A PC can turn these boars into a terrifying hazard with a little covert manipulation. A PC could furtively attempt to cut the leather ties used to hold the pen together (DC 22 Stealth or DC 20 Thievery). A PC might instead linger nearby for an hour while using eye contact and body language to make the boars angry or nervous (DC 20 Hunting Lore, DC 20 Nature, or a DC 18 Diplomacy or Intimidation check if the PC has Animal Empathy or a similar ability). A PC could even collect and modify materials from the boars' pen to create a musk that aggravates the animals (DC 22 Crafting). Whatever their approach, the PC attempts the related check.

Critical Success The boars are aggravated and ready to escape. While within 60 feet of the pen, the PC can spend 1 action to signal or incite the boars, which then spend 1 round breaking apart their pen before rampaging around the camp. This earns the PCs 2 IP. If the PCs are engaged in combat nearby when the boars escape, one of their foes takes 4d8+8 piercing damage (basic Reflex DC 22) as a boar barrels past.

Success As critical success, but the boars quickly calm down. The PCs earn only 1 IP, and the boar deals only 2d8+8 piercing damage.

Failure The PC's attempts attract unwanted attention, earning the PCs 1 Awareness Point.

Critical Failure As failure, but a nearby boar handler sees through the PC's ploy and decides to chase the PC off with violence (see below).

Creatures: If provoked (such as by critically failing the Boar Rampage opportunity), the orc handler spends 1 round opening the pen and calling out three of the boars before giving chase. Onlookers jeer and laugh at the ensuing fight, seeing the PCs not as any threat but instead as much-needed entertainment.

ORC VAGABOND CREATURE 3

Page 86

Initiative Perception +9

BRISTLE BOARS (3)

CREATURE 3

Page 83

Initiative Perception +9

Reward: If the PCs fight and defeat the handler and bristle boars, they earn 1 IP. The handler also carries a *sneaky key*.

F6. Gibbet

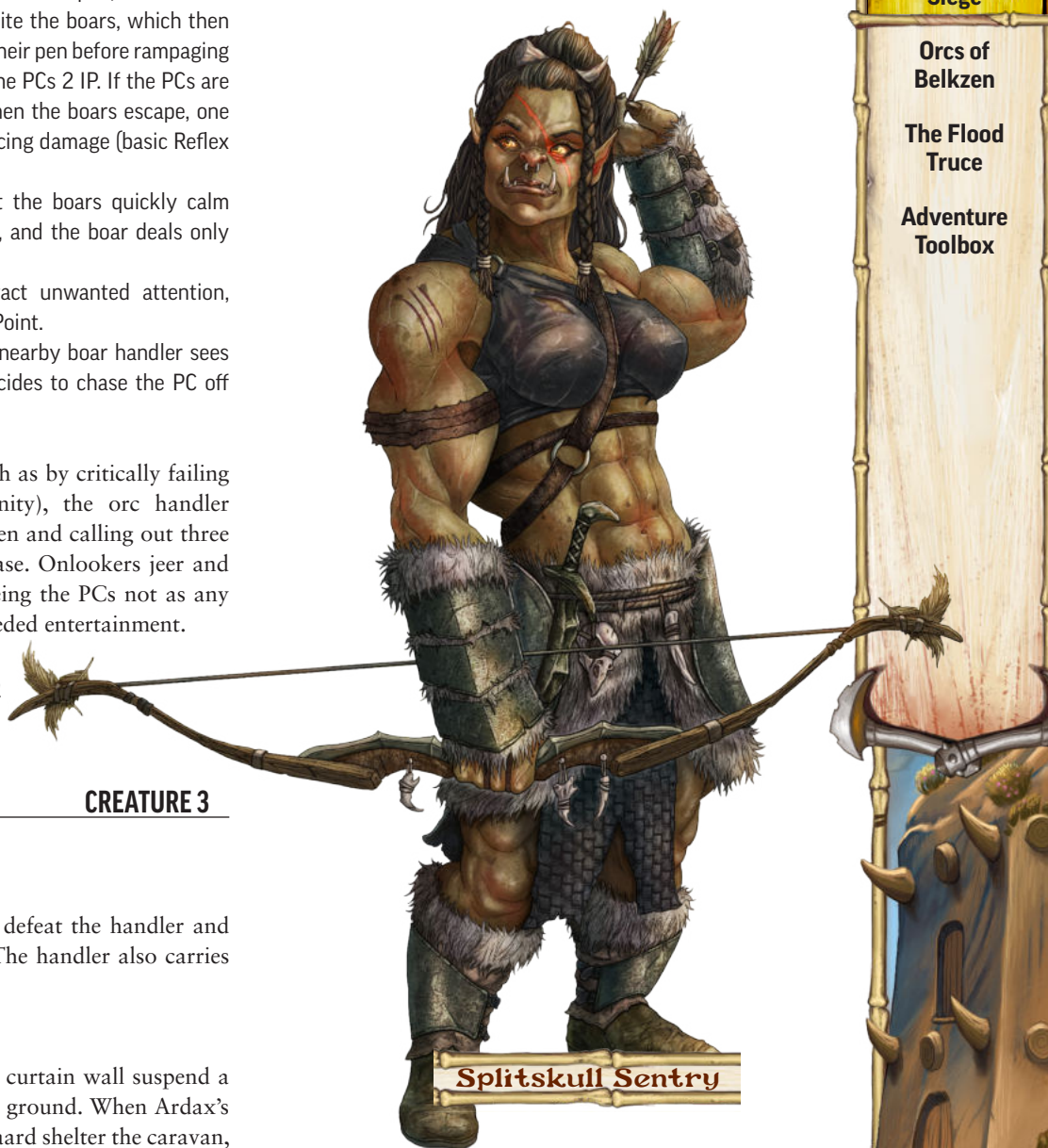
A pair of chains bolted to the curtain wall suspend a large iron cage 10 feet off the ground. When Ardax's guards entered to demand K'zaard shelter the caravan,

the leader subdued them and forced them to choose between serving the Cleft Head or perishing. The first guard defied K'zaard and was locked in this gibbet as an example. If the orc spots the PCs, she gestures for them to approach, relays what happened in the ill-fated meeting, and asks them to help her get free.

LEFT OUT TO DRY

OPPORTUNITY

A PC can help the prisoner escape, but doing so is risky and requires waiting for the ideal opening. When the time is right, the PC might break open the cage with a DC 22 Athletics check, pick its lock with a DC 20 Thievery check, or help swing the gibbet so that it becomes unmoored and crashes open on the ground with a DC 22 Acrobatics



Splitskull Sentry

SPLITSKULL KEEP: LOWER LEVEL

1 SQUARE = 5 FT



check. Once freed, the guard thanks the PC and lies low for several hours before blending in among the other orcs and helping sow distrust. This earns the PCs 3 Infiltration Points and 2 Awareness Points.

F7. Wall and Guard Posts **Moderate 5**

Jutting out from the tops of the walls, these small buildings have arrow slits on each side and provide a clear view of the surrounding terrain.

Creatures: PCs caught skulking along (or climbing) the walls might clash with the nearby guards. There's one patrol of three guards walking the perimeter, and they could be in any of the guard posts (F7). The guards fight bravely but surrender or flee once victory seems impossible. Fleeing orcs warn some of their friends of possible intruders, but they don't raise the alarm for fear of being chastised for cowardice by K'zaard.

Reward: If the PCs defeat one of these groups, award them 1 Infiltration Point.

ORC RAMPAGER **CREATURE 4**

Page 86

Initiative Perception +12

ORC VAGABONDS (2) **CREATURE 3**

Page 86

Initiative Perception +9

SPLITSKULL KEEP LOWER LEVEL

An ancient, rectangular stone keep looms over the courtyard, providing a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. Near the top of the keep on the northeast and northwest corners are two small square towers.

Above the wooden double doors, the stones of the building are shaped into the likeness of a bearded dwarf wearing a crown. A massive split down the center of the carving's head is only the most obvious damage to the structure. Its walls are chipped and broken in many places, and the entire frame of the door is built from a different type of stone than the rest of the building.

The keep is where K'zaard spends most of his time plotting and planning. He occasionally ventures out into the courtyard area to speak with hold members or personally oversee a project. He prefers, however, to have people brought to him. The door is wood reinforced with steel (12 Hardness, 48 HP, 24 BT).

Gate Guards

Moderate 5

Creatures: There are always guards posted at the entrance. If attacked, the guards shout loudly. The doomsayer tries to hold off the attackers while the other two try to close the door. It takes a total of two consecutive 3-action activities to close and bar the doors. If two guards are killed, the other flees and returns with a guard patrol 1d4+1 rounds later.

Reward: If the PCs defeat these orcs, award them 1 Infiltration Point.

ORC DOOMSAYER

CREATURE 5

Page 87

Initiative Perception +14

ORC VAGABONDS (2)

CREATURE 3

Page 86

Initiative Perception +9

G1. Main Hall

The vaulted ceilings here are supported by sturdy stone arches. The eastern wall has been carved to depict figures emerging from dark tunnels and battling orcs. To the west is a mostly destroyed wall that once separated the main hall from a smaller chamber.

A PC who investigates the carvings notes that they depict the emergence of the dwarves from the Darklands as they drove the orcs before them. With a successful DC 18 Society check or DC 22 Perception check, a PC

determines someone has recently modified the carvings, removing or redesigning a few figures, making it appear that the orcs are winning (rather than being chased off).

G2. Parlor

This grand chamber is decorated with an assortment of banners, weapons, and carefully preserved heads—mostly those of beasts, but also a few humanoid trophies. A blackened marble fireplace stands in the center of the eastern wall. An assortment of wooden chairs, benches, and tables are scattered haphazardly in the room.

A PC who Investigates the various trophies attached to the wall and succeeds at a DC 19 Belkzen Lore or Society check realizes they all represent enemies of the Cleft Head Hold or victories in battle; on a critical success, they realize that the recently acquired trophies show a shift in alliances away from Ardax and the Empty Hand Hold and toward the Wingripper and Unbroken Horn Holds.

Locked Door: The door at the northern end of the room is a new addition, something a PC who Searches immediately realizes. A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Crafting, Engineering, or Perception check believes the door was installed in the last 30 years; on a critical success they detect that it's reinforced solid wood (8 Hardness, 32 HP, 16 BT). The door is secured with an average lock (four successful DC 25 Thievery checks to unlock) designed for K'zaard's treasury key.

G3. War Room

Maps are scattered around the large table that sits in the center of the room. The west wall is crumbling, and there's a fireplace in the north wall.

K'zaard meets regularly here with his top lieutenants or visiting emissaries. A PC who Investigates or Searches the room finds several documents written partly in code, substituting pictograms for many proper nouns and using poetic imagery to obscure other passages' meaning. A PC can Decipher the Writing (*Player Core* 228) with a DC 22 Society check, DC 20 Belkzen Lore check, or DC 18 Heraldry Lore check. These texts document K'zaard's turning against the Empty Hand Hold and Ardax, instead allying his Cleft Head Hold with the Wingripper and Unbroken Horn Holds that have historically clashed with Ardax and his worldly initiatives.

The first notable document is a letter from the Wingripper leaders outlining K'zaard's responsibility to keep the stronghold closed, starting roughly a week

before the Deluge began. It further hints at an undead invasion. Another letter from three days ago contains reports on the PCs' caravan, gathered by some of the Wingripper Hold's flying scouts. It notes that Ardax's allies are headed toward Splitskull and directs K'zaard to deny them shelter.

Finally, there is a drafted proclamation telling the residents of Ossogard who "have not already been given shelter" that they will not be allowed inside. It lists several reasons including a shortage of supplies and fresh water, but it's apparent to anyone who is trained in Society that these are manufactured excuses that don't reflect reality. On a critical success, PCs notice thinly veiled accusations of treasonous thoughts on the part of those left out.

Reward: If the PCs decipher these documents and discover the deal between the Wingripper and Cleft Head Holds, award them 30 XP.

G4. Old Kitchen

Moderate 5

What must have once been two rooms are now one, with only the broken fragments of a wall providing separation. Fuzzy green mold coats several of the work surfaces, though other surfaces are scraped clean. The southern portion of the room has a large oven in the western wall beneath a few rusted metal hooks. The stone of the floors and walls almost seems to sag.

The northern part of the room has deep shelves built into its walls, although the dividers between them droop under the cover of mold. The stone floor is shattered near the far end, revealing a yawning pit, its sides covered in a thick carpet of green.

The pit is 5 feet wide in the center and drops 15 feet down to the tunnels below.

Hazard: The spores of some Darklands variety of dangerous stone-dissolving mold took hold here long ago, slowly creeping from below and into this room. It grows slowly, but if left unchecked for another decade or two it might cause irreparable damage to the keep.

STONEGUTTER MOLD

HAZARD 7

ENVIRONMENTAL FUNGUS

Stealth DC 27 (trained)

Description A hardy, innocuous-looking green mold grows over surfaces, slowly absorbing minerals.

Disable DC 26 Survival (trained) to scrape away the mold without touching it

AC 22; **Fort** +19, **Ref** +12

HP 80; **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage; **Weaknesses** fire 10

SPLITSKULL KEEP: UPPER LEVEL

1 SQUARE = 5 FT



Calcium Consumption ➔ **Trigger** A creature with bones touches the mold or steps into an area covered with it; **Effect** The mold shudders and slithers onto the triggering creature as it attempts to absorb calcium through their skin. The creature attempts a Fortitude save.

Critical Success The target shakes the mold off and is unaffected.

Success A small patch of mold clings to the target and deals 2d10+9 piercing damage.

Failure The mold clings to the target. The target takes 4d10+18 piercing damage and is drained 1.

Critical Failure The mold envelops the target. As failure, except the target is also slowed 1 until it's healed to its Hit Point maximum.

Reset 1 hour, as the mold settles back across the surface.

G5. Trapped Treasure Low 5

This austere chamber is constructed from tightly fitted stone that's been polished smooth. Numerous niches have been built into the walls, and several rusting metal racks hang from the northern wall.

The dwarven builders set this room up as a secure treasury. The door was originally a secret stone door, but Belkzen's warriors discovered it, smashed it open, and looted the treasure inside. Today, K'zaard uses it as a secondary treasure area, keeping his most precious valuables in his own chamber.

Trap: K'zaard personally placed this trap to help protect the room. Most of the orcs in the hold know he has a treasure room, and the orc leader secretly hopes one of them tries to rob it.

Treasure: A suit of +1 *leather armor* hangs on the west wall, and a coffer nearby contains 56 gp.

FALSE STEP FLOOR HAZARD 6

Pathfinder Dark Archive 123

Stealth DC 25

SPLITSKULL KEEP UPPER LEVEL

When Belkzen's orc forces assaulted this fortress on the way to claim Koldukar, they cracked open the top of the keep with siege weapons and magic. The Cleft Head orcs left the damage to the upper floors untouched when they moved in.

Exposure to weather has scoured the outer walls of any decoration they once had, and the internal wooden walls long ago burned or rotted away. The ceilings in this part of the stronghold are 10 feet high.

H1. Upper Halls and Royal Chambers

The southern wall of the main chamber is split almost exactly in the center. A five-foot-wide crack goes from the ceiling and into the floor below. Partially destroyed walls mark what must have once been impressive chambers.

Little remains here of the skilled work of the ancient dwarven crafters. This was once the chamber of the dwarves who commanded the outpost. As part of Koldukar's royal lineage, they were afforded luxury beyond what was found elsewhere in the fortress.

