TEOS ABADIA & GERALD ARTHUR LEWIS

A Dark Sun List Netbook Project

The Net Libram of Athasian Ecology

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This document can be found in the Dark Sun List Archives,
is stored at MPGN, and is linked on the Net Projects page for Dark Sun.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introductions

Adding Realism to a Campaign

Introduction, By Teos Abadia.

Role-playing requires that that the players immerse their minds in their surroundings. A DM is responsible for creating surroundings that stimulate the players' imaginations. The richer the setting a DM can create, the greater the role-playing experience.

One of the things that always amazed me as an AD&D player was the weather. It seemed that every day my character went out to find adventure, the weather was perfect! Our campaign world had nothing but sunny skies, and was never too hot for armor nor cold enough to require a coat. At some point, this absence of weather patterns really began to bother me. I mean, in the Real World, a day with high humidity can turn an ordinary day into a dismal one, while a night with the quiet pitter-patter of raindrops falling on my roof can ensure a deep calming sleep. Weather, and the effects it has on adventurers, was missing.

It wasn't until 1988 that I finally started including weather and climate in the games that I Dungeon Mastered. In 1990, I sat down for two hours and created an Excel spreadsheet that contained a climate chart for the world of Greyhawk. With a few dice rolls, I could now have the adventure begin on a cold brisk morning with a low-lying late winter fog, and end it on a bright sunny mid-Spring day.

The reasoning behind this sort of thinking, and how this Net Project came to be. The reason why climate is important is that as humans we are interconnected (no matter how hard some try to deny this) with nature. We respond to our environment. Most pre-written adventures ignore climate, and thus fail to cater to one of the factors that drives a player's (and therefore character's) mood. The addition of climactic factors enhances the role-playing experience not only through realism, but by providing players an environment with which they can interact. In my campaign, the inclusion of climate resulted in characters with favorite cloaks, preferences for certain armor types during certain seasons, and plenty of curses when an outdoor party would meet a sudden deluge.

On Athas, rain is hardly the issue. Climate should be role-played, but is really a matter of telling the players if the day is very hot, very very hot, or ridiculously hot. The nights, of course, are varying degrees of bone-chilling cold.

What is an issue on Athas, and what was somehow not apparent to TSR, is ecology. The Dark Sun world was designed by many different TSR authors, but none of them seemed to have much of a problem with the extraordinary amount of large creatures that roam the wastelands. What exactly do the gargantuan and huge creatures (Cilops, Cloud Ray [said to eat entire villages], drakes, megapedes, nightmare beasts, etc.) eat? Immense creatures expend a lot of energy, and that requires a lot of smaller critters they can eat, and a lot of plants that the smaller critters can eat. Absent are the multitude of plants, insects, and herbivores that sustain such fearsome predators. Clearly, Athas as written by TSR does not have a working ecology.

In July of 1997, the Dark Sun mailing list began to wonder about the Athasian ecology, and for similar reasons to my wanting to introduce climate into my campaigns: a working Athasian ecology enhances the role-playing experience not only through realism, but by providing players with an ecology with which they can interact. This netbook is the result of a collaborative effort amongst the list's participants, who produced some truly amazing ecological resources to enhance your campaign. With this netbook and a few of your own ideas, I expect that your druids will have realistic guarded lands, your overland trips will be more memorable and meaningful, and that your players will finally know what those huge creatures eat (which will hopefully not be their characters).

Making a Game World Come to Life

Introduction, By Gerald Arthur Lewis.

You can not just tell *someone a mood, you have to let them* experience *it.*

After six years of playing the AD&D 2nd Edition game, I finally ran a Dark Sun campaign. Actually, it was the first quest I had ever run, which is a bit abnormal for an experienced gamer like myself. Things went well at first; adventure ideas were quite easy to come up with and the players loved their characters and the campaign. But I soon realized something was wrong. I couldn't identify exactly what it was, but *something* was amiss.

During the beginning stages of the game, I had thought the problem was the adventure I was running: Six low-level characters scurrying around Athas for a would-be Avangion, collecting important components for his metamorphosis spell. Unrealistic? Yes. But, I handled it in a manner that I thought worked for the campaign. The Avangion never helped them with problems (he was *way* too busy) and the rewards for the party's help were enough to keep it fun, but not enough to damage game-balance (I don't think one of them even *saw* a gold piece until fourth level). Once I figured out it wasn't the campaign, I next wondered whether my

players were the cause of the problem. I started noticing how they would always do something that wouldn't gel with the feel of Dark Sun, whether it be an Earth Cleric who would harm his opponents with a "Dust Bunny" spell, or an assassin who was always drunk and acting silly. But was it their fault? I had thought so at the time, and so began punishing them for their inappropriate behavior. I kept trying to tell them that what they were doing was not fitting the feel of the Dark Sun world, trying to impress upon them that one could not be expected to travel for three days in the desert and not bring any water! Nothing was getting through to these guys. After a long time of seeing no real results from my iron-handed DMing method, I figured it wasn't their fault after all. So now what could it be?

And then, one night, out of the clear blue, **it hit me**. How could they know how I wanted the mood of Dark Sun to be? You can't just *tell* someone a mood, you have to let them *experienc*e it. Once the proper mood is established, appropriate behavior just falls into place. I realized that while I had done my job well as a storyteller, and while I had done my job well as a referee, I had failed at my duty to bring the world *alive* for my players. I hadn't given any attention to the intricacies, the little things. If I had spent half as much time describing how small animals emerge from almost nowhere in the early morning hours to collect the dew from the plants, as I had describing that huge nightmare beast, I would have had a campaign that really worked. It's easy to fall into the "bigger-is-better" trap with a world like Athas. Who wants to pay attention to little rodents when one could pay attention to the mighty Nightmare Beast, or the gargantuan Fire Drake? That's why this net book is so important, it shifts the focus away from the big things, so a DM can put focus on what would usually go unnoticed.

Even if you have no knowledge of ecology *at all*, you can use this net book. The second chapter describes the basics of ecology. Don't worry if you're not a science whiz, Teos wrote the whole thing in a fashion that's interesting, easy to understand, and fun to read. So don't be intimidated, leap before you look, and you'll soon have a campaign that *lives*.

Chapter 2

Ecology In The Real World

Basics of Ecology

A child said, What is grass?
And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves…
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life,
and does not wait at the end to arrest it…
This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,
This is the common air that bathes the globe.
I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars…
And a mouse a miracle enough to stagger sextillions of Infidels.
- Walt Whitman

By Teos Abadia, using the *Ecology 2* textbook by Paul Colinvaux, and with the comments of Gerald Arthur Lewis and Peter "Brax" Nuttall

Ecology is concerned with how the living part (or biosphere) of the planet works. The biosphere is driven by the energy of the sun, and this energy is passed on from species to species and then finally radiated as excess heat back into space. Green plants start this cycle, and exist anywhere under the sun where the earth is moist, warm, or nutrient-rich enough to let them live. The plants use the solar energy to drive a chemical synthesis of carbohydrate fuels from water and carbon dioxide. This carbohydrate fuel is what all the rest of the planet's creatures live off of. Without plants there would be no food for the rest of the creatures.

The details are complex. Niches (area of an environment where only one species can live) can be very small. A botanist identified 300 species of trees in 2 1/2 acres of Amazonian rain forest, even though the total number of trees was 600! Such diversity and variety in our world is perplexing, with the total being something like a half-million known plant species and perhaps 3-30 million plant and animal species being estimated. The diversity of animals is greater than that of plants. Also, keep in mind that most of those 3-30 million species are very small, and most are insects (of which

most are Beetles). (Why are most small? - specializing in small niches, using up and needing less energy if one is small, etc. etc.)

Because life is so diverse, the different species must live together, sharing resources. (One species can not avoid the others; this sets up relationships, food is finite, and must be shared or competed for). The study of the communal living between species is one of the focuses of ecology. Common questions the field tackles are how there can be so many species, and how they all come to live together. These questions are all addressed to the process of natural selection, which decides which life forms live to pass genetic traits on while others die off.

Natural selection is the necessary consequence of 1) all animals and plants procreating to the extent of creating more offspring than needed to replace the parents (otherwise the species would die out due to predation, etc.), 2) individuals having different characteristics so that each member of a species has different chances at survival, and 3) that many of the differences (traits) are hereditary.

Because each young is different, each has a different chance at surviving, and the winnowing/culling of generations adds up over time, each individual species and their characteristics are naturally selected over time. Natural selection is said to work through death, killing off the members that are less fit to the niche, environment, competition, etc.

Any death results in potential food being deposited on the environment. If a creature can eat this food (either as a carrion feeder, or by using it as fertilizer like a plant would) then that may pose a selective advantage. In tropical forests, it is the continual death of plant matter that creates a fertile layer that keeps the soil moist and healthy. When the trees are chopped down, nothing can grow back easily, because the soil itself is very nutrient poor. The nutrient cycle of death and rebirth is what enables such thick jungle, not just minerals in the soils. Nature tends not to waste, because any waste becomes a niche available for colonization by a variant of a species.

The concept of niche is important. A simple field might seem to be one niche, but could actually be composed of hundreds of niches. While each plant in the field is doing the same type of thing (making carbohydrates from H2O and CO2 with sunlight), each does it a very different way. Some are prone, others erect, some are annuals, some live many years, some flower early in the season, others late. All have different types of defenses against herbivores and climate, and so each attracts different types of predation. Niche describes the entire way of life (mating, hunting, defenses, feeding, birth, etc.) of a species.

