

GHOST-WEED

Ghost-weed grows at the edges of small ponds and still areas of marsh, head-sized green bladders, streaked with red, floating on the surface. In the fall, they send up spikes with spore pods that burst and release seeds into the wind.

At night, ghost-weed glows a cool blue-green, each plant like a floating lantern. Lost travelers and other creatures are drawn to the light and stumble into the pond where the plant grows. The water in a ghost-weed pond is tainted with a paralytic toxin.

GHOST-WEED TOXIN (CONTACT)

A creature subjected to this toxin must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The poisoned creature is also paralyzed. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Victims often fall into the water and drown. They are broken down into nutrients, absorbed by the ghost-weed's root systems.

Criminals in the marsh harvest ghost-weed and distill its toxin into a clear, slightly sticky contact poison with the same effects.

LYSANA'S CROSSING

The outpost in Aldis is named for the scout who re-discovered the Westerly Road. It has grown into a medium-sized fortress with a small town sheltered on its western side. The fortress holds about a hundred regular troops, as well as a handful of scouts. Gerrard Hallaran, rhy-bonded human noble and veteran of the Sovereign's Finest, commands the outpost and administers the town, when necessary. Hallaran's rhy-cat companion, Rosh, is a rough-and-tumble sort with an adventuresome history.

In the town of Lysana's Crossing, Aldin merchants buy goods from Jarzoni traders, artisans sell their wares, and entertainers perform for coin and recognition. The town has eight to ten times the population of the fort, depending on the time of the year. The two largest inns are the Road's End and the Traveler's Rest. The Road's End is designed to accommodate guards, merchants, cargo handlers, and other travelers not wealthy enough to afford luxury accommodations. In contrast, the Traveler's Rest is a small, expensive inn catering to the needs of wealthy merchants, the finest establishment in Eastern Lands of Aldis, as they will quickly inform you.

FIERY DEFENSE

The gatekeeper at Jarzon's end of the Great Westerly Road, Fiery Defense, is a fort of about a hundred well-trained warrior-priests. Like their Aldin counterparts, they also patrol the marsh and the road, countering Aldin scouts who try to enter Jarzon and attempting to capture heretics and others fleeing Jarzon. There is no town adjacent to Fiery Defense, and while the assignment is considered exciting, it's a harsh post with few comforts.

The Knight-Commander of Fiery Defense is Keeper Falinur Fenirson, a lean, tall, scarred man with close-cropped gray hair and a burning gaze. He's been a

warrior-priest since childhood and has several accolades to his name, including combat with Kern. In spite of his combat record, Keeper Falinur was assigned to Fiery Defense as a punishment rather than a promotion. Over the years, he has won the respect of the men under his command, but it's known (if not discussed) that the Knight-Commander has little use for the priestly hierarchy of the Church, who command fighters in the field with little military experience themselves.

SERPENT'S HAVEN

Because the Veran Marsh is no one's land, it has become a refuge for criminals from both Aldis and Jarzon. The farmsteads and small towns near the marsh are sometimes the targets of raids by both people and shadowspawn.

Towards the southern end of the marsh, the smugglers of Basketh Bay have a few semi-permanent settlements. Pirates and smugglers use these settlements to buy and sell, to duel, and to make deals. The shifting, secret paths leading to the settlements were chosen for the quicksand and ghost-weed around them, perfect for trapping the unwary. The collections of moldy wooden shacks, moss-slimed plank walkways, and dim greenish lanterns would look abandoned, except for the slinking shadows and hard-eyed people living there.

The oldest such settlement within the Veran Marsh is Serpent's Haven. Located between the southern track through the marsh and Basketh Bay, the shabby collection of driftwood shacks and muddy trails has been home to more murderers, bandits, and smugglers than your average prison. The Haven is a prime location for any dirty dealings with pirates and smugglers. Blue trumpet-flower paste from Rezea is traded for stolen pearls from Lar'tya, and desperate heretics from Jarzon book risky passages to freedom from unscrupulous sailors.