Treasure: A fallen stone block here is actually an overturned stone game board of dwarven make. It and most of its marble game pieces are chipped and broken, yet there are five (a tower, goat, token showing a pair of crossed axes, gear, and crown) in good condition. Their craftsmanship makes them worth 2 gp each. However, if the PCs can track down a collector in Urgir or abroad, they could sell these for up to 15 gp per piece.

H2. K'zaard's Chambers Severe 5

This well-decorated room stands in contrast to the weather-beaten interiors elsewhere in the upper keep. The walls are whitewashed, and colorful tapestries with intricate geometric designs hang in the north and south. Two narrow windows, little more than arrow slits, are cut into the eastern wall, and between them stands an

impressive, carved throne. The chair is draped in aurochs hides, and three orc skulls are mounted along the top of the high back.

K'zaard, the leader of the Cleft Head Hold, spends much of his time in this room, which serves as both his quarters and throne room.

Creatures: K'zaard is mostly found in this room from late afternoon through the night. If he is aware of the PCs' approach, he stands in front of his throne, flanked by Ouragrim and Blacksnout. If he gets a chance to speak, he uses Diplomacy for initiative.

The cyclops Ouragrim has worked with the orc leader for many years. They met when K'zaard was young and Ouragrim was performing a spiritual pilgrimage far from her homeland of Iobaria in the east. K'zaard was an untested warrior at the time, and once it seemed obvious the cyclops had spotted him, K'zaard tried to talk his way out of any potential conflict. This suited the cyclops, for she witnessed in K'zaard a prophetic spark that she interpreted as a sign of his future greatness. Since then, she's guided his rise to power and honed his talent for speechcraft.

Lately, Ouragrim has been troubled by K'zaard's actions. She opposes his alliance with the Unbroken Horn and their Wingripper allies, even if it presents an opportunity for K'zaard's advancement. During the last week, Ouragrim has had a series of nightmares that she's certain is a warning for K'zaard.

Ouragrim might become an unexpected ally for the PCs as they undermine K'zaard's authority. If she can arrange a way for K'zaard to be peacefully deposed, she's willing to go into exile with her friend. Prior to combat, she counsels K'zaard to cut his losses and surrender; he rebukes her suggestion. She fights in his defense if threatened, yet if it seems obvious K'zaard will be defeated, she turns on him, knocking him unconscious in the middle of battle and suing for peace. If K'zaard dies, Ouragrim fights to the death.

Blacksnout is K'zaard's current favorite pet. The bristle boar is foul-tempered but smarter than most of its kind. It follows K'zaard's lead, attacking who he attacks and stopping when he stops without being commanded. Blacksnout fights to the death.

Reward: Aside from his personal gear, K'zaard has a lockbox under his bed secured by an average lock (the key to which he carries). The lockbox contains 158 gp.

K'ZAARD THE DROVER

Page 91

Initiative Perception +17

CREATURE 6

CYCLOPS

Pathfinder Monster Core 70

Initiative Perception +12

CREATURE 5

BLACKSNOUT

Bristle boar

Page 83

Initiative Perception +9

CREATURE 3

H3. Azdroni's Room

Low 5

Flickering candlelight dimly illuminates this opulent room with windows covered by heavy velvet curtains. The scent of cinnamon and incense fends off the keep's sour smell. Much of the floor is covered by a rug decorated with twining roses. A lavish, if somewhat old and threadbare, stuffed chair stands in the corner near a pair of wooden bookshelves. A simple wooden desk and a canopied bed furnish the rest of the room.



The
Resurrection
Flood

Campaign
Overview

Chapter 1:
Torrentmoot

Chapter 2:
Flood of
Nightmares

Chapter 3:
Splitskull
Siege

Orcs of
Belkzen

The Flood
Truce

Adventure
Toolbox

These furnishings come from Ustalav, the region neighboring Belkzen to the east. Letters in the desk are addressed to various figures whom a PC recognizes as Ustalavic dignitaries, nobles, and mercenary leaders with a successful DC 15 Heraldry Lore check or DC 20 Society check. The tone in which they're written suggests some familiarity, conveying that the author considers these people equals. The letters detail the author's dealings with K'zaard, taking pains to portray the leader in a positive light and encouraging future collaboration with the Cleft Head Hold. If a PC critically succeeded at their skill check while reviewing these letters, they discern the author's real feelings: K'zaard isn't a potential ally so much as a useful pawn and public face for the author's distant plans.

Creature: During the day, **Azdroni** (male orc vampire) splits his time between reading here and sleeping in the catacombs (area I). At night, he spends part of his time drafting plans here and then wanders the fort and its surrounding area in search of intel and a warm drink.

Azdroni's adventuring party perished while exploring Ustalav and fighting undead decades ago, and he survived only by the mercy of the vampire who ambushed (and killed) his group. He broke free of that vampire, and has since enjoyed his immortality and participated in Ustalavic politics from the shadows—or at least he did until several years ago, when the Whispering Tyrant escaped his prison. The powerful lich radiates such necromantic power that undead for miles around fell under Tar-Baphon's sway. Resenting this attempt at domination, Azdroni fled. He has worked since then to secure sanctuary in Belkzen, hoping to become a powerful asset in the orcs' battle against the Whispering Tyrant.

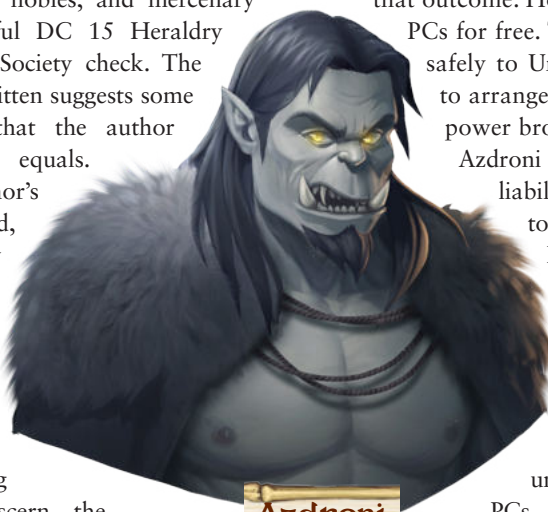
Unfortunately for Azdroni, orcs' wariness of undead has stymied his efforts, and he has been trying to exploit K'zaard to make inroads. He arrived several days ago, driven here in a wagon by a human servant he later killed and drained. However, the more Azdroni interacts with K'zaard, the more it appears the Cleft Head might be allying with the very lich Azdroni resents.

There's still a chance to turn this around. Azdroni might still bend K'zaard to his will, but helping the

PCs overthrow the leader could be just as useful. The PCs are unlikely to support Azdroni in becoming the hold's next ruler, and the vampire doesn't push for that outcome. However, he isn't willing to help the PCs for free. They must agree to transport him safely to Urgir, ideally speaking well of him to arrange a meeting with Ardax or another power broker.

Azdroni is sincere, yet he could still be a liability as both a vampire susceptible to whatever is animating undead in Belkzen and a treacherous schemer. This adventure accommodates making a deal or fighting him. If the PCs agree to his terms, Azdroni writes up a contract for them to sign and then begins working through his spies to undermine K'zaard. This earns the PCs 2 Infiltration Points. However, the vampire is relentless in ensuring the PCs uphold their bargain, and he could become a terrible nemesis if they betray him.

Treasure: Azdroni has 71 gp in a purse in his quarters. He also carries a *ring of the ram*, which he gifts to the PCs if they bargain with him.



Azdroni

VAMPIRE COUNT

CREATURE 6

Pathfinder Monster Core 336

Initiative Perception +17

H4. Guards and Armory

Moderate 5

This long, narrow room is tightly filled with bunks and storage lockers. An assortment of weapons hangs from the walls within easy reach of the beds. The room is otherwise sparse and undecorated.

K'zaard's guards use these rooms to store equipment and stay close to protect their leader from harm.

Creatures: The guards here vary from time to time, but all of them are dedicated to K'zaard's protection. Those who have managed to land a position here tend to be those who have somehow impressed their leader, either through bluster or bravery.

ORC RAMPAGER

CREATURE 4

Page 86

Initiative Perception +12

ORC VAGABONDS (2)

CREATURE 3

Page 86

Initiative Perception +9

H5. Lookout Post

The wide, empty windows in this room provide a clear, commanding view of the land north and west of the keep. A few chairs that have clearly been cobbled together from salvaged wood are scattered around the room, as are a few wobbly tables.

Despite its spectacular view, this room isn't used for much aside from social gatherings for the guards.

H6. Broken Lookout

Severe 5

The entire northeastern wall of this lookout tower is missing, the jagged stone floor ending suddenly. The dizzying view through the opening shows the dry, rough terrain of Belkzen below. A stinking pile of aurochs hides stands against the northwestern wall, and a smaller straw pallet is tucked into the western corner.

Murshek and her wyvern mount use this room as their quarters. The missing wall was destroyed during the orc invasion that ended the dwarves' occupation of the stronghold thousands of years ago. Despite this missing structure, the dwarves' handiwork has stood the test of time. The walls here have been scoured clear by the perpetual wind, dust, and sand. K'zaard and his followers don't enter this room willingly, terrified that the wyvern might simply toss them out of the gaping hole and send them crashing to the ground 50 feet below.

Documents: A saddlebag near the straw pallet where the emissary sleeps contains numerous letters and Murshek's half-written reports. The letters are partially encoded and are functionally identical to the first two letters found in area G3 (including the check required to Decipher Writing), rehashing the Wingripper Hold's orders to K'zaard and warnings of Ardax's allies' likely approach.

Murshek's reports detail various movements in and around the fort. Her writing acknowledges K'zaard's compliance, yet her tone does nothing to hide her disdain of the Cleft Head leader's craven behavior.

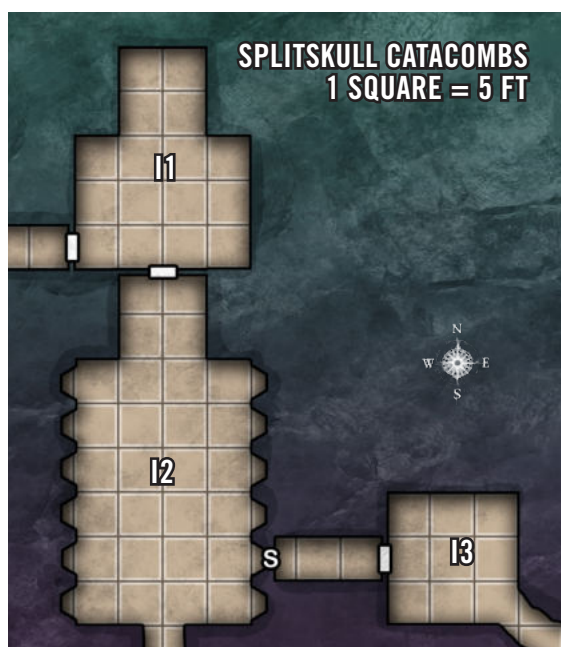
Creatures: The Unbroken Horn and Wingripper Holds knew they'd need to keep a close eye on K'zaard to ensure he upheld his end of the bargain. To that end, they didn't send just any dignitary, but one whose mere presence inspires terror. Murshek herself is tall and imposing, her hair dyed blood-red, and her face and body decorated with Wingripper

tattoos. As is the nature of many of her hold's wing riders, she is arrogant and brash. When she speaks, she expects people to listen. On those rare occasions when someone doesn't listen to her, a small gesture to her terrifying mount usually forces compliance.

Murshek is dedicated to her hold and sees K'zaard as a useful weakling. K'zaard is quite aware of this attitude and tries to play right into the cocky rider's assumptions. Several of his guards keep a close eye on her and report back to K'zaard, helping him plan several means to eliminate her and her wyvern if she ever becomes too dangerous.

Murshek attempts to flee along with Xithnik if she is reduced below 25 Hit Points or if the wyvern is reduced below 20 Hit Points. If Xithnik dies, Murshek fights to the death. Xithnik is deeply bonded to Murshek and follows her lead in battle without question. If Murshek dies, he fights until the death.





Reward: If the PCs defeat both Murshek and Xithnik in battle or force them to flee, award them 3 Infiltration Points.

MURSHEK

CREATURE 6

MEDIUM **HUMANOID** **ORC**

Perception +17; darkvision

Languages Common, Draconic, Orcish

Skills Acrobatics +14, Athletics +13, Intimidation +15, Nature +15

Str +4, **Dex** +5, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +3

Items +1 returning spear, leather armor

AC 23; **Fort** +15, **Ref** +17, **Will** +11

HP 105

Intimidating Strike ♦♦ Murshek makes a melee Strike. If she hits and deals damage, the target is frightened 1, or frightened 2 on a critical hit.

Ferocity

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ spear +15 (thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+10 piercing

Melee ♦ fist +14 (agile, nonlethal), **Damage** 1d4+8 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ spear +16 (thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+10 piercing

Toxic Teamwork Murshek's attacks exacerbate any venom in her target's system. Against a creature affected by wyvern venom, her Strikes deal additional poison damage equal to twice the current stage of the wyvern venom affecting the target.

Wingrider Trust Murshek and Xithnik operate as a team and verbally coordinate their actions. Xithnik has 3

actions, and Murshek does not need to spend any actions to command him.

XITHNIK

CREATURE 6

Wyvern (*Pathfinder Monster Core* 131)

Initiative Perception +13

I. CATACOMBS

When the dwarves constructed their outpost, they planned for it to one day become the beginning of a larger settlement. They discovered a natural aquifer far below and strongly suspected there were tunnels to the Darklands beyond that depth. The first priority, however, was to build walls and take advantage of the strategic sight lines granted by the hill. Once the keep and the walls were complete, they started work on the underground sections.

The dwarves first constructed a tunnel that led to Koldukar then built catacombs to honor their fallen. During this construction, they found natural caverns they hadn't expected. They temporarily sealed those passages off, planning to one day deal with them thoroughly. That day never came, however, as Belkzen and his armies stormed through the area on their way to attack Koldukar. The fortress fell, and the work was never completed.

These chambers are now the domain of Inax, a gem-loving creature known as a stygira. K'zaard has a deal with Inax, ensuring each stays out of the other's way. This suits K'zaard, as the stygira guards the catacombs.

There are no light sources in the catacombs. All the ceilings are 8 feet tall unless noted otherwise.

I1. Catacombs Foyer

The finely made, smooth stone walls here have been carved directly from the living rock. Bold geometric designs decorate the corners along the ceiling and edges of the room. A circular stone stairway stands in an alcove to the north. To the east is a ruined, stone-clogged doorway, while stone doors to the west and south are decorated with the same geometric borders. Lying on the ground in front of the southern wall are three detailed statues of orcs, their faces carved into expressions of pain.

If the PCs seek to enter Splitskull Keep beneath the catacombs through the sinkhole (X inside front cover) outside, they arrive here first. A PC who Investigates the room and succeeds at a DC 20 Religion or Society check knows that the carvings are associated with dwarven beliefs about the afterlife; on a critical success, they

realize the carvings are of a style not used for several thousand years that's closely associated with Koldukar.

The statues are orcs petrified by Inax years ago. K'zaard had them placed here as a warning to the other members of the hold to keep out. A PC who Investigates the statues and succeeds at a DC 21 Arcana, Art Lore, or Crafting check realizes the statues are petrified creatures.