Disturbance is interesting, particularly to the Athasian DM. Ecologists studying ice-age history say that the communities (groupings of species) on Earth are likely to be less than 10,000 years old. This is small, when compared to the million-year existences of individual species, such as a type of forest tree. So, after/during the end of the last ice-age disturbance, it took 10,000 years for the current communities (such as eastern

American forests) to build themselves up the way they are. The communities are still evolving, and the disturbances have affected and continue to effect communities in every setting on Earth, from desert to tundra.

Competition

By Teos Abadia, using the *Ecology 2* textbook by Paul Colinvaux, and with the comments of Gerald Arthur Lewis and Peter "Brax" Nuttall

On the Dark Sun List, Brax (Peter Nuttall) wrote about strategies of species populations, and "r" and "k" strategies of competition. The strategies have also been called "opportunistic" vs. "equilibrium" strategies. Many modern ecologists differentiate all four, but let's lump them together and I'll give you my recollection on the different strategies. This will sound different from what some of you may have learned in school, so you may want to refer to a textbook for different views on the topic of competitive strategy.

Opportunistic species adapt to a strategy of quickly growing and increasing their numbers during short favorable seasons, relying on special adaptations to survive the hostile unfavorable times that they have to deal with most of the time. Because of this strategy, a key ability is being able to disperse rapidly, so that remote habitats can be accessed as soon as available. For example, dandelions send out tons of tiny airborne seeds, and each seed has a very poor chance of survival. However, fitness is high, because if any surviving seed lands on a patch of exposed soil, it is in a highly favorable place with no competition and the ability to quickly set root and begin to grow. Rapid reproduction, high fecundity, excellent dispersal, short life, and the ability to endure long hard times are other characteristics of the Opportunistic species.

On the other side are the Equilibrium species, which are the strong competitors that force the other species to be opportunistic! These equilibrium species compete strongly both with their own kind and with others, and can live in crowded habitats, milking available resources for all they are worth. Dispersal is less important than persistence, and recovery from adversity is less important than perseverance. The investment of calories in defenses and endurance means the equilibrium species don't have enough calories left over to have many offspring often. Breeding is lower and less frequent. An example is an oak, that will grow slowly but surely, steadily out-competing other faster growers (like grasses, bushes, and even pine trees), and being well protected against disturbances that might wipe out other competitors (like strong winds that upset a pine). When they get a chance (like an oak that has been in a pine forest but disturbance creates a clearing) they establish themselves and claim the resources (in this case sunlight). The idea of equilibrium is exemplified by forests, which may start as pine, move to become mixed pine and other maple/oak, and then in the end have very few pine trees at all. This is the "equilibrium" point. Of course, the equilibrium is constantly upset by disturbance (which affects equilibrium species as well as opportunistic) and other factors.

Any time you have a change to the system you have a disturbance. Small disturbances occur continuously. For example, an oak will grow slowly but surely over time, but if a hurricane blows down a nearby pine tree, the oak will quickly grow to fill that new solar space created by the disturbance. It grows quickly because it is capable of utilizing the extra sunlight and nutrients that the pine is no longer using. It is capable, like most species, and particularly opportunistic species, of turning disturbance into an advantage.

On a grand scale, the ice ages were a huge disturbance to ancient ecosystems on Earth. In similar fashion, the meteor that killed the dinosaurs caused a huge disturbance resulting in the dying out of the dinosaurs and the ending of the supremacy that lizards and amphibians had on this planet. Mammals have taken advantage of this disturbance, and have adapted to play top roles in the animal kingdom. Insects and plants, of course, have been strong for a long time and continue to rule in numbers. Later we will discuss how on Athas, the evaporation of the seas and the defiling/rampaging created new environments (like the silt seas) that would have killed off every creature that couldn't make the transition. This disturbance, of course, enabled other species to survive and develop. Disturbance plays an important role, just as opportunistic and equilibrium strategies both compete against and work with each other.

Think of the interconnection between opportunistic and equilibrium species this way: the opportunistic live in the shadow of the equilibrium species. They can't step up and say "hey, I'm going to out-compete you." At the same time, the equilibrium species are leaving behind some resources (such as a lot of the water that falls on bare soil during a chance rain… it doesn't make sense for an equilibrium plant to risk trying to get every drop of rain). The opportunistic species live off of these "crumbs" that are left. Now, symbiosis does happen, and this can be seen in that bees don't rob flowers of pollen. Rather, plants attract certain types of bees to do their job of seed dispersal/pollination. Different flowers (colors, shapes, smells) will attract different insects. Different insects have different habits (some stick around, some fly long distances, some visit lots of flowers, some only a few). Plants have "learned" (produced more offspring than needed, each with different characteristics, some of which pose a competitive advantage, and which are hereditary), through natural selection, to make the types of flowers that will attract the type of insect that will spread their sperm/pollen to the right number of their kind in the right distance.

Other symbiotic relationships include birds that spend a lot of time picking lice off of cattle, or fish that live on sharks, eating food scraps or parasites off of them. The equilibrium species put up with this because they derive a benefit. We, of course, put up with the millions of microscopic crawling things that live on our bodies, and may have benefits that they pass on to us (like ridding us of skin sells and other body waste, opening up pores).

These are the kinds of relationships that seem so amazing and valuable to us environmentalists. The environment seems so much like an interlocking puzzle, and is also very fragile. It takes a lot of time and "Darwin energy" to evolve those relationships. When we come along and fill in the swamp that provides the silt to the rivers so that equilibrium reeds can grow and trap even more soil and form an island, then the opportunistic shrubs can't grow where it is dry enough, and the many creatures that depend on such islands of reeds and dry bushes die out, and so on and so on...

Desert Ecology

By Teos Abadia, using the *Ecology 2* textbook by Paul Colinvaux, and with the comments of Peter "Brax" Nuttall, Felix, and Darknight

One of the interesting things about deserts it that while the daytime temperatures are very high, the nights are freezing cold. The alternation of hot days with cold nights is due to the absence of clouds to impede irradiance from the sun by day or to stop the warm ground from radiating heat out to the cold black body of space at night.

When looking at a globe, it can be quickly noticed that most deserts exist at 30 degrees latitude. The reason for this has to do with the properties of water and air and the way air currents are circulating at this latitude. Descending air should always absorb moisture rather than drop it. Air at 30 degrees latitude, both north and south, is sinking. Land here should be without rain. Major deserts like the Gobi, Sahara, and American Southwest are in this belt. Arizona is also in this case, and is also in the rain shadow of the Sierras (winds carrying moisture reach mountains, forcing the air to rise, as the air rises, it drops moisture, then it crests the mountain top now being dry, and now drops down the other side of the mountain, absorbing moisture).

Deserts can also occur if you have inversions (warm air floating over cold air, a relationship that is physically stable). The Galapagos are desert because of an inversion, as are the Chilean deserts. In fact, much of the world's landmasses lies near the 30 degree parallel, but the coriolis effect (curving force due to Earth being a rotating sphere) shifts moisture onto many of those areas, providing enough water that deserts do not form.

Precipitation in the southern part of Africa is greatly influenced by ocean currents offshore. The Namib desert owes its very existence to the upwelling of cold, subsurface ocean waters which produce a high air pressure region that blocks moist winds from entering the African continent.

Part of the problem with Athas (and this will be addressed in other chapters as well) is that the game designers seem to have painted the picture of deserts being devoid of life.

In truth, the ultimate desert with no water and almost no plants, being merely bare rock or sandy sea of shifting dunes, is rare. Most deserts are simply land too dry to

support prairie or savanna, but with enough moisture to allow a good number of specially adapted plants to live.

Broad regions of the Earth have high diversity but to the human mind seem to be inhabitable. Arid lands that are not complete deserts are supplied with rain only intermittently or are otherwise strongly seasonal, and these periods of moisture allow for many diverse species to exist. Part of the high species diversity is due to restraint of competition. (There is little living there all the time, so as soon as the right opportunity exists, opportunistic species can quickly invade. Invasion often requires specialized creatures, and allows for high species diversity). Space is not always preempted by resident plants so that invasion by seedlings following rain is always possible. The desert after a rain can bloom with a diversity of flowers seen at no other time.

But these marginal habitats have in addition a biota of long-lived equilibrium species. Desert bushes and small trees live spaced out, probably reflecting the competition for water and suggesting stable population equilibrium. This arrangement leaves an open canopy and bare ground that can be invaded by weeds able to complete their life cycles in the short weeks of a chance favorable season. Marginal desert communities, therefore, add a resident and unique flora of equilibrium plants to their large number of opportunistic species. They win high diversity in both ways.

Plant life has a tough time in deserts, because water is both rare and comes along on an infrequent basis. Many dry months may be followed by a short intense rain, and then the dry period resumes. These factors have resulted in opportunistic and equilibrium adaptations that are worth examining more closely.

In deserts (again, deserts are not just endless sand dunes) the opportunistic strategy is that of the desert weed that scatters seeds that lie dormant until it rains. Then the seeds spring to life, grow rapidly in the following sunshine, and flower and seed almost immediately after that. The dry weather then claims most of the parents (along with herbivore predation) but the cycle can go on with the next rain. Common characteristics for these desert species are to live only as tiny roots in the soil, to spend most of the time as seeds, to protect any few leaves with tough coatings, or to have thorns. The unfavorable conditions tend to vastly outnumber favorable ones, so growth and seed dispersal is rapid and proliferate.

The equilibrium desert strategy is that of the desert shrubs, which will be evenly spaced as if grown in a plantation (actually this is a sign of crowding, and given the few resources, they are spaced out equidistantly). Keep in mind that plants don't really do anything. Death does it, and is the driver for natural selection. Plants release seeds, and those seeds that try to grow too close to one another will die out from mutual competition for too few resources (in this case water). Only the ones spaced out every so often will survive. Those survivors might develop an efficient mechanism whereby they spread seeds at the right distance. Again, they don't actively develop anything. Rather, if a plant should scatter its seeds at the right distance, it will live on,

and its offspring, if they should do the same, will also live on and out-compete other members of their species, resulting in plants that tend to disperse at the right distance. Pretty cool, eh? Amazing to look at our bodies and wonder what different environmental/competitive factors shaped our fingers, toes, eyes, arms, legs, skin, heart, kidney, etc. etc.!