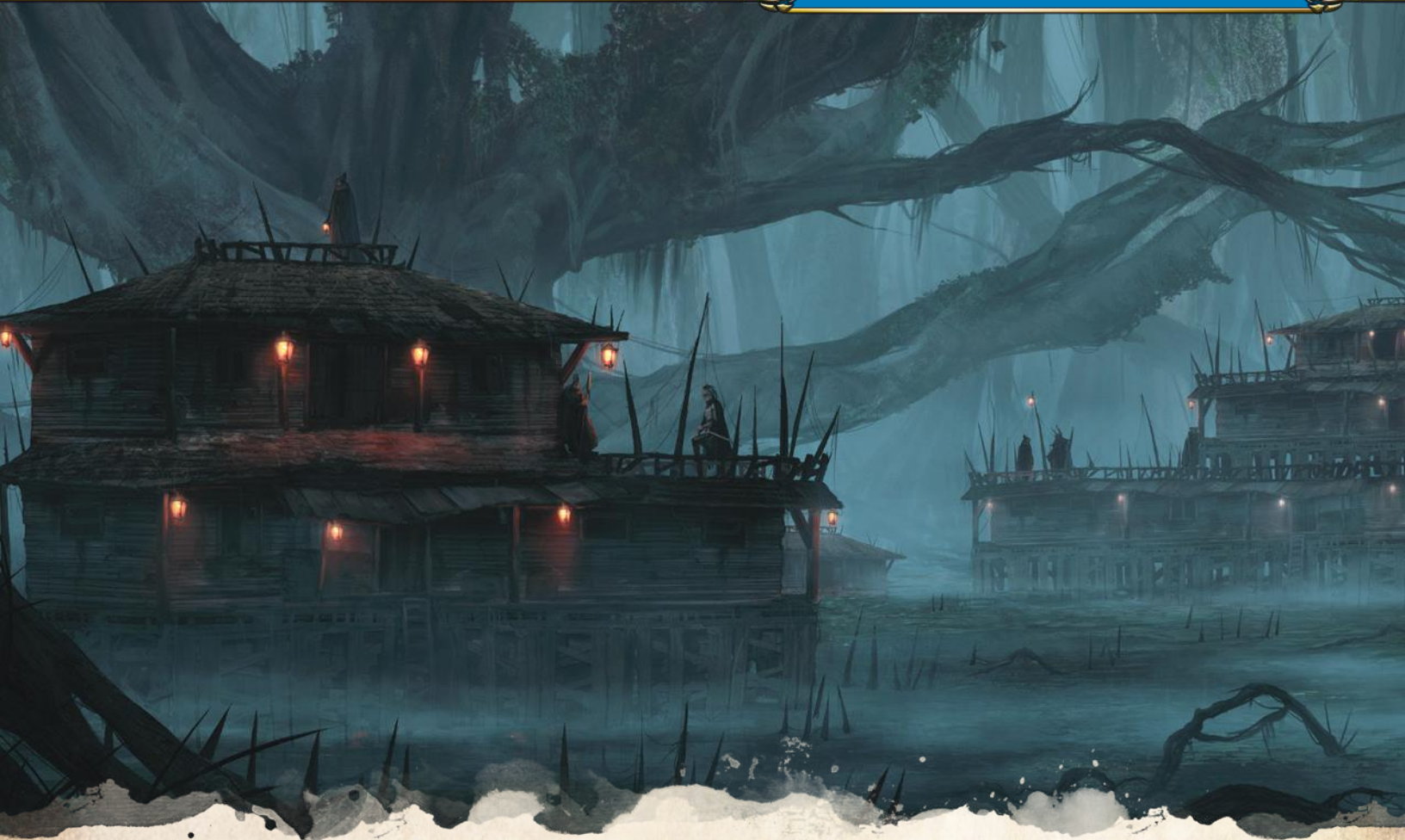
SHAN SERPENTTONGUE

The vata'sha gangster Shan Serpenttongue rules Serpent's Haven, and her gang takes a cut of every coin that crosses palms here. Shan's understanding of the marsh keeps the Haven afloat on the shifting sands—both figuratively and literally. She has outwitted shadowspawn and hunted down aberrations. She can provide guides and guards for travelers along the southern trail and has spies in Lysana's Crossing and Fiery Defense to keep her informed of nearby patrols.

THE SERPENT'S COIL

The Serpent's Coil is the circular main street and the only cobbled one in Serpent's Haven. Historically, the cobbling is maintained by whichever gang is in charge at the time. Indeed, failing to perform decent upkeep on the Coil is a good way for any gang, no matter how powerful, to fall out of favor with those merchants and other business-folk who depend on the Coil for their trade, as carts and horses cannot navigate most of the other muddy tracks through the Haven.

The Coil runs in a complete circle, and most directions proffered in the Haven use it as a landmark—a necessity,



given the ever-shifting nature of the rest of Serpent's Haven. Once off the Coil, the only streets are muddy, filth-spattered footpaths and walkways of wooden planks, more often than not slimy and green with moss and algae thanks to the incessant dampness of the place. Few of the buildings are higher than one story tall, as it takes skill to construct sturdy buildings that rise high in a swamp—skill that is rare and expensive to hire. Though the Haven does stand on ground higher than the surrounding marsh, it isn't quite elevated enough to pull it up out of the wetlands completely.

The southern edge of the Coil abuts one of the deeper river-shards that flows out of the marsh, forming the salt-water estuary where the Haven is concealed. It is deep enough to allow all but the largest of sailing vessels to dock, although the way through the estuary proper is difficult for most vessels even if they have someone familiar with the route onboard. If they do not, the Haven is all but inaccessible to anything but small rowboats and the like. Several of the local gangs—including the Serpenttongues—provide visiting vessels with highly-paid navigators capable of bringing ships in. They also frequently raid ships mud-scuttled in too-shallow waters, carrying away their cargos.

THE RUINS OF VERAN-TATH

It is widely believed the ancient city of Veran-Tath was completely lost in the inundation of the marshlands but,

from time to time, disturbances within the marsh raise strange ruins, covered in mosses and draped in weeds, or entrances to partially flooded networks of underground chambers. These places are thick with the influence of Shadow and sometimes contain unliving creatures or even darkfiends. Their presence leeches into the surrounding land and water, creating shadowspawn and sometimes drawing-in the unwary or greedy treasure-hunters. “Let the treasures of Veran-Tath rest with its bones,” say the wise, but the foolish often fail to heed them, and salvaged items turn up in one of the Marsh's “night-markets” for sale to the highest bidder.

TRANQUIL WATERS

No one truly knows how long the rhydan community of Tranquil Waters has existed deep in the Veran Marsh, though Aldin records of it go back some 70 years. Those records claim that Tranquil Waters is a rare and needed resource: a community of rhydan dedicated to identifying lingering sources of Shadow in the marsh and purifying them.

The work done at Tranquil Waters isn't a mission or even a war—it is a way of life. This is perhaps due to the approach of the Ancient Dumnall, the great rhy-turtle who leads the community. The goals of Tranquil Waters' rhydan are simple: to identify places where Shadow coalesces, to discover why, and then to break up and cleanse the corruption, allowing it to bleed away.