12. Burial Vault

The walls of this chamber are carved with geometric designs and scenes of dwarves laboring at a forge. Deep, rectangular alcoves line the walls, most filled with ossuaries and sarcophagi. The wall to the south has a large hole broken through it, and a yawning passageway continues beyond.

The dwarves interred their dead here long ago, and the orcs mostly left the remains untouched. A PC who Searches the room and succeeds at a DC 21 Perception check realizes the two unused burial spaces to the southeast are part of a secret door. The door can be opened by pressing a circular part of the designs on the southern wall. The door leads to a short passageway to the east. The passageway south leads the PCs to a trapdoor that opens up into the keep's war room (G3).

Azdroni's Coffin: A PC who Investigates the room and succeeds at a DC 22 Perception or Survival check realizes one of the sarcophagi has been opened recently. Inside is a wooden coffin that belongs to Azdroni (area H3). He naps here periodically throughout the day.

Reward: Hidden behind one of the ossuaries is Inax's stash of looted gemstones, consisting of six garnets worth 8 gp each, a chipped emerald worth 40 gp, and a *gold nodule aeon stone* imprinted with Dwarven runes. A PC can uncover this stash with a successful DC 22 Perception check.

13. Royal Chamber

Moderate 5

This beautiful stone chamber is carved with detailed geometric designs. A granite stone bier rests in the center of the room, inlaid with gold and silver and dotted with precious gems. The brittle and broken bones of a humanoid lie on the floor.

Creature: Inax dug its way to this chamber from the east after following the omens in its dreams. The stygira finally reached the room after months of excavating and took the large emerald the interred dwarf held in its skeletal hands. Inax unceremoniously dumped the skeleton on the floor and searched for more riches, ignoring anything that wasn't a gemstone.

If Inax detects intruders, it spies on them to learn who they are and why they're here. Once certain

that the PCs aren't K'zaard, Azdroni, or one of their close confidants, Inax maneuvers to ambush the PCs. If the PCs take any gems, Inax becomes enraged and attacks with less subtlety. If reduced to 20 or fewer Hit Points, Inax flees or surrenders, hoping to recover as many of its ill-gotten gems as possible before leaving.

INAX

CREATURE 7

Stygira (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 255)

Initiative Perception +17

Undead Assault

Depending how quickly (or if!) the PCs are able to take Splitskull from K'zaard, a number of outcomes are possible at the end of the adventure. None of these options outline an actual siege by the undead, as the fort is left largely untouched since the Unbroken Horn have promised the Whispering Tyrant that the stronghold is allied with them. As long as those in the stronghold don't begin attacking the undead, the horde washes through the town and surrounding countryside but leaves the fortress unharmed.

Hide in the maze burrows: If the PCs located the sinkhole, they can leave the caravan members there and try to wait out the invasion. In this case, you should have an undead encounter or two that give the PCs a chance to protect their companions. Fortunately, only some undead find them and the army passes.

Hide in the catacombs: This is a dangerous option, as K'zaard's forces are very likely to learn of any caravan members' presence. The PCs might be forced to fight off several guard patrols and mount an offensive into the keep to take out K'zaard. Missing patrols are going to be noticed eventually, and the PCs need to hurry up their efforts.

Sneak over the walls: In this desperate last-ditch effort, Ardax, the PCs, and any surviving NPCs are captured by K'zaard. How they might overcome such a problem is beyond the scope of this adventure, but could certainly prove exciting!

AFTERMATH

Once the undead have passed, Ardax waits for a few days with the PCs and any surviving caravan members. There is a celebration, but the mood is subdued as everyone realizes a much bigger, far more dangerous threat has awakened. About a week later, Ardax receives word from Urgir that there is a clear route back. He asks the PCs to take charge of Splitskull and wait for further word from him before taking other actions.



Orcs of Belkzen

If one is to believe the stories, Belkzen is a wasteland of infighting, backwardness, and barbarity. These tales are a caricature, spun around a kernel of truth to denigrate the region's inhabitants and justify millennia of isolation and hostility. Most orcs won't deny their culture's violent past and present. They likely would, however, contest their characterization as merely warlike. A raised axe, bared tusks, and thundering battle cry are all fearsome illustrations of orcs' extensive history of independence, defiance, oppression, and (above all) survival.

I have traveled to Belkzen on a mission of ethnography and personal understanding. The efforts of leaders like Grask Uldeth and now Ardax the White-Hair have done much to open Belkzen to the outside world. I hope that by documenting my own observations, Avistan might one day know these awesome people not as their greatest bogeymen but as their mightiest allies.

– Davorr, agent of the Pathfinder Society

HISTORY

Orcs evolved as a subterranean species, native to the uppermost Darklands layer of Nar-Voth. They made few settlements, instead gathering in nomadic bands that moved from cavern to cavern to avoid exhausting the Darklands' limited resources. What sustenance existed was occasionally fought over. When another band arrived, the two communities would nonlethally clash to determine who could stay and who would leave. When dwarves appeared during their Quest for Sky, orcs gathered to scare off these trespassers, assuming the dwarves were also foraging. Misinterpreting the armed display as an ambush, the dwarves responded with lethal force. Orcs retaliated, dwarves escalated, and a cycle of violence lasting nearly 10,000 years ensued.

Ultimately, dwarves were better armed, organized, and motivated, chasing orcs upward to the surface several years before dwarves themselves first saw the sun. They emerged in what is now the Hold of Belkzen. After clashing with humans, giants, and unfamiliar beasts beneath a shadowed sky—the world still suffered an Age of Darkness caused by the *Starstone's* crash—orcs established territory and a new way of life for themselves.

And then the dwarves came again, emerging from the ground and raising fortifications to seal the caves. They fanned out to control the surface, crushing any orcs they found. As the Age of Anguish dawned, the dwarven empire of Tar Taargadth extended around Lake Encarthan, and orcs were pushed into the surrounding mountains. There they eked out a living for generations. Yet even though they were scattered across hundreds of bands, orcs steadily observed and adapted the technologies of their neighbors, eventually developing many of their own crafts that could compete with their dwarven enemies. Thus, when a charismatic leader named Belkzen called upon the orcs to reclaim their lands and drive the dwarves back underground, his bellicose dream rallied thousands who had been marginalized for a millennium and were armed to the teeth.

In –3708 AR, Belkzen's armies besieged Koldukar, the dwarves' nearest Sky Citadel. Its stone and steel fortifications resisted yet ultimately couldn't withstand orcs' fearsome siege weapons. The citadel fell swiftly, and Belkzen renamed it Urgir, the capital of his new nation. Battles continued for several more years before the exhausted dwarves bitterly accepted defeat and ceded their lost territory.

A painfully brief golden age followed. Belkzen's harsh rule brought hundreds of holds to heel, both by crushing his rivals and redirecting his followers' aggression into wars of territorial expansion that brought much of what are now the Gravelands, Nirmathas, Ustalav, and Oprak under his control. What they conquered, they adopted; a vast quantity of books, tools, materials, and expert artisans were absorbed into the populace, inspiring revolutions in manufacturing, art, and mysticism. At the same time, Belkzen's reign oversaw an unfathomable number of atrocities. The same zeal that had fueled his armies drove many orcs to avenge their ancestors through war crimes, seeding in humanity's memory many of the myths that haunt orcs to this day.

Belkzen's empire was immense yet unstable. The holds bowed to his military victories and personal legend, not to any nationalist vision. When Belkzen died around –3698 AR, his empire swiftly collapsed into wars of succession with myriad warlords each

claiming they were his rightful heir. In many ways, these wars have never ended; holds' skirmishes for dominance and resources echo the unresolved question of Belkzen's succession, with no faction having ever held onto power for long. The internecine conflict weakened orcs, enabling their neighbors to divide and conquer, gradually pushing them back into the fragmented badlands and mountains the orcs inhabit today.

Belkzen's legacy didn't just spur infighting; his legend left orcs hungry for another charismatic leader who could lead them to glory. Tar-Baphon exploited this, captivating orcs with promises of power. They served willingly at first, but the Whispering Tyrant's title was well-deserved. Tar-Baphon treated orcs as expendable fodder, reanimating the fallen to continue fighting as undead. When orcs rebelled, the lich enforced his will mercilessly. Through physical torment, taking hostages, executing elders, and acts of cultural erasure, Tar-Baphon suppressed orc identity and willpower. His pogroms destroyed much of what remained of orc culture, with only scattered accounts surviving through oral history.

Eventually (and at the cost of countless orc lives), the Shining Crusade defeated and imprisoned Tar-Baphon, inadvertently freeing orcs from the lich's dominion. Yet most considered orcs accomplices, not victims. The crusaders chased orcs back into the badlands once more, stealing land to found Lastwall and ensure that neither orcs nor the Whispering Tyrant would threaten "civilized" lands again.

MINDSET

Belkzen lacks a continuous tradition of history and philosophy; on numerous occasions, warring orc overlords actively wiped out dissidents, elders, written records, and other repositories of intergenerational lore. As a result, cultural outlooks have been reinvented multiple times between multiple holds, creating a hodgepodge of beliefs.

Three simple maxims have survived the ages: show strength, today is not tomorrow, and survive. These shape orc culture from top to bottom, from children's fables to the advanced tactics devised in a war council. Even where holds create their own myths and values, it's rare for any to contradict these three principles.

Show Strength: Orcs are physically strong, and they know it. To an outsider, this often manifests as raiding, with orcs seizing resources and subduing foes with little justification other than "might makes right."

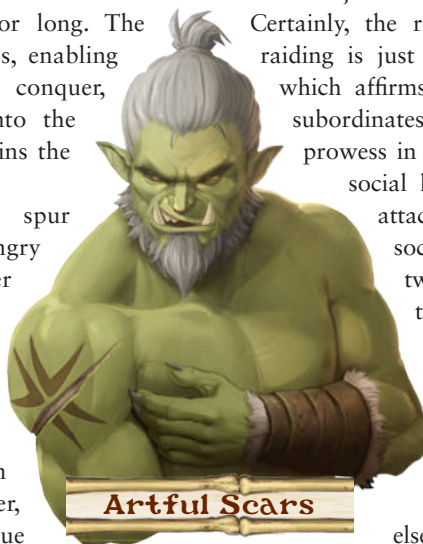
Certainly, the resources are important. However, raiding is just as much about displaying power, which affirms a leader's worthiness and grants subordinates opportunities to display their own prowess in order to advance within the hold's social hierarchy. More importantly, these attacks signal strength to neighboring societies, challenging them to think twice before trespassing or stealing the hold's resources.

Strength guides individuals' interactions, too. Good-natured shoves, muscle flexes, and punches to the shoulder are a way to reinforce bonds through physical touch and show everyone else that an orc is tough enough to

laugh off a little bruise. When words can't resolve a disagreement, orcs might posture menacingly to test each other's commitment to their respective beliefs, escalating into contests if neither party backs down—usually physical feats like wrestling, headbutting, or running a race, though it's equally acceptable to duel with music, spar with ritualistic insults, or tell the best story about their scars. Prevailing doesn't necessarily prove that the winner's right in any objective sense; it just means the winner's assertion temporarily has more merit.

Yet for all orcs' performative toughness, everyone gets hurt or needs help eventually. The walls are lowered for close family and friends, around whom an orc can show emotional, economic, and physical vulnerability without fear. Becoming such a friend is a great privilege that's rarely acknowledged with ceremony; one day an orc companion might be growling softly and making eye contact while carving scrimshaw from humanoid bone, and the next day they could be sharing their life story and secret aspirations with their new friend (and impromptu therapist).

Today is not Tomorrow: Belkzen undergoes seasonal extremes, enjoying several months of rain, growth, and plenty before the region becomes a meager badlands for the rest of the year. In the axiom "today is not tomorrow," orcs have internalized this feast-or-famine mindset, acknowledging that what is good and bountiful today will eventually end. Relationships atrophy, tools break, dynasties fall, and the aurochs inevitably migrate north, heralding months of rationing ahead. When that happens to the



orcs of Belkzen, it's best to experience the necessary grief and then move on.

Yet this isn't all fatalism. This sense of impermanence inspires orcs to enjoy the good times with gusto and take initiative when they spot opportunities. It emboldens an orc to take risks, knowing that death comes for all and dawdling just delays the inevitable. It also lends an orc strength when times are tough; whatever discomfort injury, starvation, or separation might cause, it will end eventually.

Survive: From evolving in the resource-starved Darklands to being uprooted by crusading dwarves to suffering under a megalomaniacal lich to eking out a living in marginal lands, orcs are born survivors. To endure danger or discomfort and ultimately thrive is a virtue. Perceived durability is aesthetically pleasing in orc culture, from seemingly clunky (yet tough) weaponry to the beauty of a heavily scarred suitor.

CREATIONS

Belkzen has an undeserved reputation for producing nothing of value. This stereotype stems from limited resources, rumors of worshipping violent deities, and tales of orc raiders destroying rather than creating. Belkzen does have limited wood, water, and arable land. Competition among orcs and exploitation by outsiders have nearly erased the culture's technological achievements every few centuries. And with half their historical pantheon encouraging theft and destruction over innovation, it's little wonder Belkzen hasn't developed according to other cultures' expectations.

Behind their brutal facade, Belkzen's people are just as inventive as any other culture; they just have a different set of tools to work with. In fact, innovation is the central value in orc crafting. Whenever a catastrophe wipes out some fraction of their technological resources, orcs quickly recover, recycle, and repurpose whatever scraps they can gather and use whatever they can raid from neighbors. In this way, orcs have undergone dozens of dark ages followed by equally bright renaissances, each time reinventing industries. As a result, there's no one way to make anything in Belkzen; a single hold might produce projectiles using a millennium-old elven technique combined with a 200-year-old dwarven crossbow design that's rotated 90 degrees and finalized with a compositing technique reverse-engineered from a Lastwall ballista—all given a unique orc twist that accomplishes something the original technologies could not.


The entries below explore the region's noteworthy crafts.

Architecture: Belkzen has few cities, and several of these exist only because they are ancient dwarven sites repurposed for orc needs. The realities of a semi-nomadic lifestyle mean most holds have a few seasonal villages that include permanent dwellings and cleared courtyards for anyone else to pitch tents. What Belkzen lacks in wood, it boasts in mud, reeds, and stone. On higher ground, homes are usually adobe structures whose interiors are partly excavated to regulate temperatures better. Along the Flood Road, such houses would be inundated; that region instead favors low stone platforms or stilt houses to create habitable islands in a seasonal sea of water and grass.

Husbandry: 9,000 years ago, orcs reached the surface and marveled at the land's fearsome animals. Those creatures pale in comparison to the region's modern fauna, all thanks to orc intervention.



Turning Trash into Treasure



BEYOND BELKZEN

This article explores Belkzen, considered the greatest concentration of orcs in the known world. The information here isn't universal, and orc communities beyond Belkzen might uphold some values while decrying others. The following are several dromaar and orc populations of note outside of Belkzen.

Averaka: Founded in the Ironbound Archipelago on the island of Flintyreach, Averaka is a fortified village founded and run predominantly by dromaars. Any dromaar has the right to settle there, though all inhabitants are expected to defend Averaka from the giants and trolls that control most of the island.

Mwangi Expanse: Upon reaching the surface, some orcs traveled south to the Mwangi Expanse, where their descendants are known as the Matanji. These orcs maintain positive relations with most neighbors, earning them a warm reputation among humans. This friendliness doesn't extend to the Matanji's sworn enemies: demons.