More examples exist. Equilibrium trees in the Galapagos desert have the adaptation of putting out leaves only when rain comes, but dropping them during dry seasons. The trees are very hardy, withstanding the lack of water and the attempts by herbivores or disease to wipe them out.

Even in a desert, the equilibrium species never win over the opportunistic ones or vice versa. It may seem that equilibrium species would dominate due to their head start, but there is only so much water most of the time, and equilibrium strategies can't occupy every ounce of space. Equilibrium species end up spaced out in deserts, and the spaces have plenty of soil, sun, and no competition. The second it rains, this becomes prime territory, and only an opportunistic species can move fast enough to take root in that space and reproduce before the moisture disappears and the opportunist dies or must go dormant.

Typical perennial plants have swollen stems rather than leaves, with heavy cuticles, sunken stomata, and spiny defenses against herbivores. These adaptations are for heat stress, water stress, competition for water, and avoiding herbivores and the cost of repairing herbivore damage.

Where water is more plentiful, perennial bushes form more or less regular arrays with bare ground in between (like saltbrush and sagebrush in Western movies). Numerous annuals grow briefly following rain, and some perennial bushes may be opportunistically deciduous.

Desert plant shapes are made to exchange heat, just like the way a car amplifier or microprocessor has grills to radiate excess heat. Cacti grow like upturned umbrellas, with the thin growths spreading outward. Trees often also mimic this shape, with branches rising in big half-moon shapes pointing at the sky. The ears of an elephant and rabbit are in part made to radiate extra heat. Flat leaves will absorb too much heat, so such shapes do not abound in deserts. Cacti are cylindrical reducing the surface to volume ratio. The half-moon shape of branch growth allows for the least exposure to the noon sun and the most exposure to the oblique rays of morning and noon sun, thus avoiding over-heating. Photosynthesis is modified, and can take place behind closed stomates without loosing moisture.

The common developments are reduced leaves, reduced horizontal shapes, green photosynthetic stems, and closed stomates so excess heat is given off without having to give off water.

I feel most comfortable providing examples of plant strategies, but opportunistic strategies abound for creatures. Low productivity of plants, temperature extremes, and shortage of water narrowly restrict the lifestyles of animals. The low-energy systems of reptiles are well suited to this regime, and hot deserts have a wide variety of these. Amphibians are almost absent due to the lack of water. Nonetheless, some frogs happen to wait for years under the soil cracked by the sun until it rains, they mate in a night, in a very short time the young frogs are adult (matter of days) and they return under the mud before it becomes rock-hard as before. Mammals are restricted to varieties that produce concentrated urine (loosing little water when urinating) or take refuge from the sun in burrows, or those with a special tolerance to desiccation and with heavy fur insulation like camels. Insect life stories seem to be strongly seasonal, with diapausing eggs or adults able to survive the dry times. Plague grasshoppers or locusts are almost characteristic of deserts, like in Australia.

Camels, one of the well-known large animals living in deserts, have a remarkable set of adaptations allowing them to exist in the desert. To begin with, camels have a convoluted nose, which creates a countercurrent of air when the animal takes a breath. This countercurrent travels cools exhaled air, reducing moisture loss. The top of the camel has fur, to insulate the body, while the underside is bare, permitting radiant and convective cooling. The kidney produces concentrated urine. The hump of a camel is fatty, storing energy. In addition, camels can tolerate elevated body temperatures, and dehydrate their blood significantly without ill effects, and can drink rapidly to repair their body's water deficit (camels do not, as the myth goes, store water in their body).

Desert rodents typically share the heat exchange feature of cooling the exhaled air to keep moisture within. This is done through convoluted nasal passages so the passage of incoming air cools the outgoing air. Many sleep in burrows during the day, coming out at night.

Most insects are very high in protein. Larger creatures, including humans, may supplement their carnivorous diets with protein from insects, or even feed exclusively off of them (like anteaters). It is said that a pound of beef is less nutritive than a pound of fly "meat". Termites, ants, flies, locusts, crickets and caterpillars would be common food sources for carnivores and omnivores, including sentient species.

Insects typically cope well with heat, and may live in areas protected from the heat of the sun and the cold of the night. Termites build large nests with packed sand, which are full of channels. These channels function as an air conditioner during the day, so temperatures inside a termite nest are always cool, even if it is hot outside. Also, many insects live below the ground where there's more cool and humidity and which also acts as insulation from the cold of the night.

Chapter 3

Applying Ecology To Athas

So What Does This All Mean?

Powerful grace that lies
In herbs, plants, stones, and their qualities:
For naught so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special food doth give.
William Shakespeare

By Teos Abadia

What this all means is for us to decide. Armed with the basics, we can decide what Athas is missing. This net project began as a few questions asked on the Dark Sun List. I then posted most of Chapter 2 as one huge post, which I have revised to incorporate the contributions, comments, corrections, and questions of others. In this chapter we discuss how Real World desert ecology principles can be applied to Athas. We will begin by discussing Athasian history and how various disturbances have shaped ecology over time. Next we will cover how magic and psionics can be part of the evolutionary process, followed by a discussion of ways in which the existence of huge ecologically-taxing creatures like Drakes and Dune Reapers can be explained. We will end with a few ideas on the types of normal creatures and plants that can live amongst the more fantastic

Athasian History and its Effects on Ecology

By Teos Abadia, with help from Peter "Brax" Nuttall and Jacob Ruttle

Athasian ecology is significantly shaped by the huge disturbances that have taken place throughout its history. The first was caused by the halflings with their use of the Pristine Tower to burn up the brown algae growths destroying the oceans. The use of the Tower resulted in the loss of all the oceans, the sudden appearance of at least one major continental landmass, and the opening up of millions of new ecological niches. Aquatic creatures would have been incredibly plentiful during the blue age, comprising the greatest percentage of life forms. Once the tower was used and the oceans started drying up, aquatic creatures would have almost entirely died out in a very short span of

time, with only a very, very few surviving and adapting to the new dry environment. Most reptiles and other creatures requiring a lot of water should have had some chance of adapting, but one could expect massive extinction here as well.

The massive extinction of creatures over such a short time period may have resulted in the eventual loss of all life on the planet, if not for the Pristine Tower. The Pristine Tower at this time started mutating anything that was born or bleeding in the vicinity of the Tower. According to the Timeline of Athas (Found on the www.tsrinc.com Website), the mutations began happening in 8th World's Age (-14,014). This means that around 14,000 years have passed since this disturbance, with mutations introduced continually, some of which would have become viable species. Indeed, the rules present most humanoid races and other creatures as being mutations. In fact, if the mutations were drastic enough, perhaps aquatic creatures did turn into some of today's creatures. For example, silt horrors could be mutated jellyfish, and DMs may wish to add some aquatic traits to some of today's creatures (such as Peter Nuttall's idea of Dune Reapers that bark like seals).

A second set of disturbances is brought upon the lands when the Cleansing Wars take place, and when Borys rampages. These two events are said to be the reason why most of Athas is so lifeless. The defiling magic of these two events turned the soil into lifeless ash, turned water to silt, and killed many creatures. Mutations from the tower continue during this time, and it is also likely that each use of the Pristine Tower changed climate as well (directly if not indirectly).

So, it seems that the only reason why Athas isn't devoid of life is because of the mutations of the Pristine Tower. There simply wouldn't be much that could survive a transition from a water world to a desert in 14,000 years, along with world-wide warfare and the existence of huge predators. Mutations seem to be the only answer.

However, there is a fairly new theory on the mechanics of evolution that states that species go through periods of rapid change followed by long stretches of time with almost no genetic shift. Most species are kept at an equilibrium by competition with each other; then something happens that relieves the competition by destroying a large number of organisms (such as a meteor). With little competition and a strong environmental stressor, the remaining species can go through a rapid evolutionary change (6 or 7 generations).

To illustrate this: there was an experiment written up in the NY Times Science section where scientists relieved the competitive evolution between male and female Drosophila flies by preventing the females from evolving. How? 1) They created a large stock of F1 generation females. 2) They took some of these, mated them to F1 generation males. 3) F2 generation males were mated with another group of F1 females. 4) F3 generation males were mated with F1 females, and so on. In the experiment, the females never had the chance to evolve. By the six or seventh generation the males had evolved some really wild stuff: huge mandibles to hold the females against their will, sticky semen that would block the female's reproductive

opening (preventing further mating with different males), sperm that would hunt and kill sperm belonging to a different male, and a few other things I can't recall. The point is that the only evolutionary pressure here was to develop better sexual strategies to increase the chances of successfully passing along an individual's genetic code, and within 6 generations some massive changes had been made. These types of changes would not occur so drastically in most species, but could take place in some of the Athasian aquatic species, allowing rapid evolution. While most of the mutations on Athas would have come from the Pristine Tower, it is important to note that life can be pretty amazing on its own.

The life-shaped creatures used by the Rhulisti and Rhul-Thaun raise questions about how life-shaping could have affected the environment. The process of life-shaping creatures is similar to the bioengineering done today. You may be aware that most of our crops (corn, grains, etc.) used to be many different species found in nature, but have since been bioengineered and carefully selected to be just the few species that will produce the most food in the shortest time in the most climates. The problem with bioengineering is that there are then only a few species, and a vulnerability to a disease could mean the death of every species. For example, only a couple of decades ago there was a disease that affected corn plants. At one time there were many types of corn, but over time corn was bioengineered to just three or four varieties. The disease very nearly wiped out all of the corn used in the world!