Urglin: Located in eastern Varisia, this town is a melting pot of Shoanti, orc, dromaar, and giants, providing a somewhat safe meeting place to do business. Rival factions rule, creating a carefully balanced anarchy that erupts into brawls periodically.

"After all," thought these early orcs, "couldn't this carnivore be twice as fearsome if it were twice the size, had razor-sharp fangs, and had a hide covered in spikes?" Though careful husbandry over the millennia, Belkzen's beastmasters have made these visions a reality, creating some of the most powerful mounts and living siege engines known to Golarion.

One of their secrets is never truly domesticating any species. Handlers avoid keeping any lineage for more than a few generations, releasing grown offspring back into Belkzen to regain their wild ferocity and produce offspring that future orcs will capture to repeat the cycle. In Belkzen, these animals' aggressiveness is a selling point. The market for war beasts that are as likely to bite their owner as their foe is less lucrative in neighboring lands.

Leatherwork: The seasonal auroch hunt provides Belkzen thousands of pelts each year, and orcs have adopted leather as one of their primary resources for clothing, temporary housing, and art. Like other crafts, the primary objective is sturdiness that can withstand all the scrapes and scuffs that come from living in rocky terrain. Beyond that, leather becomes a canvas. Tooled geometric designs, patterns formed

from vegetable dyes and incised scenes from history are gradually added to any unadorned hide. In time, even the most utilitarian garment can become more ornate than the finest Taldan embroidery.

Weaponry: Like leatherwork, weapon-smithing prioritizes function over form. Their reliability makes orc armaments a valuable yet unremarkable export. Where Belkzen truly shines is siege weapons; something about massive armaments awakens orcs' creative genius. Some are simple, like the crushing wheel, a steel roller driven by a yoked aurochs to squash whatever lies in its path. Others feature remarkable engineering, such as the manticore's tail that fires a hail of heavy bolts to break up enemy formations. In siege weapons, Belkzen's inventors sometimes abandon reliability in favor of destructive absurdity, earning respect for artillery that's as shocking in concept as it's useful in practice.

BELIEFS

While knowledge of the Test of the *Starstone* has spread far and wide, few are familiar with the Crucible, a tradition by which mortal orcs can challenge their own gods in duels to seize divinity. Being able to challenge is far different than being victorious; it's rare that an orc apotheosizes in this way. Yet thanks to the Godsrain, three contenders have challenged the gods and won, while another god was transformed by the Rough Beast's chaos, becoming a Spawn of Rovagug. And kicking off the conflict was Gorum, whose death scattered divine essence across the multiverse.

This is a worrisome time. With over half the orc pantheon destroyed or replaced, the divine edicts of raiding, conflict, and might making right have been called into question. Simultaneously, these rapid-fire changes are a celebration of impermanence. After all, Gorum perished doing what he loved, the Crucible system worked, and Godsrain has swept the chaff from the pantheon, making room for new strength to grow in the orcs' faith.

Priests of the fallen deities are less enthusiastic. The Bloodied Gauntlet Hold revered Gorum above all other gods, and his destruction has weakened their warpriests when they'd otherwise be most eager for battle. Most of the overthrown orc gods represented some principle distasteful to outsiders that was considered a grim necessity by many orcs, including Lanishra (a god of subjugation and tyranny), Sezelrian (a god of fire and revenge), Verex (a god of pillaging), and Zagresh (a god of death and destruction). Their removal might encourage a reexamination of orc values, purging old practices

that vilified Belkzen to their neighbors. The fall of Dretha (a goddess of birth and community) is more complicated, as her edicts were less destructive, and orcs need unity more than ever.

In these fallen gods' place arise new divinities. Ardax the White-Hair's predecessor, Grask Uldeth, assassinated Zagresh to become a god of discipline, power, and prosperity. Mahja Firehair bested Sezelrian, becoming a goddess of community, fire, and trials of worth. Finally, Lanishra fell to Uirch, who is now a god of protection, leadership, and fortification. Each of these new deities will shape Belkzen for generations to come, yet such change will take time. For now, many orcs view these upstart deities with suspicion or resentment. However, there are just as many who welcome this cultural shift and had been sitting quietly with their own misgivings of what their society had become.

RELATIONS

Most of Belkzen's neighboring territories view it with disdain, if not outright hostility. Admittedly, millennia of raiding and teaming up with regional tyrants have lent credence to violent tales of orc aggression. Even so, their closest neighbors have come to view Belkzen with some nuance, often developing working relationships with individual orcs or even entire holds while maintaining their guard against unfamiliar visitors.

Gravelands: Lastwall viewed orcs as enemies, in many ways perpetuating grudges left over from the Shining Crusade. Belkzen responded in kind, particularly because Lastwall occupied territory once controlled by orcs. Over the centuries, Lastwall slowly lost ground to Belkzen's "liberating" armies before being wiped out by the Whispering Tyrant. The resulting Gravelands are just as dangerous to orcs as Lastwall ever was. Holds along the border patrol their territory often, intercepting both undead raiders and errant zombies.

Realm of the Mammoth Lords: Much like Belkzen, its northern neighbor isn't a nation so much as a shared culture spread across dozens of seminomadic groups. Vague legends of orc aggression have instilled caution among Kellids here, but not outright hostility or distrust. Those Kellid followings closest to the border trade frequently with orcs, particularly during the Flood Truce. The wintry realm's megafauna fetch a handsome price in Wyvernsting, often in exchange

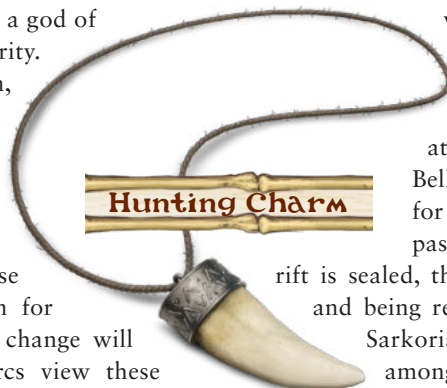
for Belkzen's sturdy manufactured goods. This doesn't stop the occasional quarrel; both populations periodically raid each other's herds and settlements, starting short-lived feuds.

Sarkoris Scar: Known as the Worldwound for over a century, this region was a wasteland of demons who were too strong and unpredictable for orcs to raid. The Worldwound's fiends focused most of their attentions east toward Mendev, so Belkzen went largely unnoticed but for a spike in demon worship over the past few generations. Now that the rift is sealed, the Sarkoris Scar is slowly healing and being repopulated—not just by displaced Sarkorians, but also by orc bands who are among the few brave enough to settle in the scarred land. For now, there's room

enough for everyone, and more hands help heal the region more quickly. However, Sarkorians are keeping a close eye on these orcs, wary that Belkzen might quietly claim a chunk of their homeland in the decades to come.

Ustalav: Orcs served under both the Whispering Tyrant and the draconic warlord Kazavon, and both villains subjugated vast swaths of Ustalav. Its people have never forgotten. To this day, Ustalav maintains heavy fortifications and patrols along its western border, ever vigilant against orc raids. Following the Battle of Nine Skulls, in which orcs crushed one of Tar-Baphon's armies, Ustalav's aristocracy are still navigating the cognitive dissonance and questioning whether orcs might become an ally of convenience. Ardax's diplomatic overtures are slowly eroding the walls between Ustalav and Belkzen, yet it would take decades or some extraordinary shared threat for them to fight side-by-side.

Varisia: Shoanti have controlled eastern Varisia since before orcs first saw the sun. Their strength and limited fortifications have tempted countless orc raiding parties hoping to test their prowess on open battlefields, and Shoanti periodically send raids of their own in retaliation. Neither side has made significant efforts to conquer the other, instead skirmishing to incrementally nudge their borders. Occasionally, a specific quah and a specific hold forge an alliance that lasts a few decades before misunderstandings reignite hostilities. Ultimately, both peoples have been pushed into badlands by colonizing forces, and were they ever to create a lasting peace, they might unite to reclaim territory from their respective oppressors.





The Flood Truce

An annual spring flood brings peace to a frequently war-torn land.

Each year in late spring, the melting waters of the Tusk Mountains north of Belkzen create a sudden, life-giving flood the orcs have dubbed the Deluge. For the next two months, the Flood Road—normally the region's main thoroughfare—is transformed into a rushing river. Rapidly growing plants spring up along the banks of the river during this time, and the sudden, lush landscape attracts migratory herds of animals, chiefly the aurochs, from the Realm of the Mammoth Lords.

The Deluge usually occurs in Gozren or Desnus, although it has arrived as late as early Sarenith on occasion. The flood is sudden and fierce, and while it's rare for ice to survive the journey into Belkzen, uprooted trees and other detritus is common, making the waters hazardous for those who want to dare a closer look.

FLOOD AND FUR

The landscape of Belkzen is notoriously harsh. In summer, its rocky soil bakes beneath the sun, while in winter, snow and ice driven by bitter winds scour the land. For most of the year, life along the Flood Road is just as cruel as elsewhere in the region. The Flood Road cuts through the heart of a wide, flat plain that starts between the Kodar Mountains to the west and the Tusk Mountains to the east. From there, the Road stretches south past the Dirt Sea and Blood Plains and into the lands around Urgir. It then meanders south before finally terminating at the River Esk, where the Deluge empties.

The Deluge begins in late spring, when the meltwater from the Tusk Mountains breaks through the ice dams that hold the temporary lakes high in the mountains. It roars down the slopes, tearing up anything in its path as it speeds toward the Flood Road and crashes into the low ground created by millennia of previous floods. When it arrives, the once-dry riverbed becomes an actual river as the Deluge begins flowing to the south.

The Flood Road's banks host numerous quick-growing plants and a few hardier, deep-rooted shrubs and grasses. Silvergrass is one of the first plants to appear after the Deluge arrives, springing up almost immediately after the initial surge of water is absorbed.

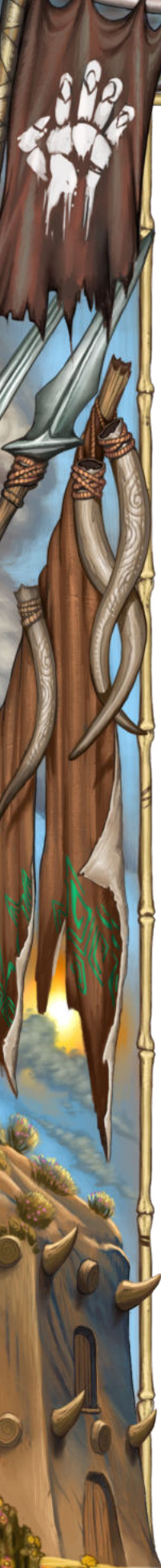
It serves as one of the early sources of food for the migrating aurochs, and wide fields of it turn the brown landscape a bright, silvery green. Ponds and lakes formed by the Deluge's initial wave remain long after the waters recede. These bodies of water host hardy aquatic plants, such as mudlattice, that wait out the dryness of the rest of the year and flourish in the stagnant, muddy waters. Some holds gather mudlattice's tough, matted fibers to dry and use as fuel for fires.

By far the most important animal associated with the Deluge is the aurochs. With its shaggy fur, massive horns, and powerful body, this wild bovine looks like a larger, primeval version of domesticated cattle found throughout Avistan and Garund. In fact, scholars widely agree the aurochs is likely the progenitor of other species of bovines. A few even speculate that aurochs were created in the First World long ago before their introduction to Golarion. Visitors to the First World report even larger, more terrifying bovines, however, so this theory might be little more than wild conjecture.

Aurochs bulls typically stand over 6 feet tall at the shoulder with particularly large specimens measuring just over 7 feet. Cows are slightly smaller, averaging 5 feet at the shoulder and up to 6 feet at most. Massive even for a bovine, the largest aurochs can weigh in at 3,000 pounds. Both bulls and cows have slightly curved horns that span up to 3 feet long from base to tip.

Other animals also follow the Deluge to the Flood Road. Predators that hunt and feed upon the aurochs and other herbivores thrive during this time of plenty. The snow leopards that usually stalk the Tusk Mountains make their way onto the plains as they hunt deer, while larger cats, such as tigers, compete directly with orcs for aurochs. Some of the northernmost holds send out parties specifically to drive off these predators, and those who fell the beasts are regarded as skilled hunters. The tigers, for their part, seem content to eat any orcs they catch.

As the flood season nears its end in the early summer, the waters that once inundated the land recede. Rain becomes rare, and the green parts of the land begin to dry. The areas farthest from the Flood Road brown first, and before long, the harsh sun returns Belkzen back to the hard, cracked land many associate with it.



Only the most deep-rooted plants thrive in Belkzen's summer heat, many of them flowering mid-season, though pockets of greenery remain as accumulations of meltwater slowly dry. These watering holes continue to be visited by animals, predator and prey alike, until they're completely drained. Not long after, the weather once again turns cold, and the mountains begin collecting the snows that become next year's Deluge.

CULTURAL IMPACT

The effect of the Deluge on the orc holds of Belkzen is hard to overstate. Simply put, without the Deluge, there wouldn't be enough food to support the holds. Out of this shared necessity, the region's orcs long ago recognized an annual peace that would allow everyone to hunt the aurochs without also fighting their neighbors. While the origins of the Flood Truce are lost to history, it's one of the few agreements among the normally fractious holds that has remained unchanged for centuries.

Despite a lack of facts regarding its origin, several myths have sprung up to explain the Flood Truce's creation. Some involve the ancient orc hero Belkzen driving the aurochs from the north during the greening that followed the floods. After declaring there was to be no fighting while the waters flowed, Belkzen took advantage of the resulting peace to forge alliances and build the army that eventually took Koldukar from the dwarves.

Other stories insist that it was an alliance between Dretha, the orc goddess of birth, death, and fertility, and Rull, the capricious deity of storms and war, that created the first Flood Truce. Dretha liked the idea of a time when orcs could grow and flourish without battle, while Rull enjoyed lulling those same orcs into complacency before scattering them with lightning bolts. Dretha dragged a massive plow behind her to carve out the Flood Road. In turn, Rull created spring storms to melt the snow in the mountains.

A third, more obscure tale tells of an unlikely alliance between Dretha and Dranngvit, the dwarven goddess of debt and vengeance. Dranngvit tired of the low status granted to her in Koldukar, and Dretha was similarly frustrated with the orcs' focus on war. Together, they supposedly arranged for the Flood Truce to be a time when orcs could plot the takeover of the Sky Citadel.

Whatever its mythical origins, the Flood Truce begins each year when the first waters of the Deluge

cross into Belkzen from the north. All orcs traveling along the Flood Road refrain from violence against other holds during this time. Old rivalries are suspended, active warfare temporarily ceases, and orcs can cross each other's lands without fear of sparking large-scale conflict.

This isn't to say all violence between orcs ends. Individuals still fight, but those disagreements rarely end in death or escalate into larger conflict. As they lack a central authority to regulate behavior during the Flood Truce, each hold polices its own members. Those few warriors who simply can't resist fighting each other find themselves scorned, imprisoned, or exiled by their peers. Some holds even impose a death sentence on any member who breaks the taboo, though this practice is rare.

The marriages, friendships, and alliances that develop during the Flood Truce are also vital to the long-term survival of the holds. While stories of tragic, star-crossed lovers exist, it's far more common for closely allied holds to build even stronger bonds through marriage. The relationships forged during the Flood Truce tend to be between holds that don't share a common border, as conflicts with neighbors are often too pointed to allow space for anything else.