Also, we have introduced foreign species into ecosystems that aren't ready to handle these. Examples are the vine-weed-plant Kudzu that grows over everything in its path, snakes that have eaten almost every single bird in some islands that never had snakes before, and beetles that have ravaged southern US pine forests. Life-shaped items, if they could breed, could do something like this. Pristine Tower mutations could also destabilize the environment in this way, appearing all of a sudden in an ecosystem that can not compete with the new species.

Keep in mind, the process of natural speciation and competition on Earth is in most cases a slow one. The introduction of variations/mutations is usually an introduction of a very minor mutation (such as some critters with darker wings or a slightly larger appendage) and not something drastic like a six-headed Kank with psionic powers! On Athas, there is no telling what could happen when any creature or plant bleeds or grows near the tower, and just about anything could end up being viable. It is worth noting that menstruation, which in mammals and other creatures involves bleeding, would also be likely to result in the mutation of any menstruating female that neared the Tower!

Viability is a key concept. You probably know that inbreeding results in problems. There is a certain breeding population required for each species. If the number dips below this, then reproduction either results in harmful side effects (like a concentration of genetically-passed-on negative traits - thin blood with the British royal families) or generates too few different individuals to compete with changing

environments (for example: a really brutal summer comes along, and only the members with the thinnest fur skin would survive. If only 200 of 2000 members have thin fur, and usually 500 die each summer from predation, then the species wont survive the summer.). Also, a small number of species members might be too small to reproduce fast enough to outlive predator/competition seasons (If you have three really powerful mutations come out of the tower, but two are eaten by an earth drake near the Tower, then that's the end of the species (unless the last remaining member can self-reproduce).

As an aside, DMs and players may want to use some of the ideas posed in this chapter in their campaigns. Environmental science and ethics should play heavily in the Athasian campaign. Just like on our planet, Athasian environmental policy and science is complex, and should not be viewed as a two-sided battle ("environmentalists" vs. "destroyers of the environment"). Druids and Clerics are complex individuals that strive both for environmental restoration and for the superiority of their element. Some Druids, Elemental Clerics, and Preservers may hold most life dear, but oppose life shaping and new mutations, seeing them as unnatural. Templars, Sorcerer Monarchs, and some Defilers may favor these creatures, while having to protect the species and individuals that they depend on (SMs defile, but must carefully monitor the health of their city's crops). DMs may want to create adventures around new mutations from the tower that pose a threat to existing species, or pit organizations that have different environmental ethics against each other, or use ethical situations as challenges that characters must overcome. The authors of this tome hope that you will use this chapter to flesh out aspects of both the ecology itself and of the PCs and NPCs that live in the ecology.

Magic and Psionics as Ecological Functions

By Teos Abadia, Gerald Arthur Lewis, Peter "Brax" Nuttall, Darknight, and Felix

In our discussion of ecology, we have so far ignored magic and psionics, both of which would have effects on the evolution of Athasian species. This section details how psionics and magic can be explained through ecology, and how Athasian creatures would develop magic and psionics through evolution. This section is composed from posts made on the Dark Sun mailing list, rewritten to flow together.

One of the keys to understanding Magic and Psionics as evolutionary traits is to recognize their similarity with real ecological developments. The real-life "powers" that creatures on Earth possess can be analogous to Psionics - in the sense of an extraordinary ability that promotes survival. In fact, many of the psionic powers (such as *Chameleon*) seem to be derived from the powers of Earth creatures. Animals have the ability to impersonate/mimic sounds, or to blend in with their background (chameleon lizard), or to spring forth lethal talons (claws of a cat) or to secrete acids and poisons (frogs), or to glide (flying squirrel).

Turtles are born in mass numbers at sea and for a long time biologists had no idea how they could return to their beach of birth. This power resembles the clairsentient psionic powers of *Know Direction, Know Location,* or *Radial Navigation.* There are carnivorous plants that have extraordinary abilities in terms of developing chemicals that digest insects so they can "eat them." There is a plant that produces the smell of rotting flesh so that flies will come and fall in its pitcher of sap (and again, they are digested). These powers resemble illusion spells, Telepathic powers of *Attraction*, and Psychometabolic powers of *Chemical Simulation.*

Some of the characteristics of Earth creatures are pretty amazing, even though we take them for granted. Insects have telekinetic-like abilities (bees dance to communicate near-infallibly to their hive where food is found). The powers of insect queens to control other members of their species resemble Telpathic and magical powers of mind control and charm.

DMs can take a pretty ordinary creature, but by explaining how it fits into nature, make it really interesting and challenging. A zebra's stripes work so that when a whole heard of Zebras is running away from a lion or other predator, the stripes blend together and the hunter can't discern individual creatures apart. What a cool defense to have on Athas! Imagine your party coming upon some striped herbivores, only to find that when they try and hunt them, the stripes reduce their AC to really low levels. Or, to fit Athas even more, that the stripes are combined with a psionic confusion-type attack. This would be so much more interesting than just a psionic defense like displacement, let alone the standard "this creature has a low AC due to its thick hide".

The sidewinder is another example of a normal creature whose "powers" are pretty amazing and which could be used as a model for Athasian creatures. The sidewinder snake moves the way it does (sideways, bringing different areas of its body to the ground as it moves) to limit the amount of skin that is in contact with the hot sand, which would otherwise dehydrate it too much (snakes in less arid environments move with their entire body flat against the ground).

Athasian creatures would develop similarly clever defenses against the burning temperatures of the Athasian soil and sand. Some creatures might use a type of psionic levitation, or burrowing with psionic means, or constant dimension dooring or teleporting. Maybe some animals have developed a psychokinetic devotion to cool the surrounding area by creating a cloud above them and shading themselves somewhat. Or, a psychokinetic devotion might be used to force the hot sand to radiate all of its heat and cool off right before the creature moves onto it. Some creatures could use this power as they move, others just when they need to rest or only during the hottest period of the day. Other creatures might use psionics or magical energy to absorb the heat that would burn their outsides, and store it in their insides. This energy could be released against predators, or perhaps used as a fuel source. Still other creatures could take the reverse approach, keeping their insides cool while having incredibly hot skin to discourage predators.

It is worth noting that we are used to player character races having random wild talents, but this need not be the case for other creatures. Human and other sentient species face many different environments, and no single psionic wild talent offers a clear advantage in all environments. For more specialized creatures, a single wild talent (or perhaps one of a few) offering an advantage in the environment the creature is specialized to inhabit might make more sense.

Since psionics are a common trait for Athasian creatures, it could be expected that many animals have developed them so as to improve their chances of survival, not only as a means of attack. The example of the sidewinder is great and could really give a personal touch to the snakes or lizards of Athas. However, DMs should keep ecology in mind, and probably apply this type of power/characteristic to the reptiles outside the forest ridge, and maybe even only to reptiles (mammals already have body heat control). An Athasian snake that uses psionics to cool its surroundings might even have to switch off the power while hunting, to prevent the prey from noticing the change in temperature before the snake attacked! DMs should remember that while players appreciate the awesome powers of hostile creatures, they can be just as intrigued by their weaknesses.

The existence of magic and psionics may go a long way towards explaining how the Athasian ecology could exist with so many predators. Peter Nuttall had a terrific idea on two non-standard psionic ways that monsters might get by with little food. The first, psionic hibernation, is dealt with in the next section of this chapter. The second is that psionic photosynthesis could be used to replace or supplant the need for tradition energy sources (energy in plants or animals). The Pristine Tower and the presence of Psionics on Athas could result in creatures that feed by converting sunlight directly to useful biological energy (carbohydrates, proteins, calories).

The idea of psionic photosynthesis makes a lot of sense, while being "fantastic". Dark Sun herbivores might either supplement or completely bypass the need for plants by having psionic photosynthesis that they can tap into. Even in areas of Athas where vegetation is common, such as scrub plains, there isn't a whole lot of food that is easy to eat (plants have tough leaves or spines and other defenses that discourage predation). Herbivores could exist in great numbers on Athas if they could tap into just a small amount of the solar power radiating from the huge crimson sun. DMs might create all sorts of interesting animals that have solar collectors, perhaps as large umbrella-like devices they open to absorb the sun, or as green collector patches they have on their backs, or on large ears or skin flaps.

Another possibility is that while some animals and plants could feed using psionics, others might feed off of psionic power itself. To add realism to the campaign, DMs may want to first think about what they feel is the nature of psionic energy. Is psionics energy, or is it willpower alone? That is, do creatures channel or create an energy source when they think or use psionics, or do they just make things happen without any "energy"?

If there is an energy source, then it could be logical for evolution to favor creatures that could tap into that energy source. For example, if there is an energy from psionics and PSPs, then specialized creatures could eat the brains of prey and extract PSPs. Other small creatures could attach as leeches and live off of PSP drains, perhaps providing the host with a benefit in return.

Gerald poses the following example on an what two travelers might find in the wastes:

Two travelers come across a body laying in the sand.

Traveler1: "Why do his eyes look like that?"

Traveler2: (Stoops over and overturns the body. A large hole is revealed in the back of the man's skull, green worms spill out.) "Ah! Look's like some Brain Worms got to this guy. They LOVE Psionicists. Wait, didn't you say you were a Practitioner of the Way?" (Looks back at Traveller1. Repeats his question and then notices a glazed look to the man's eyes...)

Psionic parasites themselves may have powers they use when not feeding. Maybe they can teleport to the nearest PSP source. If the target psionicist survives the initial attack, he may be able to use the dead (or alive) parasites as a source, eating ten of them to get 1d4 PSPs and an additional temporary devotion. Eating too many might turn the psionicists brain to mush, requiring psychic surgery to heal.