Every hold watches these new relationships carefully—no one wants a rival suddenly gaining a new ally on a different border.

As a replacement for the violence long used to settle disputes, sports and other competitions have arisen. Contests of skill with weapons are popular, especially archery and axe or javelin throwing. A competition called "neck cleaving" is also widely practiced. In preparation this event, an aurochs hide is wrapped around a thick wooden pole, creating what orcs refer to as the "neck." Participants then take turns hewing through the neck in as few blows as possible. True champions of this sport manage the feat in a single swing.

Quick-witted orcs also participate in "word wrestling" competitions, in which two orcs take turns flinging creative insults at each other before a crowd. The first orc to lose their temper or fail to formulate a response is the loser. The crowd's laughter during these raucous events often gets so loud it becomes hard to hear the competitors.

EVENTS

No proclamation marks the beginning of the Flood Truce. Instead, most holds recognize the first heavy rain of spring as its starting point. This means that



different groups begin the truce at different times, although all know that if another hold enters one's land around this time, the truce has started. Strangers passing through one's territory makes everyone on edge, but even so, it's rare for anything more than a shouting match or minor scuffle to occur.

The onset of the Flood Truce is a tenuous time for the holds, made worse because it's typically when their supplies are lowest. While the orcs of Belkzen are excellent stewards of their resources, there are always unexpected troubles throughout the year, and sometimes that means shortages of food. Empty bellies make for grumpy attitudes, so although the Flood Truce brings peace to the holds at large, internal tensions sometimes erupt into violence. Normally, orcs use battles with other holds as a release valve for this tension, but during the Flood Truce, the most successful leaders find ways to channel their followers' frustration into ceremonies and rituals.

Along these lines, some holds have adopted a practice they call Hunger Crushing, a form of competitive fasting where one's standing in the hold rises as one resists the need for food. Smart leaders carefully monitor this practice. The last thing a hold needs are famished orcs who can't carry out their work, the likely result of a group of highly competitive young warriors refusing to eat. Hunger Crushers who endure the entire fast gain status in their hold, and many adopt a title, such as "the Empty," to boast about their prowess.

As the Flood Truce solidifies near the end of spring and early summer, careful rationing and strategic fasting give way to gluttonous feasts. Up and down the length of the Flood Road, bonfires illuminate the river's edge, and the smell of roasting aurochs fills the air. Known simply as "the Blaze," this time began as a simple excuse for the holds to celebrate, but over the years, it has become another way for orcs to nonviolently compete. The feasts are often accompanied by loud singing as the holds try to outdo each other. The flat surface of the river carries sound well, so these songs often can be heard from miles away. Many participants wake up with ragged voices that last for days.

One of the most common celebrations to occur during the Flood Truce is the holding of a moot in which two or more holds come together to share food, swap stories, and build relationships. Some holds observe regular moots every year, such as the grand feast the Burning Sun celebrates with the

Death's Head. The shared history of these moots is often a shorthand for the bond between participants. It's common, for example, for two orcs who attended the same moot to share a private joke that makes both erupt in raucous laughter.

The most impressive and rare gatherings are the Grand Moots in which the leaders of three or more holds come together. The last Grand Moot was hosted by Grask Uldeth shortly before he was assassinated. The moot was attended by such disparate groups as the Drowning Sand, Gutspear, One Eye, Wingripper, Bloodied Gauntlet, and Unbroken Horn Holds, in addition to Grask's own Empty Hand. Whether a connection exists between this moot and Grask's death remains a mystery, but most assume Uldeth's proclamation about opening Belkzen to outsiders played some role in his demise, as only a few months passed between that meeting and his death.

Ardax Whitehair, Grask's longtime confidant and heir apparent, hasn't yet called his own Grand Moot. After his crushing success over the Whispering Tyrant's forces at the Battle of Nine Broken Skulls, the orc leader certainly has the political capital to pull together such an event, but whether he thinks such a meeting is a good idea remains to be seen.

FOOD, FASHION, AND MORE

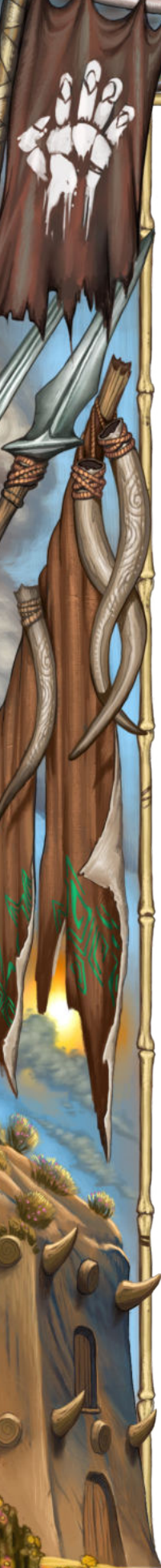
As might be expected, the feasts held during the Flood Truce center around the aurochs. Most holds' supplies of meat are very low by the time aurochs arrive in Belkzen, so the night after the first successful hunt is usually greeted with a massive celebration. All members of the hold help to butcher the fresh kill, and before long, steaks and roasts are being cooked over open fires. While the idea that orcs eat aurochs raw is a false stereotype, most of them would agree they prefer their meat "flame-licked" rather than cooked through.

Each orc has their favorite cut of aurochs, and each hold also tends to prize some cuts over others. As in most places within the Inner Sea region, large steaks are usually given the most attention, although many orcs feel that the tougher parts of the aurochs are more pleasing. The melt-in-your-mouth texture popular in some cities is often seen as food for infants by these orcs.

Aside from meat, the most precious resource provided by the aurochs is its hide. Dense with fur, aurochs hide serves as the basis for almost all clothing



Aurochs Crafts



in the holds, with a single blanket providing enough warmth to survive even the coldest winter night. Most nomadic holds use aurochs hide to insulate the floors of their dwellings, a welcome comfort in the otherwise harsh landscape.

Even with the abundance of aurochs during the Flood Truce, the orcs of Belkzen know how difficult the winter months can be and are careful to make best use of every animal they kill. Aurochs horn and sinew are used for weapons, tools, and musical instruments. Once cleaned, bones end up as decoration for armor and other clothing, and even hooves are boiled or ground up for later use. In short, no part of the animal goes to waste.

As the Flood Truce wears on and the supply of aurochs piles up, orcs begin the process of food preservation. Holds lucky enough to have someone who can preserve meat magically have an easier time than those that don't, but even then, traditional methods can be employed. Smoking is the preferred technique, with different holds favoring wood they gather specially for this purpose. Some larger groups even construct stone smokehouses to which they return each year. Other groups use salt to cure the meat, filling barrels with alternating layers of meat and salt. Sausage making, both fermented and smoked, is also popular.

Fermenting meat underground is a method that works well in the colder parts of Belkzen, particularly in the mountains. One traditional method is to bury an entire carcass in permafrost or place it deep within a cave and cover it with soil. The meat is then left to ferment over the winter and dug up in the spring. The carcass—which now has a distinct flavor profile—is either eaten without further treatment or cooked just enough to sear it on the outside. Given the difficult and time-consuming nature of underground fermentation, however, few orc holds rely on the practice for sustenance. Instead, they reserve the method for food served during the ceremonial meals that mark the start of the Flood Truce season.

Each group of orcs has its preferred method of food preparation, leading to a variety of diets amongst the holds. In fact, a small but enthusiastic group of cooks and gastronomes visit each other every spring to share recipes and techniques. During these visits, it's common for holds that were enemies a few weeks prior to become fast friends at a tasting party, their competitive natures redirected into the elaborate meals they serve each other.

SITES

While numerous holds traditionally gather in Urgir to watch the arrival of the Deluge, there isn't one central

location where all the orcs of Belkzen meet during the Flood Truce. Even so, a number of mysterious places connected to the Deluge hold a special spot in orc lore. One of these, the Flooded Court, is located about 30 miles north of Belkzen, where the flood flows through a grove filled with spire-like trees. Though trees are rare in Belkzen, this grove has been left alone as it's rumored amongst orcs to be the home of wicked fey. Legends say that those who touch the Court's waters are transported to an underwater castle teeming with deadly fish monsters ruled by a cruel naiad monarch.

Farther to the north is a hole that orcs call the Well. Even during the driest months, this 150-foot-deep shaft is always filled with dark, clear water. Though travelers often stop at the Well to replenish their waterskins, the water level never changes, suggesting a massive underground reservoir beneath the area. A few explorers have descended into the Well, and those who return speak of caverns extending to the north and west. Whether these caverns connect to some other cave system or the Darklands—or if they're just a legend—isn't widely known.

The Cleft of Dorguun marks the point where the waters that form the Flood Road meet and become a single river. Each spring, the narrow valley serves as a gigantic funnel for the water that pours down the Tusk Mountains. An ice dam forms in the cleft, creating a lake that grows until the dam bursts. As the Deluge passes through the valley, it tears up everything in its path before shooting through the gap and racing southward. Aside from the spectacle of this natural wonder, prospectors claim the valley is an ideal place to find rare minerals exposed by the scraping ice, rocks, and water.

Above the Cleft of Dorguun is a series of icy pools that fill as soon as the waters begin to trickle down from higher elevations. In this place of tranquil beauty, sound echoes strangely before becoming lost among the cracking of glaciers and ice floes. Those who have traveled to the area call it the Echoing Pools, and while they claim that the echoes reverberate with a strange, eldritch language, no one has determined the source of these odd sounds.

BELKZEN'S HOLDS

The most common communal organization in Belkzen is the hold, a coalition of about 500 to 5,000 individuals united by a banner and name. Little beyond the banner is permanent; leaders come and go, families might split off, values evolve, and a hold might even be forced out of its territory while still retaining its identity. A hold only dies once its remaining members merge with other holds. Over the millennia, thousands

of holds have roamed Belkzen, though only a few dozen noteworthy holds exist today. Beyond these, as many as a hundred minor holds stubbornly survive, each kept alive by fewer than a hundred members.

The major holds can be roughly divided by their stance toward Ardax's diplomatic initiatives, summarized below.

Advocates for Change: Continuing the work of his predecessor, Grask Uldeth, Ardax the White-Hair strives to open Belkzen to the wider world. Ardax heads the Empty Hand Hold, which has ruled Urgir for generations and enjoyed the prestige that comes with controlling the capital. The Death's Head Hold shadows Empty Hand politics, focusing more on Urgir's security than intrigue. Ardax's vision promises economic opportunities that the Steel Eater Hold longs to exploit, marketing their superior armaments across Avistan.

Others have sided with Ardax thanks to the recent Godsrain. The Burning Sun Hold has revered Sarenrae for decades, putting them at odds with most other regional gods. However, with many orc deities' demise and the apotheosis of one of their own—the passionate Mahja Firehair—the Burning Sun has become an outspoken advocate in support of the new gods. The Bloodied Gauntlet Hold is less enthusiastic; these orcs favored Gorum, and the Lord in Iron's recent destruction spurred a massive crisis of faith. Bloodied Gauntlet leaders have aligned with Ardax, believing he can lead Belkzen's warriors to victory amid the turmoil and provide the hold a worthy foe to ground orcs in this difficult time.

Warmongers and Scoundrels: To many orcs, the world made them its enemy, and they're happy to return the favor. The notion of entering an alliance with outsiders is absurd; neighbors should be subjugated and looted, not befriended. The most powerful of these holds is the Unbroken Horn, based out of Belkzen's second largest city, Wyvernsting in the north. Its outspoken defiance against Ardax and partnerships with the region's giants have made the Unbroken Horn a rising power. The Wingripper Hold, famous for its drake-riders, eagerly joined the cause. Others, like the Broken Spine and One Eye Holds have lost power for decades—the Broken Spine having been embarrassed by adventurers and the One Eye slowly losing control of the Blisterwell forge city—and see revolution against Ardax as a path to regaining power. Holds like the Dead Eye and Twisted Nail attract the most nefarious orcs, many tempted by the notion of restoring Belkzen to its continent-conquering might of old.

Survivors and Traditionalists: Just as many orcs look on the Godsrain, Ardax's politics, and growing

tensions and then shrug. Belkzen will survive; no squabbling will change the essentials: hunting aurochs, protecting territory, and living another day. Many of these holds occupy border regions, granting them non-orc neighbors whose relations matter more than Urgir politics. To the north, the Ice Tooth Hold focuses on hunting, beast-rearing, and trade with Kellids. Nearby, the Drowning Sand rarely strays beyond the Dirt Sea and seasonal waterways, contenting themselves with a soggy domain that few others desire. Likewise, the Storm-Screamers of Rull live above Belkzen (figuratively and more literally), descending from the mountains only when the rains arrive.

These and many more holds are content to wait out Ardax's imminent conflicts, picking up the pieces afterward. Yet what the Battle of Nine Skulls showed is that the right outside threat could quickly shift allegiances, drawing these neutral parties into the fray.



Aurochs Fashion



Adventure Toolbox

The options in this section are uncommon or rare for most PCs. However, longtime residents of Belkzen gain access to the uncommon options that follow; at the GM's discretion, orc and dromaar PCs from other regions might also gain access. The rare options are associated with particular orc holds, seldom shared with anyone who isn't part of that community or recognized as a deeply trusted outsider.

NEW ITEMS

Orc Skewer Maul

As dwarves poured out of the Darklands following their Quest for Sky, the orcs driven before them adapted to their tactics—including dwarves' heavily armored infantry charges. Surviving orcs developed a response: a weapon that combines a spear and maul to crush heavy armor and skewer charging foes. Although rarely seen today, the weapon is remarkably effective in the right situation.

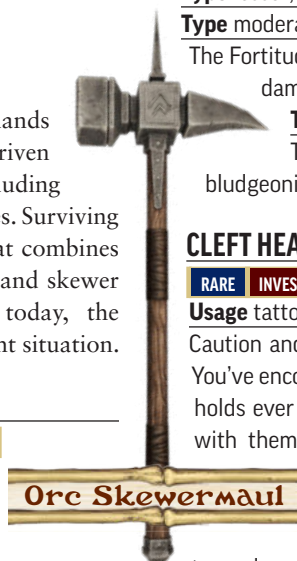
ORC SKEWERMAUL

UNCOMMON BRACE ORC TWO-HAND 1D10 VERSATILE

Price 2 gp; Damage 1d6 B; Bulk 1

Hands 1

Type Melee; Category Martial; Group Hammer



Orc Skewer Maul

damage, the target attempts a DC 24 Fortitude save to avoid being toppled by the impact.

Critical Success The target is unaffected.

Success The target is off-guard until the beginning of its next turn.

Failure The target is knocked prone.

Critical Failure As failure, but the target also takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

Type lesser; Level 8; Price 475 gp

Type moderate; Level 13; Price 2,575 gp

The Fortitude saving throw DC is 30, and the bludgeoning damage dealt by a critical failure is 4d6.

Type greater; Level 18; Price 20,000 gp

The Fortitude saving throw DC is 38, and the bludgeoning damage dealt by a critical failure is 6d6.

CLEFT HEAD MARKING

ITEM 4+

RARE INVESTED MAGICAL TATTOO

Usage tattooed on the body; Bulk –

Caution and misdirection are the hallmarks of your hold. You've encountered more travelers than most of Belkzen's holds ever see, and you need to understand how to deal with them. You're a proud member of the Cleft Head

Hold or have been found worthy of wearing their mark. This tattoo is a crooked line that begins high above one eye and zigzags toward your mouth. The tattoo's grim appearance can help mask your true motivations. You gain a +1 item bonus to Deception checks to Feint.

Activate—Unexpected Strike ◆ (concentrate) **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger** You Strike a creature that has the off-guard condition with a weapon attack; **Effect** You deal an extra 1d6 precision damage to the target.

Type lesser; Level 4; Price 80 gp

Type greater; Level 10; Price 850 gp

The item bonus is +2, and Unexpected Strike deals 2d6 precision damage.

EMPTY HAND MARKING

ITEM 5

RARE INVESTED MAGICAL TATTOO

Price 135 gp

Usage tattooed on the body; Bulk –

Members of the Empty Hand consider themselves leaders of Belkzen, and their fearsome reputation has helped control Urgir for generations. As a proud member or

Tattoos

Like many cultures, the orcs of Belkzen have a long history of decorating their bodies. Tattoos help discern friend from foe, memorialize a person or event, or tap into a source of magic. Many holds have their own markings, which they share only with members of the hold or those who have proven themselves worthy.

AUROCHS' MIGHT TATTOO

ITEM 8+

UNCOMMON INVESTED MAGICAL TATTOO

Usage tattooed on the body; Bulk –

The aurochs depicted by this tattoo is a powerful symbol of strength and resilience. When upgraded, the tattoo expands to depict an increasingly imposing herd of aurochs.

Activate—Aurochs Charge ◆◆ (concentrate) **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** You Stride twice and make a melee Strike against a creature within your reach at any point during your movement. If the Strike hits and deals

honored guest of the hold, you've been allowed to bear their mark. The tattoo depicts a partially closed hand that grasps nothing. Many people wear this tattoo on their faces, but others have it on an exposed shoulder or arm.

Activate—Reproach ◆ (concentrate) **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger** You successfully Coerce a creature; **Effect** The maximum duration of the target's compliance increases to 1d4 days, rather than 1 day.

FLOWING WATER

ITEM 3+

UNCOMMON INVESTED MAGICAL TATTOO

Usage tattooed on the body; **Bulk** –

The Flood Truce is a season of relative peace, and this tattoo of a river can soothe your temper when you might otherwise lash out. You gain a +1 item bonus to Diplomacy checks made against orcs who honor the Flood Truce.

Activate—Embody the Truce ➤ (concentrate) **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger** A mental effect would compel you to harm an ally or bystander; **Effect** Attempt a counteract check with a counteract rank of 2 to end the effect.

Type lesser; **Level** 3; **Price** 55 gp

Type moderate; **Level** 7; **Price** 320 gp

The counteract rank is 4.

Type greater; **Level** 11; **Price** 1,200 gp

The counteract rank is 6.

STORIED SKIN

ITEM 3

UNCOMMON INVESTED MAGICAL TATTOO

Price 45 gp

Usage tattooed on the body; **Bulk** –

Your skin becomes a canvas that records history as you learn it. When you receive the tattoo, choose a Lore skill. You can add the visual trait to the Recall Knowledge action in order to study your tattoos, granting you a +1 item bonus to your check using the chosen Lore skill. A *storied skin* tattoo starts with an icon that represents a central event in your subject of study and is usually placed on the forehead or over the heart. Each time you learn about a major event in the history of that subject, an image, design, or symbol appears on your skin to represent the event.

Activate—Living History ◆ (concentrate) **Frequency** once per minute; **Effect** The tattoo's design animates for 1 round, crudely portraying some scene associated with the chosen Lore skill.

NEW FEATS

The orcs of Belkzen are adaptable survivors who can expertly make do during times of scarcity.

AUROCHS-HEADED

FEAT 3

UNCOMMON SKILL

Prerequisites trained in Diplomacy or Intimidation

Your words and body language can subconsciously unsettle orcs, giving you an advantage when convincing them to see things your way. Many with this feat use it to travel freely between holds, warning all but the toughest orcs to waylay weaker prey. You gain a +1 circumstance bonus to skill checks to Make an Impression or Coerce creatures with the orc trait. Enemy orcs who can see you at the start of combat take a –1 penalty to initiative rolls.

SPELL SURVIVOR

FEAT 5

UNCOMMON ORC

Prerequisites Orc Superstition

Once you've resisted an opponent's magic, anything else they throw your way becomes less effective. When you attempt a saving throw against a spell using Orc Superstition or Pervasive Superstition and critically succeed, you gain resistance 1 to all damage dealt by that triggering spell's caster until the end of their next turn. At 9th level and every 4 levels thereafter, the resistance increases by 1.

NEW ARCHETYPE

Belkzen's harsh environment and ancient history have inspired this tradition and archetype.

Tattooed Historian (archetype)

In Belkzen, an important part of a storyteller's arsenal is body art—anything from depictions of past events to illustrate a legend to gruesome scars that prove the bearer faced real danger and survived. Belkzen orcs with extensive body art and scars are often dubbed historians for the stories they carry. The greatest of them can unlock these stories' intrinsic magic to perform supernatural feats. A tattooed historian commands respect and reverence, often allowing them to travel safely among Belkzen's holds.

This archetype represents the Belkzen version of a tattooed historian; other cultures might have developed variations of this tradition with different prerequisites.

TATTOOED HISTORIAN DEDICATION

FEAT 2

UNCOMMON ARCHETYPE DEDICATION

Prerequisites Constitution +1; trained in Belkzen Lore, Orc Lore, Orc Pantheon Lore, or (at the GM's discretion) a related Lore skill

You become trained in Diplomacy or Performance; if you are already trained in both skills, you instead become trained in a skill of your choice. You gain access to all uncommon magical tattoos with the orc trait.

You gain a *storied skin* for free upon gaining this feat (or another magical tattoo of 2nd level or lower if you already have *storied skin*). You cannot have more than one *storied skin* tattoo, but the frequency of its Living History ability increases by one use per minute for every three tattooed

historian feats you have. For every two tattooed historian feats you have, you can invest one magical tattoo that does not count against the maximum number of items you can have invested at one time.

AGENT OF ALL HOLDS

FEAT 2

UNCOMMON ARCHETYPE

Prerequisites Tattooed Historian Dedication

Trigger You critically fail a Diplomacy, Intimidation, or Performance check.

Orcs across Belkzen recognize you as an honored lorekeeper. You're adept at leveraging this status and showing off your tattoos to resolve conflicts, change minds, or distract others from a faux pas. You get a failure on the check, rather than a critical failure. If the triggering check was made against a creature with the orc trait, you can instead add the fortune trait to this ability and reroll the check, treating any critical failure as a failure.

INKED PANOPLY

FEAT 4

UNCOMMON ARCHETYPE

Prerequisites Tattooed Historian Dedication

Trigger A creature targets you with an attack, and you can see the attacker.

Your tattoos can briefly animate and extend from your skin, granting you a spectral shield-bearer who protects you from harm. Doing so expends one use of your *storied skin*, granting you a +1 circumstance bonus to AC against the triggering attack. In addition, you gain resistance to mental, spirit, and void damage equal to twice your number of tattooed historian feats against the triggering attack.

INFUSED WITH BELKZEN'S MIGHT

FEAT 6

UNCOMMON ARCHETYPE

Prerequisites Tattooed Historian Dedication

Your tattoos immortalize the conquests of orc war leaders, such as Belkzen besieging the dwarven Sky Citadel of Koldukar. You can expend one use of your *storied skin*'s Living History ability to channel this power into your own weapons. Until the end of your next turn, you deal additional spirit damage with weapons and unarmed attacks equal to 1 plus half the number of Tattooed Historian feats you have.

INSCRIBED WITH ELDERS' DEEDS

FEAT 6

UNCOMMON ARCHETYPE

Prerequisites Tattooed Historian Dedication

Your tattoos commemorate unique exploits that (according to legends) only an orc could accomplish. During your daily preparations, you can reconfigure part of your *storied skin* to depict a specific orc hero, granting you a 1st-level ancestry feat with the orc trait until you prepare again; this

ancestry feat cannot require any physiological feature you lack, as determined by the GM. Since this feat is temporary, you can't use it as a prerequisite for permanent character options, such as for a feat. At 13th level, you can instead gain a 5th-level ancestry feat with the orc trait.

WRATH OF THE HOLD

FEAT 8

UNCOMMON ARCHETYPE OCCULT

Prerequisites Tattooed Historian Dedication

Your tattoos carry the strength of an innumerable horde, and you can expend one use of your *storied skin*'s Living History ability to animate your tattoos as ghostly assailants that swarm your foes. These spirits attack all foes in a 30-foot cone, dealing 4d6 spirit damage. The damage increases by 1d6 at 10th level and every 2 levels thereafter. Each affected creature must attempt a basic Will saving throw against the higher of your class DC or spell DC.



Tattooed Historian



AUROCHS ROLLING

Farmers throughout the Inner Sea often joke about cow tipping: sneaking up on an unsuspecting bovine and pushing it over while it sleeps. But since cattle sleep lying down, the animal usually has the last laugh. Nonetheless, some younger orcs in Belkzen spend evenings creeping up on sleeping aurochs to roll them over. This usually results in little more than a startled aurochs.

AUROCHS

This massive bovine looks like a larger, wilder version of the domesticated cattle found throughout the Inner Sea region. During winter, vast herds of the animals roam the southern reaches of the Realm of the Mammoth Lords, but as the ice high in the mountains begins to melt, the aurochs migrate south into Belkzen, following their ancestral route along the Flood Road. Once the water flows in earnest and turns to massive floods, the sudden surge of greenery provides the aurochs with all the food they need to survive.

Aurochs are essential to life in Belkzen. Not only do the orcs there hunt the wild cattle for their meat, but they use every part of the aurochs, from hide to bones, to craft their weapons and tools. The aurochs' arrival prompts the beginning of the Flood Truce, during which the usually war-focused orc holds cease all hostilities to take advantage of this time of plenty.

While groups of 20 or fewer animals are sometimes encountered, most aurochs travel in herds that stretch to the horizon. The land thunders under the weight of these herds, and the dust kicked up by their hooves is often spotted days before the aurochs—or the floodwaters that spurred their migration—arrive.

Aurochs bulls stand between 6 and 7 feet tall at the shoulder and weigh around 2,500 pounds, although prodigious specimens can grow to over 7 feet tall and 3,000 pounds. Cows are smaller, standing near 6 feet at the shoulder and weighing up to 2,000 pounds. All aurochs have slightly curved horns that grow up to three feet long from base to spear-sharp tip.

The aurochs is represented in much of Belkzen's artwork. Not only are the animals vital to survival in that unforgiving land, but their strength, power, and tenacity serve as potent symbols for orc holds.

AUROCHS

CREATURE 3

LARGE ANIMAL

Perception +9; low-light vision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Skills Athletics +11, Survival +9

Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +4, **Int** -4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -1

AC 18; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +6

HP 42

Easily Spooked The aurochs gains a +5-foot-status bonus to Speed while frightened.

Safety in Numbers Aurochs move together to keep safe from predators. While within 10 feet of another aurochs, the aurochs gains a +1 circumstance bonus to AC.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ hoof +10, **Damage** 1d8+6 bludgeoning

Melee ♦ horn +10, **Damage** 1d8+6 piercing plus Knockdown

Trample ♦♦♦ Medium or smaller, hoof, DC 19

Wild Charge ♦♦ The aurochs Strides twice and makes a single horn Strike against any foe along its path.



BRISTLE BOAR

The wild animals that have adapted to the harsh environs of Belkzen are either fierce enough to scare off predators, tough enough to survive attacks, or smart enough to avoid trouble. Bristle boars are all three. Many orcs admire the bristle boar, viewing them as living symbols of the toughness Belkzen demands from its inhabitants. With their spiny manes, sharp tusks, keen noses, and irascible nature, the creatures are both intimidating and dangerous.

Hunters throughout the Inner Sea region know that taking down a wild boar can prove deadly for the unprepared. Bristle boars—the name given to both male and female specimen—are even more challenging to kill. Further, their meat is sinewy, so few hunters even bother with the animals. For those who fell the beasts, the boars' spined hides often serve as trophies of the hunter's skill.

Bristle boars are not as reliant on the Deluge as other animals in Belkzen. Though they're certainly found in the green areas that spring up during the annual flooding, sounders of bristle boars can survive even in desolate areas like the Dirt Sea, grubbing for sustenance where few others can.

The Cleft Head Hold maintains a small herd of tamed bristle boars. The orcs have learned that, with the right trainer, the clever animals make excellent companions. Aside from their utility in battle, the boars are often used to sniff out the rare yellow truffles that grow throughout the hold.

A typical bristle boar stands 4 feet tall and weighs roughly 200 pounds.

BRISTLE BOAR

CREATURE 3

MEDIUM ANIMAL

Perception +9; low-light vision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Skills Athletics +10, Survival +8

Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +4, **Int** -4, **Wis** +2, **Cha** -2

AC 19; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +6, **Will** +9

HP 45

Bristle Spines When an adjacent creature hits the bristle boar with a melee attack, that creature takes 1d6 piercing damage unless it succeeds at a DC 17 Reflex save.

Ferocity

Speed 40 feet

Melee ♦ tusk +11, **Damage** 2d6+6 piercing

Melee ♦ spine +11 (agile), **Damage** 1d8+6 piercing

Boar Charge ♦♦ The bristle boar Strides twice and then makes a tusk Strike. As long as it moved at least 20 feet, it gains a +2 circumstance bonus to its attack roll.

Dustup ♦ (earth, manipulate) **Requirements**

The bristle boar is standing in an area with soil, dust, sand, or similar debris; **Frequency** once per round; **Effect** The bristle boar spins and kicks up dirt, knocking it into foes' faces. Each adjacent creature must attempt a DC 17 Fortitude save.

Success The creature is unaffected and immune to the bristle boar's Dustup for 24 hours.

Success The creature unaffected.

Failure The creature dazzled for 1 round.

Critical Failure The creature is sickened 1 and dazzled for 1 round.





PANICKED EYES

One distinctive feature all floodslain share are their wide, panic-stricken eyes. A floodslain's gaze is permanently frozen in the expression of terror the creature felt moments before its death. Some floodslain are rumored to have the ability to spread this fear to others with a mere glance.

FLOODSLAIN CREATURE

The sudden, crashing waters of the Deluge kill many creatures in Belkzen each year. The surprise and terror these victims of the Deluge feel during their last moments is sometimes enough to raise them from the dead as floodslain. As the waters that killed them recede, the undead seek others to join them. Despite their broken, shattered bodies, floodslain are often recognizable to those who knew them in life.

Floodslain creatures are rare outside Belkzen, leading some scholars to speculate that the waters of the Deluge are somehow cursed. Others believe the proximity of Gallowspire could be the cause. If so, this means the Gravelands could soon see floodslain arise there too, as the Whispering Tyrant furthers his plots after escaping that prison.

Creating a Floodslain Creature

You can build a floodslain creature from the ground up using the standard rules for monster creation (which is how the floodslain orc and floodslain wolf were built), or you can turn an existing creature into a floodslain creature by completing the following steps. In either case, the specific floodslain creature abilities listed below work the same.

Select a creature that has the animal or humanoid trait; this is the base creature. Increase the creature's level by 1 and change its statistics as follows.