Other possibilities abound. Creatures could store PSPs, and consume them (self-cannibalize) when energy is needed. For these creatures, using a psionic power would be a last resort, as the powers would use up a possible food source. Creatures travelling in packs might cannibalize off of other pack members, either in a friendly manner, or by praying on the weakest members so that the rest of the pack can survive. Whole energy cycles could exist, with some plants storing just enough PSPs to attract pollinators, and these pollinators would come for the PSPs, instead of for nectar. Maybe there are psionic forms of digestion that maximize energy assimilation (and result in a very dry feces with no lost energy - or even no actual eating, just energy sucked out of a body, leaving a dry withered carcass to scare PCs).

Some campaigns could limit the accessibility of this food source by declaring that PSPs themselves can not be ingested without aid, and that creatures must have a special psionic Science or Devotion in order to turn PSPs into actual food. This Science or Devotion might not be available to humanoids, only to certain creatures. This all assumes that the DM holds psionics to come from an energy source that can be tapped by creatures.

Now, if DMs choose to <u>not</u> make PSPs an energy source in their campaign, they could still have creatures that use PSPs to convert other sources to energy. For example, a lizard might have a power that allows it to use PSPs to absorb the heat energy on rocks through its skin as useful energy. Other creatures could have powers

that allow them to absorb moisture (or blood and other fluids) from creatures, even from a distance. Some insects could be ticks and stinging flies that use psionics to enhance the powers such creatures have on Earth. An Athasian tick might be able to absorb twice as much blood as a normal Earth tick due to a psionic enhancement that allows it to expand its body cavity without alerting the host to its presence. These creatures might use powers only on freshly killed prey, or perhaps even on living prey, to absorb other types of energy (decomposition, metabolic energy, kinetic energy, etc.).

Some members of the Dark Sun List feel that psionics is both energy and willpower. Psionic energy would be a powerful energy stored in every beings body. Willpower is used to shape that energy to a desired effect. Gerald Arthur Lewis' campaign is an example of the campaign styles DMs can develop around the nature of psionic energy. In Gerald's campaign, psionics played an important evolutionary role. At one time the brain stored energy it wasn't using for other means (fighting, running, etc.). This energy acted as a reserve for when the body required extra fuel (determination, resolve, quick thinking). Over time, most creatures did not use this source because it was hard to master, and most creatures could compete better without it. Other creatures did develop the ability to use this energy reserve as psionics. This energy is necessary for bodily functions and such, and in Gerald's campaign, any psionicist that has their PSPs drop below 10% of their total become severely fatigued. When they reach "0" PSPs they become unconscious.

The nature of magic on Athas may result in another food source. Magic users on Athas power their spells with energy from plants. They utilize some (preservers) or all (defilers) of the energy that plants have to fuel their spells. This is energy that can no longer be used by herbivores (other primary consumers) that would normally eat the plants. Some organisms could be "magic scavengers". These creatures would feed off of the residual life energy left over from spells (assuming that the process of spell casting results in some "lost" energy that doesn't make it into the spell, or that after the spell is cast, some energy remains in the area). This idea obviously would have to be considered carefully by DMs, so as to not result in an unbalanced or illogical ecology. Animals capable of siphoning off magic would be rare (as magic is rare on Athas) and might be otherwise very weak.

Perhaps even the Gray/Black can be used for energy, much like the various types of spell energy. Some herbivores might feed off of the dead, just as other plants feed off of nutrients in soils that may have at one time been part of another plant. The use of the Gray and the Black as energy sources could be a lot of fun. DMs could create creatures that followed the party like vultures, waiting to feed off of their dead, or even off of their wounded (perhaps absorbing pain through psychic energy). DMs may want to take a look at the Defilers and Preservers supplement for ideas on how creatures may feed off of these energy sources much as different Wizards tap different energy sources to power spells.

The key to developing these powers is to make creatures seem logical, interesting, and vivid to the imaginations of the players. An ecology is composed of interconnecting species, like the food chain we learned about in school. The best creatures in a campaign world aren't always the ones that are tough to kill; players can have great gaming sessions when they learn the interesting characteristics of the creatures around them. For example, when a party that is running out of food decides to hunt, the DM can go a step further than saying "you find food for dinner." The DM can describe an interesting creature that, even if easy to kill, makes the situation a memorable one for the PCs. These types of activities can help a campaign revolve around role-playing and de-emphasize hack-and-slash. These types of scenarios can also help players develop their characters. A trader PC, for example, might start studying flora or fauna and even trapping weird creatures to sell in different markets. The party's Druid might have a very different interaction, striving to learn about these creatures and perhaps freeing them when he finds them in captivity, or raising them on her guarded lands when she establishes her chosen land. Campaigns that offer many ecological hooks will find players responding positively to these hooks and role-playing around the ecological scenarios. None of these scenarios have to offer great wealth or power to the players. They should probably offer experience gains, however, to reflect actual knowledge gained.

This chapter could be more extensive, but is kept short to allow different DMs to develop different notions of how magic and psionics would play evolutionary roles in their powers. Keep in mind that not every power has to provide players with a clear indication of how the creature evolved. Scientists on Earth continue to be baffled by many aspects of nature and evolution. The central theme we have tried to stress is that psionic and magical powers are best when they would have logically developed through evolution for the creature to ensure its survival. The task of picking ecologically-fitting powers for creatures is a tough one for DMs, but results in clear campaign benefits. DMs will find more suggestions on psionic and magical powers in the next section and scattered throughout other chapters.

Making Behemoths Realistic

By Teos Abadia, Peter "Brax" Nuttall, and Gerald Arthur Lewis.

Athas is a world full of enormous, behemoth-type creatures. But how can these huge creatures survive in a world with so little plant-life and water? The following section proposes some ideas for making Athas' abundance of gigantic creatures feasible.

The Athasian monster books are missing something. Think of the Drakes and other huge creatures. They must have to eat a ton of food! What do these walking behemoths eat? The dilemma presented by the TSR monster supplements is that of explaining how the food chain supports such large creatures when there are so few small animals, so few insects, and most importantly, so few plants that are a part of the food web.

Several of the list members proposed clever modifications that could be made to bring the large predators into line with the ecology. One obvious assumption is that TSR simply did not bother to detail the smaller creatures and non-threatening plants, which is logical. DMs can populate their ecology with all manner of tiny rodents, mammals and insects, as well as a myriad of plants, all to feed the larger critters. The key is to make the plant and animal life interesting and logical, so it paints a picture of the ecology and of the cycles that drive life on Athas. Introducing medicinal herbs, having a nefarious NPC favor a specific type of fruit, or having a tough monster always favor a particular type of plant life are all good ways to make the smaller critters important to players.

Still, even with more of the small critters, the huge behemoths are simply too big to be supported by any type of desert ecology. Creatures like Drakes must ravage the landscape, consuming most living creatures in their passage. The existence of these monsters must be explained by even more clever means.

Peter Nutall came up with a great idea, by thinking about alternative sources of energy. As was mentioned before, two non-standard psionic ways that huge monsters might get by with little food are psionic photosynthesis (which cuts the food needs) and psionic hibernation (can't remember the official metabolic name . . .) which allows monsters to wait out those low-food seasons. Peter suggested that hibernation could take place in large groups, with one lookout in case enemies or prey come by .

The idea of psionic photosynthesis was discussed in the previous section. Still, the idea of non-psionic photosynthesis is a possibility as well, and will be discussed very briefly here. Large animals could use photosynthesis just like plants. This is an interesting idea, particularly for large predators. Most of us are familiar with the large whales that inhabit Earth, eating tiny plankton by swimming through schools of them, rather than by trying to eat tons of fish. This might be a useful strategy for the large species on Athas. Animals like nightmare beasts and megapedes could have large solar "collectors" on their backs, or perhaps flaps of protective skin that open like an umbrella (or like the cargo doors on the space shuttle) to allow the sun to shine on their photosynthetic collectors. The availability of this second source could mean that large predators are able to survive lean times, and may even be able to be territorial. (Right now, the large creatures would have to roam Athas constantly in search of food to feed their massive bodies. If they can use sunlight, they might be very territorial, eating everything that enters their territory and using photosynthesis the rest of the time.) Predators that are not territorial might also use photosynthesis, with this resulting in the animals often not needing to feed. Thus, a village could be lucky and be spared when the nightmare beast walking by has no need to eat the population! (Maybe sun clerics could develop spells to feed these big creatures, or temporarily fill them up, so they would become disinterested!)

Hibernation, Peter's second idea, seems like a very useful and realistic explanation. Veteran AD&D players will recall that the feared Terrasque which inhabits other

worlds stays dormant most of the time, only to emerge periodically for voracious feeding before returning to its long slumber. This model can be used for Athasian ecology. The various giant monsters presented in the Dark Sun supplements could each hibernate at different time periods, and thus Athas would only have one or two large predator species active at any one time! This idea makes sense, and goes a long way to explain how the ecology is not simply wiped out by the giant predators.

In fact, DMs could tie the appearance/waking of different predators to Athasian culture. The Athasian calendar could mark the waking and sleeping of the various predators, and a new month could bring an early or late slumber for a species. Cultures on Athas would be shaped by the predators in their surroundings, and by the months in which these predators were active! Trade would be affected as well, and this effect would be felt in the trade between other cities, as key goods might be unavailable from some cities during the worse months of predator activity.