- It gains the amphibious and undead traits.
- It gains darkvision.
- Increase AC, attack bonuses, DCs, saving throws, and skill modifiers by 1. If the base creature didn't have any listed DCs, use the moderate DC for a creature of its level for any new abilities that require a DC.
- Increase its Hit Points as shown on the table below.

Starting Level	HP Increase
1 or lower	+10
2-4	+15
5-19	+20
20+	+30

Floodslain Creature Abilities

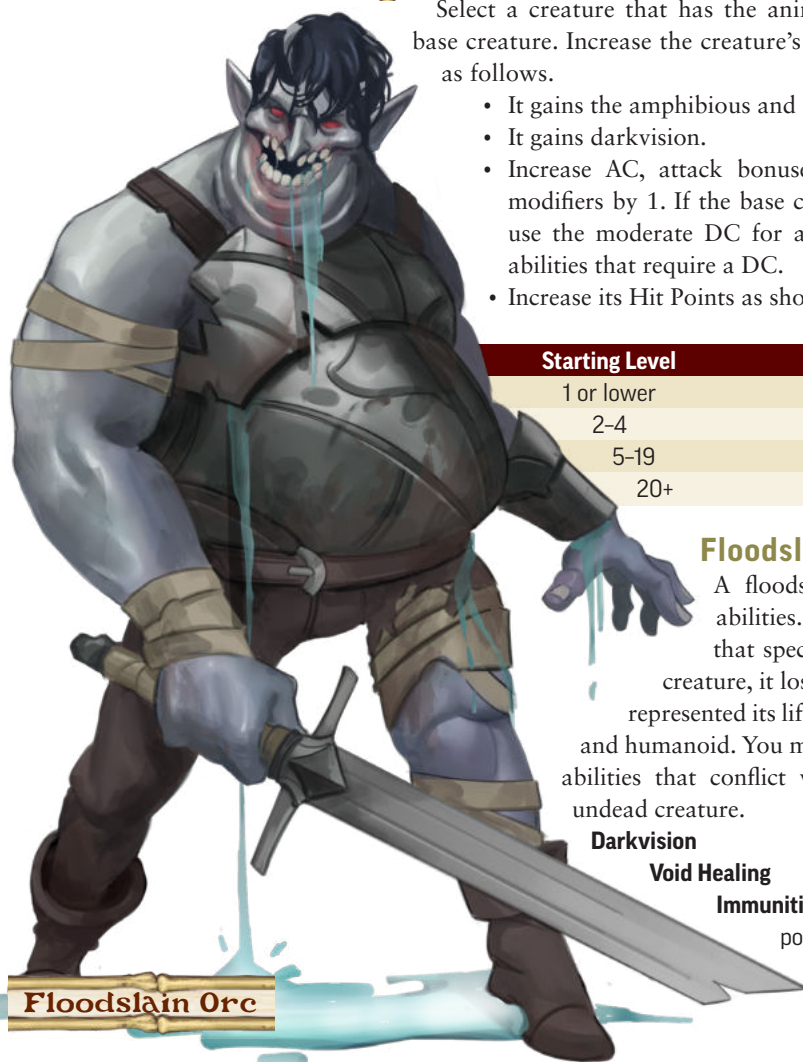
A floodslain creature gains the following abilities. If the base creature has any abilities that specifically come from it being a living creature, it loses them. It also loses any traits that represented its life as a living creature, such as human and humanoid. You might need to adjust or remove other abilities that conflict with the floodslain's theme as an undead creature.

Darkvision

Void Healing

Immunities death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, sleep

Drowning Touch (occult) When the floodslain creature damages a creature with a non-weapon melee



Floodslain Orc

attack, the target's lungs begin to fill with water. The target must attempt a Fortitude save against the floodslain's Will DC. A target affected by Drowning Touch can spend a single action coughing in an attempt to recover, which immediately lets them attempt a new Fortitude save against the effect. A success improves the previous result by 1 step. A critical success improves the previous result by 2, and a critical failure decreases it by 1.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is slowed 1 for 1 round.

Failure The creature is slowed 2 for 1 round.

Critical Failure The creature is slowed 2 and drowning.

Floodslain Spawn (occult) A living animal or humanoid killed by a floodslain creature will rise as a floodslain if their corpse is left in water for 24 hours. The new floodslain isn't under the control of the floodslain creature that killed it.

Hard to Burn The creature gains resistance to fire damage equal to its level (minimum 1).

Sodden Ground (aura, occult, water) 20 feet. Water flows endlessly from a floodslain creature, making the area around it slippery. The ground in the aura is difficult terrain for all non-floodslain creatures.

Swimmer Despite their ungainly appearance, floodslain are excellent swimmers. The creature gains a swim Speed equal to its base Speed.

Vomit Flotsam ♦♦ (occult) A floodslain creature's body is filled with debris from their horrific death, which they can spew at their enemies. The floodslain vomits flotsam in a 15-foot cone. Any creature in the area takes 1d8 bludgeoning damage per level of the floodslain creature (minimum 1d8) with a basic Reflex save against the floodslain's Fortitude DC.

Floodslain Orc

Countless orcs have fallen victim to the Deluge over the years. Some were caught unawares by the sudden flooding, while others lost their lives trying to save loved ones, valuable goods, livestock, or their property. A few were even thrown into the raging waters during conflicts with other orcs.

FLOODSLAIN ORC

CREATURE 3

MEDIUM AMPHIBIOUS UNDEAD

Perception +9; darkvision

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Athletics +10

Str +4, **Dex** +2, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** -2

Items shoddy breastplate, orc knuckle dagger (2)

AC 17; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +6

HP 44, void healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, sleep;

Resistances fire 3

Sodden Ground (aura, occult, water) 20 feet

Ferocity 2

Speed 25 feet, swim 25 feet

Melee ♦ orc knuckle dagger +11 (agile, disarm), **Damage** 1d6+6 piercing

Melee ♦ fist +11 (agile, nonlethal), **Damage** 1d8+6 bludgeoning plus Drowning Touch

Drowning Touch (occult) (see above)

Floodslain Spawn (occult) (see above)

Vomit Flotsam ♦♦ (occult) 15-foot cone, 3d8 bludgeoning



IN SEARCH OF WATER

Floodslain tend to move toward lower ground, instinctively seeking water. Belkzen's flat floodplains, however, mean that the creatures wander in unpredictable ways. A common saying among old orc crafters is "build on high, keep dry," but many add "build low, the dead flow."



ORC FAITH

With so many sudden disruptions to the orc pantheon, the faithful find themselves in a confusing time of change. Fervent worshippers of Lanishra, Sezelrian, and Zagresh don't particularly like the new deities who have usurped their old gods. Some of these zealots desperately cling to their old faiths, and many still hold a sliver of their fallen deity's power, further adding to the confusion.

ORCS

The orcs of Belkzen are survivors to the core. Shaped by the unforgiving landscape, they're experts at managing resources and making do with scarcity. Aside from the relative peace from late spring through early summer during the Flood Truce, Belkzen's orc holds are nearly always at odds with each other, though these conflicts rarely rise to the level of war. Instead, there are raids for supplies, skirmishes to establish borders or retake lost territory, and feuds over personal slights. Outsiders who travel in Belkzen often become embroiled in these conflicts; sometimes they even trigger the fights themselves.

The members of a given hold are often quite spread out, rather than centralized, so communication and coordination is sporadic. Even the Empty Hand orcs of Urgir rarely stay in the city all year long. At the very least, they travel a few miles to the Flood Road when the aurochs arrive, and they may wander even further afield when the mood strikes.

Orc Vagabond

Tough and no-nonsense, orc vagabonds are just as likely to serve their own interests as they are those of a warlord. Some live as bandit leaders, assembling their own group of veterans and outcasts. Many others work as the elite guards of their hold, keeping a watchful eye out for trouble.

ORC VAGABOND

CREATURE 3

MEDIUM HUMANOID ORC

Perception +9; darkvision

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Athletics +10, Intimidation +7, Stealth +9

Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +3, **Int** +1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +1

Items battle axe, longbow (20 arrows), studded leather armor

AC 18; **Fort** +11, **Ref** +10, **Will** +6

HP 48

Ferocity 2

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ battle axe +11 (sweep), **Damage** 1d8+6 slashing

Melee ♦ fist +11 (agile, nonlethal), **Damage** 1d4+6 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ longbow +10 (deadly d10, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 1d8+3 piercing

Surprise Shooter The orc vagabond's ranged attacks deal an extra 1d6 precision damage to targets adjacent to at least one of the vagabond's allies.

Orc Rampager

Fueled by bloodlust in battle, orc rampagers are fearsome combatants. They often serve as the elite shock troops of an orc hold. They train to move quickly through enemy ranks, striking all around them to disrupt their foe's defenses. The speed and fury of a group of orc rampagers working together is terrifying to behold.

ORC RAMPAGER

CREATURE 4

MEDIUM HUMANOID ORC

Perception +12; darkvision

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Athletics +12, Intimidation +11, Survival +10

Str +5, **Dex** +2, **Con** +4, **Int** +1, **Wis** +2, **Cha** +2

Items hide armor, longbow (20 arrows), orc necksplitter

AC 19; Fort +14, Ref +11, Will +8

HP 75

Ferocity

Reactive Strike

Speed 30 feet

Melee ♦ orc necksplitter +14 (forceful, sweep), Damage 1d8+9 slashing

Melee ♦ fist +14 (agile, shove), Damage 1d4+9 bludgeoning

Ranged ♦ longbow +12 (deadly d10, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), Damage 1d8+4 piercing

Rampaging Strikes ♦♦ The orc rampager Strides and makes two melee Strikes at any point during that movement. Each Strike must target a different creature. The attacks count toward the rampager's multiple attack penalty, but the penalty doesn't increase until after Rampaging Strikes is complete.

Orc Doomsayer

Driven by fervor bordering on zealotry, doomsayers spread the word of their destructive deities. Many are faithful followers of recently fallen gods. Though their deity has been cast down, an orc doomsayer's unwavering faith allows them to hold onto a sliver of their god's essence to power their abilities.

ORC DOOMSAYER

CREATURE 5

MEDIUM HUMANOID ORC

Perception +14; darkvision

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Athletics +11, Deception +12, Intimidation +12, Medicine +12, Religion +13

Str +3, Dex +2, Con +4, Int +1, Wis +5, Cha +4

Items breastplate, flail

AC 21; Fort +12, Ref +9, Will +15

HP 78

Ferocity

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ flail +13 (disarm, sweep, trip), Damage 1d6+3 piercing plus 1d8 void

Melee ♦ fist +13 (agile, shove), Damage 1d4+3 bludgeoning plus 1d8 void

Divine Prepared Spells DC 21, attack +14; 3rd chilling darkness, harm; 2nd augury, heal, silence; 1st enfeeble, fear, heal; Cantrips (3rd) daze, detect magic, guidance, shield, void warp

Dooming Proclamation ♦♦♦ (auditory, divine, emotion, fear, mental) The orc doomsayer shouts pronouncements that presage the unstoppable approach of a cataclysmic event. Each enemy within 30 feet attempts a DC 21 Will save.

Critical Success No effect and temporarily immune for 1 minute.

Success The creature is unaffected.

Failure The creature is frightened 1.

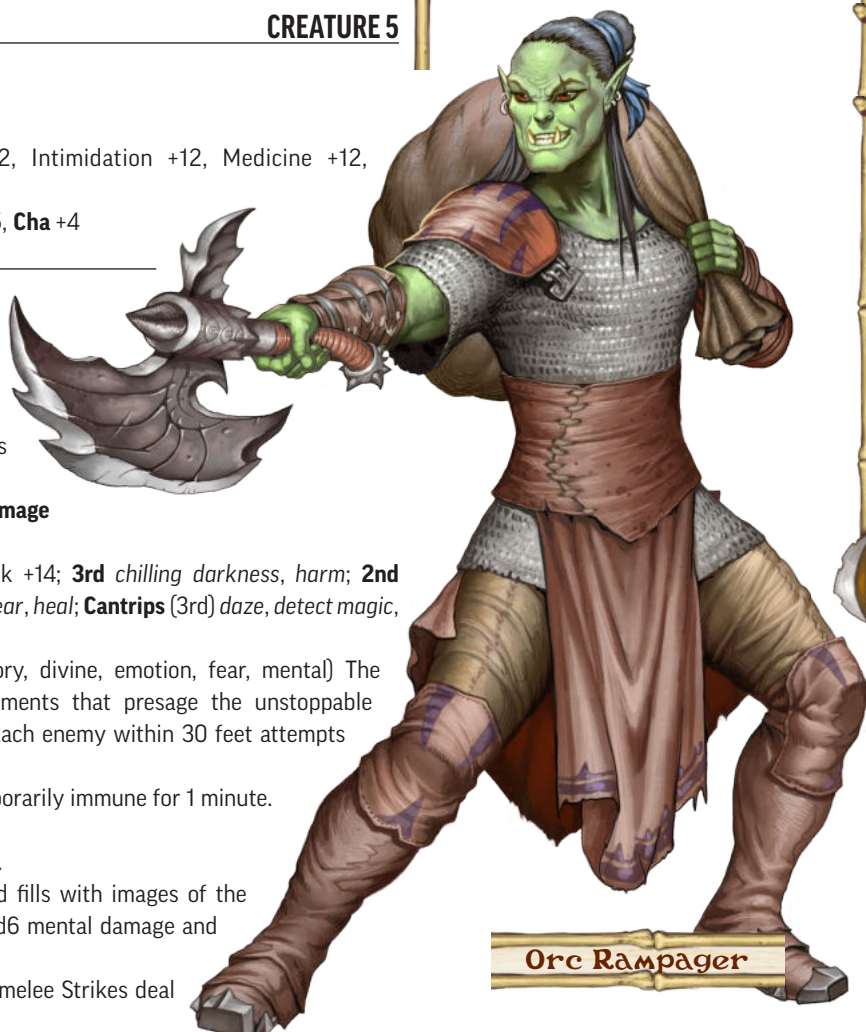
Critical Failure The creature's mind fills with images of the end times. The creature takes 3d6 mental damage and is frightened 2.

Infused Strikes The orc doomsayer's melee Strikes deal an extra 1d8 void damage.



SALVAGE

Orcs are experts at repurposing materials for their own use. Belkzen doesn't have rich soil or abundant deposits of valuable metals and minerals. Instead, orc crafters rely on salvage from battles or trade with outsiders for their raw materials. It's common for a basic tool, such as a knife or cooking pot, to be very old yet kept in perfect working condition. Even when a tool breaks, orc crafters find ways to reuse as much of it as they can manage.



Orc Rampager



THE WAX MAN

In the many taverns around the Inner Sea, there are tales of a creature called the Wax Man, a mysterious figure whose features are kept hidden by a deep, dark hood. If these stories are to be believed, beneath his voluminous robes, the Wax Man's skin shifts of its own volition. Whether the Wax Man is a skinslough, suffers from another condition, or is even real remains a subject of nervous debate.



SKINSLOUGH

A skinslough looks like a humanoid whose skin moves like an ill-fitting coat, independent of the underlying muscle and connective tissue. Nightmarish to behold, their touch spreads their terrible disease to others.

Skinsloughs are often mistaken for floodslain, a type of undead also brought about by water. Unlike floodslain, however, not all skinsloughs arise after drowning in a flood. Sailors cast overboard, lone explorers of remote lakes, and even people who tumble down abandoned wells can all become one of these foul creatures. Certainly, many skinsloughs arise from the Deluge, but their existence is far more widespread.