As always, each DM can decide if the idea of hibernation fits their campaign, and the extent to which it should influence culture. Hibernation cycles could be very long, even stretching over multiple years, if the DM wishes to limit the appearance of some large predators. Another idea is that hibernation periods could be based on age instead of seasons. So, a Drake is born, and hibernates on years 3-4, 7-9, and 10-11. you could figure out the math so that most of the time only a few of these creatures is present. Either method would work, and would allow for all of the different species to be awake at the same time, just not certain ages of each species.

In the real world, mating is often a risky time for animals, and this could be particularly true of the large Athasian predators. If you ever feel like reading about the wonders of mating from an ecological perspective, check out the Ecology 2 textbook by Paul Colinvaux. Very funny and informative (he makes the point that when you figure the energy cost of mating and the risks to the mother, the big question of how two sexes can continue to be preserved by natural selection is “who needs males”). If mating is both risky and costly (in terms of energy spent), then mating season could serve as a culling period that further reduces the number of each large species. (The main source of death for large predators might be their own kind). Furthermore, these large species might give birth to only one offspring, and the birth might often result in the death of the female. The parents might not travel with the young one, increasing the chances that young will not survive (or that PCs will face young that won’t kill the party off easily).

So, if mating is risky and costly, and perhaps only one offspring is produced, and if fertility is low, and if they all hibernate and fight each other, and a few of these supplant their feeding with photosynthesis, then we have only a few behemoths on Athas at any given time, and the ecology is that much closer to being realistic.

Rounding out Athasian Ecology

By Teos Abadia, with help from Gerald Arthur Lewis, Eric "The Sage" Weilnau, Peter "Brax" Nuttall, Felix, Darknight, Tom Slattery, Adam White, and Leslie Ann White.

This section collects various ideas by the list that serve to make the details of Athasian ecology more realistic.

Ideas on the Ability of Athasian Terrain Types to Support More Life

Felix asked an important question about the ability of deserts to support life overall: "Can the Athasian desert support as many animals as are presented in the two MCs? What can be done to fix any discrepancies?" Various list members (including Felix) came up with explanations and solutions to the question. The explanations tended to center around two ideas. One, that deserts on Earth tend not to be as lifeless as we usually think they are, and two, that the Athasian desert would have many small animals and plants that are not detailed in the MC compendiums.

When people hear the word desert, they usually think of great expanses of sand dunes, with the occasional oasis appearing now and then. Perception is not correct, however, as most deserts on Earth aren't like that. Only *some* areas of *some* deserts, like the Sahara, have miles and miles of sand (But Athas is a special world so these areas are more common). What is more frequent on Earth is that deserts are rocky or sometimes mountainous, and very arid. Because these deserts are more than sand dunes, they can hold a surprisingly large quantity of small and medium sized life-forms. Deserts tend to have mostly small mammals and reptiles, but do include the larger creatures like deer, rabbits, coyotes, and desert foxes in the Americas, or the familiar camel in Middle Eastern deserts. Even deserts with sand dunes can hold a lot more life than one might expect, but such life tends to be small and nocturnal.

As we discussed previously, the MC supplements overlooked the small animals and the plants that would exist on Athas. The monsters listed as common (Dune Reaper, for instance) would have to feed on smaller creatures that would need to be prevalent in even larger numbers on Athas. This all reflects the underlying concept of a simple food web/pyramid; a huge amount of plants support a large amount of herbivores, which support a small amount of predators, which support an even smaller number of top predators. Part of fleshing out an Athasian ecology, then, must include a DM's effort's to populate the ecology with plants and small animals that the larger creatures can feed on.

Adam White pointed out that a quick check of the maps of Athas reveals that most of the Tyr region is sand dunes, but much of it (like the area East of Tyr) is stony barrens. These hard rocky deserts, along with the scrub plains, would have many niches for plants and animals to survive. These environs would resemble the deserts of California or Utah, with a relatively prevalent plant life. Of course, this is plant life that struggles to survive, but it would be common nonetheless. The environment should support many small critters and a significant number of larger beasts. (For the

truly gigantic creatures, see the previous section which addresses how to handle them). If you are unsure of what a desert of this type looks like, think of the chaparral deserts depicted in Western movies, with small cacti and a few shrubs dotting the dry landscape. Other deserts would look like the areas in Utah, with red rocky soil, few large plants, and flat plains broken up by rocky mountains. A quick search on the Web for "Utah" or a visit to the Desert USA Web site will provide you with pictures of these types of deserts.

Scrub plains are more like savanna where it meets the desert, with an acacia here and there and patches of graminaceous plants everywhere dried for a long period of the year. In the areas of scrub plains it rains every year and sometimes more than once in a year. For 2-3 months after rainfall, the plants are green again before drying up once more. Some readers may recall TV documentaries about African savanna and the alternate dry and rainy seasons. In the regions of scrub plains the situation is similar, but with longer dry seasons and scarcer precipitation.

On Athas, it can be expected that scrub plains and rocky badlands would have a high volume of opportunistic plant species that could bloom periodically producing seeds quickly. These seeds, being opportunistic, would face a high mortality by predation and this would feed the herbivores that are later eaten by the ferocious carnivores that PCs are always fighting. The lack of plants in the game is particularly alarming, considering the nearby forest ridge which contains a lot of plants. It can be expected that the plants in the forest ridge would produce many seeds and pollen, which would help to disperse plants throughout the region. The Pristine Tower would also further speciation and help plants adapt to the harsh Athasian environment through mutation.

DMs should introduce many plants to their Dark Sun ecology. See the previous chapters for descriptions of the types of plants that typically live in deserts. The types of plants should vary with the type of terrain. Many low bushes and plants develop equilibrium strategies to survive in arid areas, especially if high winds blow, as is seen in the few "wet" areas of the Tenere' desert which is located in Morocco and nearby areas (I think it's similar to the rocky badlands).

Plants aren't the only type of life lacking from the monster supplements. Other types of life are lacking., such as insects, which should be common in deserts. There would be a lot of lizards and snakes on Athas, as these creatures are small and fast to avoid being cooked by the sun and the burning sand. The lizards and snakes either hunt smaller members of their kind or insects. Some should have powerful poisoned bites and rely on this to capture larger prey. Lizards and snakes that feed on larger prey would then retire for a week or more in under ground to digest the animal whole. Many of these creatures (as is seen in the Sahara, Kalahari, and other deserts) have a nocturnal activity cycle.

Gerald did some research and learned that insects and other small creatures would need to consume many times their body weight in water every day if they were not

nocturnal. DMs should incorporate this into their campaigns, creating areas of terrain where the PCs see little activity by day, only to have the same place crawling with insects at night. In other areas, one predator and some prey may be visible during the day, while two different predators and different prey (along with insects and lizards) are visible at night. Many of the nocturnal creatures burrow under ground during the day to escape the hot sun. This could result in creatures that hunt during the day but dig up their prey, or in PCs who are unfortunate enough to venture into the lairs of nocturnal creatures when they are seeking a break from the noon sun.

Some animals act like the opportunistic desert plants that bloom only when it rains. These creatures (typically small insects, although some frogs and lizards do this as well) lie dormant under the sands, and emerge from the sands shortly after a rain to mate and then die. Predators are keenly aware of these cycles, and will gather to feed on this sudden food source. The waking insects deposit eggs immediately after mating, and the eggs or young then await the next rain event.

Many small animals get their water from plants in the early morning. The dew droplets that form on the leaves of plants from condensation is licked off by small insects and mammals, and can be a significant source of the required moisture needed to survive. For many insects and very small animals, this, along with moisture contained in food, is the sole source of water.

Evolution of Plants as a Response to the Effects of Defiling and Preserving

It is worth considering that in a world where evolution is rapid (due to the Tower and other aforementioned reasons), plants could have evolved some resistance to being used to fuel magic. These plants would not be common, as magic is not common in most areas, but would be present in some areas where magic was more prevalent. The plants might have simple adaptations, such as an ability to give up their branches readily to defiling magic, but to protect the integrity of their roots and soil from the otherwise lasting effects of defiling magic. Other plants might have more interesting defenses. Spellcasters might find themselves drawing energy from a plant that only yields its energy part of the time, otherwise causing a spell to fail. A few rare plants might yield their energy readily, but the spellcaster would feel great pain while drawing the energy. As with using creatures that feed off of magic, DMs will have to exercise caution with any plants that can resist the draining effect of magic. There has to be a disadvantage to plants having this ability (otherwise every plant would be magic-drain resistant!). These plants might exist only in sites where major battles occurred during the Cleansing Wars, near the Pristine Tower, or in buildings where they are carefully monitored and kept for by highly knowledgeable druids. DMs might require these plants to have a very slow rate of growth, be otherwise very vulnerable to predation, and require much more water than most plants, making them unfit for most areas of Athas.

Tiny Sand Creatures

Gerald liked one of my ideas about tiny creatures that would lie under the sand and then burst forth when they detected a creature walking above. The creatures could be simply carrion feeders, eating only a dead animal that falls on the sand, or they could be like piranhas; many tiny critters feeding with tiny razor sharp teeth on a large creature. Gerald thought of another creature, which could exist in the arenas of the Tyr region. This creature is described later in this book.

Land Whales

The largest creatures on Earth, whales, feed off of tiny plankton. Gerald pictured the Drake as a sort of "Land Whale" (maybe their ancestors were whales, and they turned into Drakes after being tainted by the Pristine Tower). Instead of eating a few large sized meals per day (can anyone say "extinction of 3 species a year"?), these behemoths could gorge themselves on the little critters that most Athasians don't know about. Their similarity to whales stems from the fact that whales eat a lot of little plankton, instead of a couple of sharks per day. Maybe the huge teeth and fangs are simply to ward of potential predators. Perhaps they feed on things like psionic parasites or insect swarms. It would be really funny to have some group of Athasians that was actually happy to have a huge monster come by and get rid of locusts that are destroying the crops!