Unlike most other intelligent undead, skinsloughs aren't exclusively cruel and merciless, though many are. They retain a flicker of memory from their past lives and often actively avoid contact with anyone. Skinsloughs who have experienced the screaming terror that's so often a reaction to their appearance, however, give in to anger and work to spread their pain to others.

SKINSLOUGH

CREATURE 4

MEDIUM **AMPHIBIOUS** **UNDEAD**

Perception +12; darkvision

Languages Common, Necril

Skills Athletics +12

Str +5, **Dex** +2, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +2, **Cha** -4

AC 20; **Fort** +14, **Ref** +8, **Will** +11

HP 72, hard to target, void healing; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, unconscious; **Weakness** cold 6; **Resistances** bludgeoning and piercing 6

Hard to Target With their loose, shifting skin, a skinslough's vital organs are difficult to locate. Each time a skinslough would take precision damage or extra damage from a critical hit, it attempts a DC 5 flat check. On a success, the additional damage is negated.

Slough **Trigger** The skinslough gains a persistent damage condition or becomes grabbed, immobilized, or restrained; **Effect** The skinslough sheds part of its skin and attempts a DC 5 flat check to end the condition.

Speed 25 feet, swim 20 feet

Melee **◆** fist +13 (agile, disarm), **Damage** 2d8+5 bludgeoning plus Sloughing Sickness

Skin Net **◆** (attack, disease) The skinslough interacts to pull off part of its skin and throw it at a creature within 30 feet, making a ranged attack with a +12 modifier. If it hits, the target takes a -10-foot circumstance penalty to its Speeds for 1 round and must make a DC 18 Fortitude save. If the skinslough critically hits, the target gets a result one degree of success worse than the outcome of its Fortitude save.

Critical Success As success, and the creature automatically succeeds at saving throws against the skinslough's Skin Net for 24 hours.

Success The target is unaffected except for the penalty to Speed.

Failure The target is also sickened 1.

Critical Failure The target is also sickened 2.

Sloughing Sickness (disease, void) This horrifying disease can make a target's skin slough away. **Saving Throw** DC 18 Fortitude; **Stage 1** carrier with no ill effect (1 hour); **Stage 2** 2d4+4 void damage and clumsy 1 (1 day); **Stage 3** 4d4+4 void damage, clumsy 1, and stupefied 1 (1 day).

STORMBLOOD TIGER

Whereas most werecreatures follow the monthly rhythms of the full moon, the stormblood tiger's change is connected to the floods brought by annual rainfall. In parts of the world where flooding or heavy rains are both regular and predictable, such as during the Deluge in Belkzen, these lycanthropes stalk the land hunting for prey. Every night after the floods begin, a stormblood tiger is forced into its hybrid form until sun rises or the waters recede, usually 2–3 months later. The remainder of the year, stormblood tigers walk undetected among the population, often mistaken for hunters or scouts.

STORMBLOOD TIGER

CREATURE 7

RARE LARGE BEAST HUMANOID ORC WERECREATURE

Perception +18; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Common, Orcish; tiger empathy

Skills Acrobatics +17, Athletics +18, Stealth +17, Survival +15

Str +6, **Dex** +5, **Con** +4, **Int** +2, **Wis** +3, **Cha** +3

Items +1 battle axe, hide armor

Tiger Empathy The stormblood tiger can communicate with felines.

AC 24; **Fort** +16, **Ref** +18, **Will** +12

HP 114; **Weaknesses** silver 7

Reactive Strike ⤵

Speed 25 feet, swim 25 feet

Melee ⬥ battle axe +17 (magical, sweep), **Damage** 1d8+12 slashing

Melee ⬥ claw +16 (agile), **Damage** 2d8+12 slashing plus Grab

Melee ⬥ jaws +16, **Damage** 2d6+12 piercing plus curse of the flood tiger

Change Shape ⬥ (concentrate, polymorph, primal) Orc with fist +16 for 1d4+12 bludgeoning, or tiger with Speed 30 feet and Wrestle (Monster Core 51).

Curse of the Stormblood Tiger (curse, primal) This curse only affects humanoids. **Saving Throw** DC 22 Fortitude. Each night of flood season, the cursed creature must succeed at another Fortitude save or transform into a stormblood tiger until dawn. The creature is under the GM's control and goes on a rampage for half the night before falling unconscious until dawn.

Flood Frenzy (polymorph, primal)

As the night falls in flood season, the stormblood tiger must enter hybrid form, can't Change Shape thereafter, becomes one size larger, increases its reach by 5 feet, and increases the damage of its jaws Strike by 2. When the sun rises or the lands dry again, the stormblood tiger returns to humanoid form and is fatigued for 24 hours.

Rend ⬥ claw

Sudden Pounce ⬥⬥ Imbued with an insatiable predatory instinct, stormblood tiger Leaps up to 15 feet and makes a claw Strike at the end of that movement. If the attack hits, the stormblood tiger can immediately Rend.



SOUGHT OUT


Because of the stormblood tiger's fearsome reputation and powerful abilities, some foolhardy orc warriors view becoming a stormblood tiger as a path to greatness—a blessing instead of a curse. In their minds, it's more important to have this power at hand during times of conflict than worry about disrupting peace during the Flood Truce. Wiser voices argue that too many stormblood tigers roaming about during the Flood Truce risks ending the accord altogether.





K'zaard the Drover

Cunning and narcissistic ruler of the Cleft Head Hold



Becoming a ruler among the orcs of Belkzen is no mean feat. While anyone with sufficient magical or martial might can force others to do their bidding, many orcs claim that kind of leadership “only carries as far as the sound of one’s voice.” The most successful orc leaders build a cadre of powerful supporters to ensure their commands are obeyed. While some who lack leadership skills use fear and threats to force compliance, others rely on bribes or play friends, allies, and enemies against each other in a manipulative, treacherous web. K’zaard, the current leader of the Cleft Head Hold, is a prime example of the latter, relying less on physical might and more on psychological and political manipulation to maintain his rule.

K’zaard was never the strongest orc in his hold, but he was always one of the most clever and insightful. From a young age, K’zaard always seemed to get his way. No mistake was ever his fault; his honeyed words and misdirection deflected all responsibility. This skill set K’zaard in a positive light with others. Soon the other members of his hold were jealous of each other’s friendship with the young orc, and K’zaard’s pride swelled as everyone tripped over themselves to associate with him.

K’zaard also made a powerful ally during this time—the cyclops Ouragrim—whom he met on an excursion into the Tusk Mountains. The fearsome reputation of the cyclopes didn’t stop K’zaard from striking up a conversation with Ouragrim. The young orc’s boldness impressed the cyclops, and the two became fast friends. Once everyone in the hold learned how K’zaard had “defeated the vicious giant” with his words alone, the orc’s reputation exploded.

Wresting control of his hold from its previous leader, Gormstang, was far easier than K’zaard had hoped. With a few subtle suggestions to Gormstang’s top advisors, K’zaard launched a quick and effective coup. His few remaining enemies in the hold quickly fell in line once they realized the incredible influence K’zaard now possessed.

K’zaard’s takeover quickly gained the attention of Grask Uldeth. Already known as a merciless warlord, the ruler of Urgir had grand plans for bringing Belkzen into closer contact with its neighbors. Grask

aggressively pursued new approaches to dealing with outsiders and personally oversaw the destruction of several bands of orcs who refused to give up raiding foreign trade routes. When K’zaard’s activities as a clever, opportunistic, and shrewd leader reached his ears, Grask summoned K’zaard to Urgir. Though K’zaard knew the meeting with Grask could end poorly if he wasn’t careful, he also saw it as a tremendous opportunity.

After arriving in Urgir, K’zaard was surprised to find a number of humans included in the meeting. He quickly learned the humans were members of the Sharpes Gang, a criminal organization that had worked in Lastwall, Ustalav, Nirmathas, and Molthune, being driven out by each nation in turn. The desperate gang had finally settled in a valley north of Vigil, certain no one would pursue them there. Instead, the orcs of Belkzen noticed them and sent word to Urgir.

Grask Uldeth saw an opportunity to build connections with non-orc groups and gave permission for the gang to found a settlement in the area. He also informed the outlaws he’d be assigning them protection in the form of K’zaard and his hold. Sharpe’s Gang understood this “protection” was more like extortion, but they considered the arrangement better than the alternative.

Soon after the meeting, Grask told K’zaard that part of his job would be to keep the other holds from causing trouble for the humans. K’zaard would collect taxes on Grask’s behalf, and as reward, Grask would grant K’zaard’s hold rights to an abandoned fort north of the new settlement’s location and provide funds to repair and improve the fort.

K’zaard easily convinced his tribe to relocate, and soon they found themselves settling into the run-down fort north of the new human settlement, Freedom Town. The Cleft Head Hold refortified their fort to the best of their abilities, turning Splitskull into a viable fortress and formidable seat of political power.

Campaign Role

K’zaard serves as the primary antagonist of Chapter 3. While he doesn’t have much influence on the adventure before that point, information about

his personality and the Cleft Head Hold appears in Chapter 2. If you want to more fully emphasize K'zaard as a looming threat, you could have rumors of his rise show up in Chapter 1. Although Ardx doesn't fully trust K'zaard even before his arrival in Chapter 3, he certainly knows quite a bit about the Cleft Head leader.

K'zaard likely meets his end in battle against the PCs. If captured instead, he can provide information about his nascent alliance with the Unbroken Horn Hold and their Wingripper servants, although he's largely been kept in the dark about what's going on. If K'zaard escapes, he flees to the Unbroken Horn Hold and could return to trouble the PCs again, probably better armed, with new friends and at a higher level.

K'ZAARD THE DROVER

CREATURE 6

UNIQUE MEDIUM HUMANOID ORC

Perception +17; darkvision

Languages Common, Orcish


Skills Acrobatics +14, Athletics +11, Deception +16, Diplomacy +15, Stealth +14, Thievery +13

Str +3, **Dex** +6, **Con** +3, **Int** +5, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +5

Items dagger, leather armor, +1 striking *orc skewermaul*, ring of keys to all locks in Splitskull


AC 24; **Fort** +11, **Ref** +17, **Will** +14


HP 95


Back Pedal  **Trigger** K'zaard is targeted by a Strike; **Effect** K'zaard moves unpredictably and suddenly as he tries to dodge. He gains a +1 circumstance bonus against the triggering attack. After the attack is resolved, K'zaard can Step.


Ferocity

Speed 25 feet


Melee  *orc skewermaul* +16 (brace, magical, two-hand d10, versatile P), **Damage** 2d6+6 bludgeoning

Melee  dagger +15 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+6 piercing

Ranged  dagger +15 (agile, finesse, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+6 piercing

Keep Talking  (auditory, mental) **Effect** K'zaard continues to speak quickly and convincingly. Creatures frightened by K'zaard's Weaseling Words can't reduce the frightened condition caused by that effect at the end of their next turn.

Sneak Attack K'zaard deals 2d6 extra precision damage to off-guard creatures.

Weaseling Words  (auditory, emotion, fear, mental) K'zaard weaves together a short speech

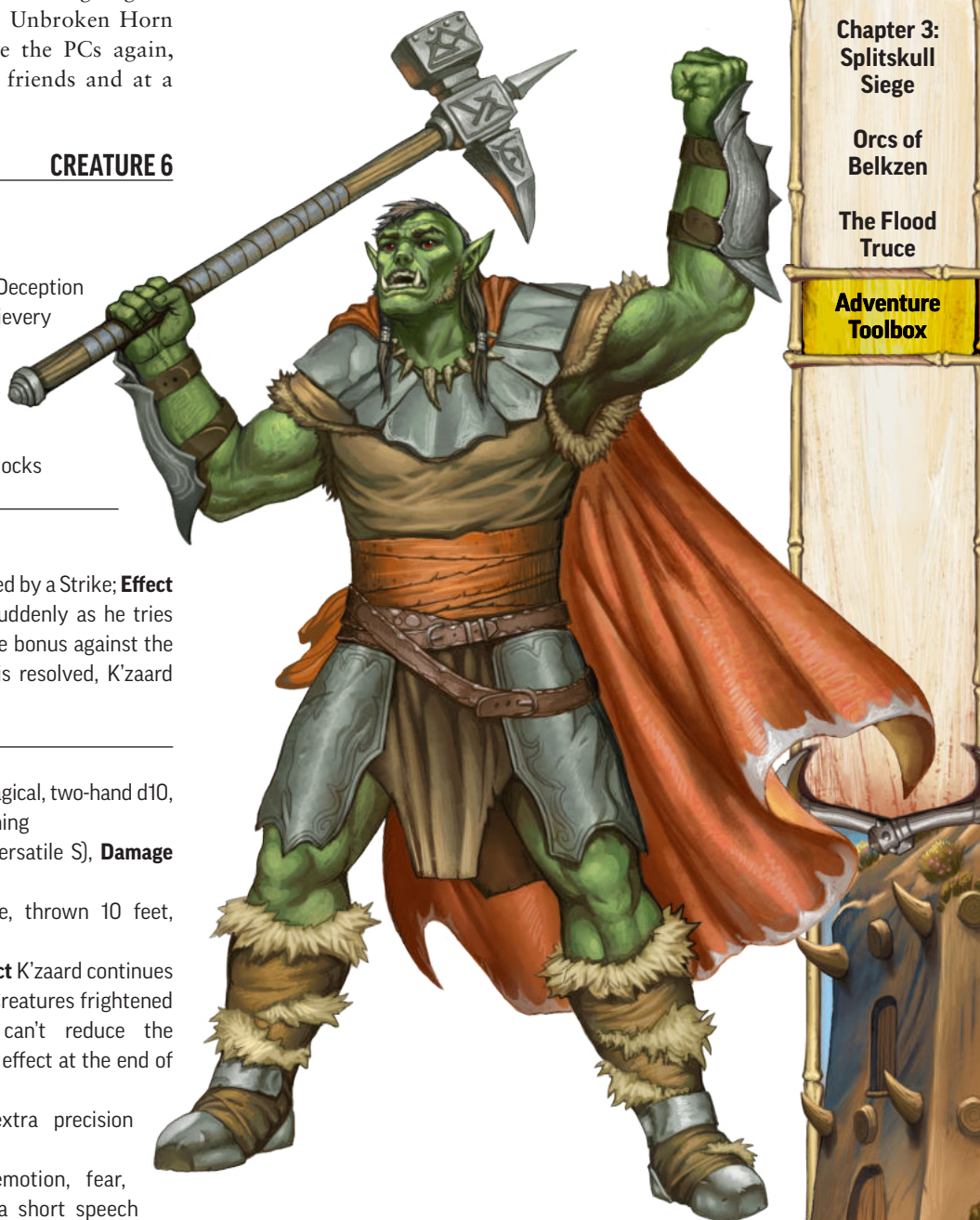
that gives the listener pause. Enemies within 30 feet must attempt a DC 24 Will save. While a creature is frightened by this ability, it's off-guard to K'zaard.

Critical Success No effect, and the creature is temporarily immune to Weaseling Words for 1 minute.

Success The creature is unaffected.

Failure The creature is uncertain and frightened 1.

Critical Failure The creature is riddled with self-doubt about its own actions. It is frightened 2 and can't take hostile actions against K'zaard until the frightened condition ends.



NEXT MONTH

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by David Schwartz and Shay Snow

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