Pollination

Tom Slattery pointed out that the real world has bees and other insects to pollinate flowers. Dark Sun doesn't have any obvious pollinators. The closest may be a Wezer, but they probably don't pollinate tiny flowers.

To Peter Nutall, Athas seems to be a world larger then life. In a few adventures he had larger plants, complete with giant insects to pollinate them. That's just one idea though, another option is assume that some insects survived threw the ages. DMs could combine traditional pollinators with Athasian characteristics. Maybe bees are twice as large, maybe some bees have chitonous shells. African bees may have mutated into real horrors. Honey would be a real treasure on Athas, and it would probably be really hard to get too! In most worlds, the idea that a tiny insect can do up to 1 point of damage. Seems ridiculous. On Athas though, that seems more realistic. The point is that there really doesn't need to be a completely alien creature to fulfill every role in the Athasian world, and at most only a small change needs to be made (the bees could be black, or glow white hot, they attack on sight, their poison is stronger, etc.) in order to introduce realistic pollinators to your players.

Kreen Hunting as an Example of how to Bring in New Ideas from This Netbook

One of the areas that this netbook has not covered is how the ideas in this book can be brought into an actual campaign that is in progress. The list had a discussion about

Thri-Kreen and their hunting. List members offered advice as to how much time a DM should take to role-play a Kreen PC's nighttime hunting.

Eric S. Weilnau (The Sage)wrote that one option would be to assume that the majority of the time the thri-kreen (when hunting alone) will only manage to bring down small prey (the most abundant type of life on Athas by necessity) that will be a minimal amount of food to allow the thri-kreen to avoid starvation. This way you can introduce a large number of species not worthy of MC entries but abundant on Athas nonetheless. Also, the only XPs this will merit are those deserved by good role-playing (which goes beyond merely rolling for the hunting proficiency every night).

The introduction of new interesting species can keep a kreen's nightly hunts from being a bore to the other PCs that must sleep at night. DMs could create a table with various outcomes for hunting, such as small creature, medium creature, interesting non-threatening creature, no creatures met, and an adventure. By preparing 5 or so creatures/adventures for each outcome, a DM could introduce interesting fauna and flora to the players. DMs can choose a creature or creatures that fit the terrain and kreen/party experience level. Adventures could be both simple and very hard, as the kreen should be aware that these hunting excursions can be quite risky.

Here are some examples of outcomes that could be prepared:

- Large animal: Kreen is stalking an animal, when suddenly a herd of animals runs through the area. The kreen must take cover or be trampled. These animals would be a type of herd animal the party had not met before, and would feed on a rare plant. Merchant houses would be interested in learning about these creatures.

- Adventure: Kreen is stalking a small rat-like creature, when she realizes she is not the only one stalking the prey. The other creature is a carnivore, and decides the Kreen is a better meal than the rat-like creature.

- Adventure: Kreen spots a caravan or group of intelligent creatures. The DM would flesh out the details before hand. The kreen could decide to go on alone, or return with the party.

- Adventure: Kreen spots a landmark/cave/body/village/etc. This can be a good way of speeding up an adventure, and can actually make the other players happy that the kreen PC chooses to go hunting.

In some cases the adventure would involve the party, in other cases it would be just for the one player. The more it involves the party, the more interesting it is for all the players. Normal hunts should be role-played every now and then as well, just to keep the player(s) on edge.

Having a kreen that goes out on nightly hunts is a great way to introduce the many nocturnal creatures of Athas. The DM could describe to the kreen, while the rest of

the party listens, what interesting species the kreen finds, and the interesting ways of coping with the cold, the dark, and the sands. DMs could make up all sorts of neat abilities for creatures, like traveling underground, absorbing the body heat of prey, waiting in stasis for prey to come by it, etc.

As you read the chapter on Athasian creatures, try to imagine how you could weave them into your campaign. Creatures should belong in the setting and terrain you choose for them. There are only so many times that the party should simply come around a sand dune and see a creature. Don't forget to have creatures emerge from the sands, dive underground, blend into the surrounding foliage, or reveal themselves by eerie grunts or shrill whistles long before the party encounters them. Focus not only on the creature, but believable ecological settings for the creatures. Are the creatures feeding, hunting, giving birth, sleeping? The possibilities are endless.

Chapter 4

Creatures of Athasian Ecology

Athasian Species

"The universe, in the state in which we find it when we wake up to consciousness, is obviously imperfect and unsatisfactory. Many living creatures prey on each other. All animals live on other animals which they kill to eat."

Arnold Toynbee

Monsters Organized By Gerald Arthur Lewis and Teos Abadia

The following species were created by members of the Dark Sun Mailing List in August of 1997. List members collaborated over a one-week period to come up with creatures that would fit the ecological environment of Athas. The species are in alphabetical order, and have been edited only for grammatical corrections.

Alerma

By Teos Abadia

Name: Alerma (Poisonous variant in parenthesis)
Climate/Terrain: Stony barrens, rocky badlands, scrub plains
Frequency: common (poisonous variety=very rare)
Organization: spaced matrix, 12' between each
Activity Cycle: day
Diet: as plant (as plant/carnivorous)
Intelligence: non
Treasure: none unless incidental
Align: TN
 # Appearing: 2d6
AC=6
MV: Nil
HD: 3
THACO: Nil (15)
 # Attacks: Nil (1/day Max)
Dmg: Nil (2-5 thorns, for 1d4 + poison each)
Spcl Attacks: Nil (Poison causes 1d8, save for half)
Spcl Defenses: Nil
Size: S (4' tall)
Morale: N/A
Level/XP: Nil (70)
Psi: none.

An Alerma is a plant usually seen as a tall (around 4') long cactus-like stem. The alerma is an equilibrium species, and when several Alerma are in an area, they tend to be spaced out at a distance of

12' due to their using up all the water in the soil. The Alerma is a dark brown color, except on the top 3' of its stem, where a dark green membrane covers the stem.

This membrane is extended, umbrella-like, by the plant only twice a day, during the morning hours, and then again at dusk. The plant collapses the membrane at all other areas to reduce overheating. The membrane is collapsed somewhere around 9:30 Am and then at night, to avoid exposing it to predators.

While the membrane is up, it provides nice coverage from the sun, and many creatures will choose to rest under the shade of an Alerma. As a result, the plant often gets nutrients through dung and other tidbits left behind by the visitors.

The trunk can be grazed on by only the toughest of predators, such as larger herbivores and huge omnivores. The membrane can be eaten by most small insects, and by larger creatures if they work carefully around a few hard ridges and scattered thorns. Otherwise the plant presents a very nutritional meal. Three or four medium sized creatures, (including adventurers) can get their day's food (not water) requirements from one membrane.

However, a rare poisonous variant of the Alerma exists, and the near-imperceptible differences between the two is enough to discourage predation. Many a wanderer of the wastes has taken their chances on an Alerma and died during this last attempt to find nourishment.

The poisonous variant is the same as the normal Alerma, except where noted in the statistics above, and as described here. The poisonous Alerma has a poisonous chemical that runs through its membrane, and anyone taking a bite of the membrane will be subject to 1d8 points of poison damage per bite (and subject to stomach cramps, no game effect). Furthermore, this version of the plant can sense vibrations through its root system (there are rumors, unconfirmed at this time, of psionic Alerma that can use life detection and other powers). If a creature approaches under the plant (to eat it or enjoy its shade), the poisonous variant will suddenly collapse its membrane, driving 2-5 of the thorns that run along the inside of the membrane into the creature. Each thorn causes 1d4 points of damage, plus poison injection (1d8, save for half).

If the creature, survives, it can attack only with a small weapon, or it can attempt to escape with a successful strength check, at -5 if small, -2 if medium, and at +5 if larger. The plant gets only one attack, being capable of opening its membrane only twice a day at the most, and never in rapid succession. The plant usually spends 1-2 weeks digesting its prey with the help of the poison, which acts to dissolve the prey. The plant absorbs the prey through its root system as the prey dissolves into the soil, and directly through the membrane.

There is seldom more than one poisonous Alerma in a group of Alerma, and never a solitary poisonous Alerma.

Athasian dung Beetle

By Raptor

Name: Athasian Dung Beetle
Climate/Terrain: Sandy wastes, stony barrens
Frequency: Common
Organization: Solitary
Activity Cycle: Any
Diet: Dung
Intelligence: Animal(1)
Treasure: Dung
Alignment: Neutral

No. Appearing: 1
Armor Class: 7 (Chitinous exoskeleton)
Movement: 3
Hit Dice: 1/2
THAC0: 20
No. of Attacks: 0
Damage/Attacks: 0
Special Attacks: Nil
Special Defenses: Horrible taste

Magic Resistance: None
Size: T (3" long)
Morale: Unsteady(5)
Level/XP Value: 15

The infamous Athasian dung beetle bears little resemblance to its namesake we all know and love. It is fully three inches long and almost two inches wide, with long, dexterous rear legs and shorter front and middle legs. Its rear legs are primarily used for pushing a dung ball around. (The Athasian dung beetle walks backwards when rolling dung. The dung balls measure anywhere from two to 6 inches in diameter, depending on how lucky the beetle was in its search for dung.) It's rock hard carapace is a dark sandy brown in color making a still Athasian dung beetle look like just another rock. Athasian dung beetles are almost always encountered by themselves, their little brains thoroughly transfixed on moving some piece of dung from one pointless place to another.

Combat: These beetles have almost no attack form whatsoever. If disturbed in their task, their first instinct is to ignore the disturbing creature or thing. If their dung is taken from them, they will run around in circles trying to find it, and if no dung is found after a few minutes, they move on in search of a new piece of dung to roll. Their sole defense is simply tasting bad. Most creatures of Athas will eat a dung beetle only once, unless they are truly stupid and have forgotten how horrible the taste truly was.

Habitat/Society: Athasian dung beetles live out most of their lives rolling dung across the sand dunes. Once in a while they will encounter another dung beetle and they will either fight for the other's piece of dung, or mate, depending on the relative sexes of the beetles. A female will lay her eggs inside a piece of dung and roll the piece of dung around until the young emerge.

Ecology: The Athasian dung beetle fills a necessary role in Athas's ecosystem. By rolling dung that would otherwise be scattered throughout the wastes to a centralized location, enough fertilizer can sometimes be found in these areas to support plant life (given that there is sufficient water).

Blade-Licker

By Teos Abadia

Name: Blade-Licker
Climate/Terrain: Crimson Savanna
Frequency: uncommon
Organization: swarm
Activity Cycle: Any
Diet: Blood/Tissue
Intelligence: Semi (2-4)
Treasure: None
Align: Neutral
 # Appearing: 2d8
AC: 2
MV: 1"
HD: 1-1
THACO: Special
 # Attacks: Special
Dmg: 1hp/round for 3d4 rounds
Special Attacks: Nil
Special Defenses: Nil
Size: T (5 mm diam)
Morale: N/A
Level/XP: 18
Psi: None

Blade-lickers are tiny insects that live on the razor-sharp edges of the blades of grass in the Crimson Savanna. Each blade-licker has a near-transparent round body that is a mere 5 mm in diameter, with six tiny green legs radiating from the center of the underside of its body. The front of the body of a blade-licker has a tiny aperture from which a thin straw-like sucker can be extended. The sucker ends in tiny teeth that can saw through most skin, fur, and carapaces.

Blade-lickers are an opportunistic species remarkably well-suited to the environment of the Crimson Savanna. Blade-lickers crawl to the edges of the grass leaves, fitting their tiny bodies nicely between the serrated teeth on the blades of grass. The insects can then lie dormant for up to 5 weeks. When a

creature passing through the area and is cut by the sharp blade of grass (Creatures with an AC higher than 7 are cut by the grass, as explained on p.85 of The Wanderer's Chronicle), the blade-lickers end up in contact with the wound. At this point the blade-lickers wake from their slumber, and instantly latch onto the passing creature. Because of the method of attack, no THACO is rolled. Instead, any creature without an AC of at least 7 has a 5% chance of picking up 2d8 blade-lickers for each 20'X20' infested area traveled.

Each blade-licker that is picked up quickly extends its straw-like sucker into the wound cause by the grass blade. A light anesthesia in the insect's saliva prevents the host from feeling the blade-licker's attack. The blade-licker then feasts on the exposed blood and tissue, draining 1 HP/round for 3d4 rounds before being full of blood. At this point the blade-licker's body is a bright red, and the creature drops from the wound to scurry to safety and rest. Blade-lickers reproduce soon after feeding through self-insemination, quickly producing nearly 100 minute offspring.

When a creature is first attacked by blade-lickers, it may make one saving throw vs. Poison at -4 to detect the attack. If the attack is detected, the creature may remove the blade-lickers with gloved hands or a blade (using exposed flesh simply results in subsequent attacks, causing 1 HP each round for each blade-licker exposed to flesh).

Blade-lickers have been used on special occasions in the gladiatorial arena in Gulg, either placed on the vines and thorns that grow in the arena, or applied directly to toothed weapons to inflict additional damage on opponents.

Darter: The blade-licker manages to avoid most predators, but is vulnerable to a gray scarab that lives in the savanna, called a Darter. The darter is able to use the psionic power of body equilibrium to slowly creep up on dormant blade-lickers and eat them without awaking them. Darters can also use the power of teleportation to evade any predators (mainly birds and spiders) that should decide to interrupt the Darter's slow measured hunt across a blade of grass. This teleportation power is limited, transporting the beetle only 4' away at a time, and the power can be used but thrice per day. Darters never seem to use the teleportation power to attack, and pose no threat to other creatures. Darters are considered a delicacy by Thri-Kreen and other Savanna inhabitants.

Blood Beetle

By Gerald Lewis

Name: Blood Beetle
Climate/Terrain: Urban areas, any sand
Frequency: uncommon
Organization: nest
Activity Cycle: Any
Diet: Blood
Intelligence: Animal (1)
Treasure: None
Align: Neutral
 # Appearing: 2d6
AC: 10
MV: 3, br 6
HD: 1/4
THACO: 20
 # Attacks: 1
Dmg: 1
Special Attacks: Blood Burrow
Special Defenses: Nil
Size: Low (3)
Morale: N/A
Level/XP: 10
Psi: Mthac0:18, MAC:10 Psp's:5 Clairsentience: Sense Blood (no cost)

Description: Many creatures live in the blood-soaked sand of arena floors, but none thrive as the Blood Beetles do. This species has adapted to live in this environment by learning to subsist only on blood. These creatures have a sandy yellow hide, with veins of red interspersed throughout. They are very small (measuring no more than 2" long), and resemble other beetles as

they have 6 legs, antennae, and a thick carapace that protects their innards. The main physiological difference between the Blood Beetle and a regular beetle, is that the former has an organ that functions very similar to the gills of a fish. Blood soaked sand is taken into the body through the mouth. The fine sand is filtered out of the "gills", and the blood travels into the beetle's stomach.

Combat: If there is no blood around, Blood Beetles will attack creatures. They do this using their wicked, jagged incisors that rip flesh and cause nasty gashes. These pincers are coated with a chemical that stops the blood from clotting. Unless the cut is bandaged, the victim will lose 1 hp of blood per round. If a wounded creature is in the vicinity of a Blood Beetle, there is a good chance that the beetle will make it's way towards the wound, hoping to burrow into the flesh and drink the blood. To so this, the beetle makes an attack roll with a +4 bonus. If the attack hits, the victim suffers one point of damage every round, as the beetle bores into it's skin, getting it's fill of blood. After 5 rounds the beetle will stop. If no attempt is made to clear the beetle of the wound, it nests there, producing 5d8 tiny offspring in 1d4 days.

When these young beetles hatch, they cause considerable damage, as they burrow their way out of the wound. This "attack" causes 2d6 damage and will leave the victim stunned for a round.

Habitat/Society: Though mainly found in arenas, Blood Beetles can be found in any other sandy region, as well as the Stony Barrens. After they nest in a creature, they and their kin are brought to other regions, where they reproduce asexually.

Ecology: Blood beetles are exceptionally tasty (if not a little bloody) and have a great deal of protein in them. Their carapaces are quite beautiful, and are occasionally used as ornaments. Their hides fetch 3bp in most market places. Aside from humans, Blood Beetles are preyed upon by Kes'trekels and other carrion eaters.

Bone Men

By Andrew Poli

Name: Bone Men
Climate/Terrain: Stony barrens, sandy wastes
Frequency: Rare
Organization: Tribe
Activity Cycle: Day
Diet: Omnivore
Intelligence: Low
Treasure: None
Align: Chaotic Evil
 # Appearing: 1d20
AC: 2d4
MV: 12
HD: 3d10
THACO: 15
 # Attacks: 2
Dmg: 2d8
Special Attacks: None
Special Defenses: See below
Size: M
Morale: Average
Level/XP: 160

BoneMen are heavy, thickset humanoids vaguely resembling a Tarek at a distance. A closer inspection reveals the bone protrusions that make up their natural weaponry.

Combat: In combat BoneMen attack as a group but there is little strategy or plan with each individual acting independently. Bone weapons only do half damage and, on a natural miss, bone weapons are absorbed adding a bonus of +1 to their AC. If the bone weapon is magical it is

allowed a save vs. petrify/polymorph, if unsuccessful the item is absorbed and any magical bonus is added to the BoneMan.

Habitat/Society: Simple and Brutal, the BoneMen group together in loose clans. Within the clan life is harsh and the weak or crippled are usually killed in the day to day brawling. The BoneMen are nomadic and barely know what shelter is. Any construction is crude and offers little resistance to the elements. If clan life is harsh little can be said for the treatment of any outsiders including other clans- anyone who comes within range shall be killed.

Ecology: Though often mistaken for undead BoneMen play a part of the ecological balance of Athas. As they wander the wastes and stony barrens they absorb any bone objects that they find, providing a cleaner service to Athas. The bones of BoneMen are used to make superior bone weapons with a non-magical bonus of +1. Bodies of BoneMen are sometimes bought by arena necromancers for re-animation and some other mages use the bone in the creation of magical items.

DM's NOTES:
1. You may wish to make it that BoneMen can absorb any bone matter, adding to their AC
2. You may also wish to include undead skeletons as possible bone matter.
3. The maximum AC is -4.
4. At the DM's discretion you may wish to have any absorbed matter after AC -4 is reached used to increase damage by d8 until 7d8.
5. If you are worried about political correctness you can change BoneMen to BoneFolk.

Cone Ants

By Andrew Poli

Name: Cone Ants
Climate/Terrain: Sandy Wastes
Frequency: rare
Organization: nest
Activity Cycle: day
Diet: Carnivore
Intelligence: Animal (1)
Treasure: See Below
Align: Neutral
 # Appearing: 1 nest (1d100 X 100 ants)
AC: Nest: 10, -1/1000 ants
MV: 8
HD: nest: 1d10 per 100 ants, one ant: 1 hp
THACO: 10
 # Attacks: 1/opponent
Dmg: 1/100 ants
Special Attacks: Psionics
Special Defenses: Psionics
Size: Nest: S-L, ant: T
Morale: Nest: Fanatical, ant: Low
Level/XP: 100 per 100 ants
Psi: Mthac0:20, MAC: 10, PSP's:50 MB, ToIW, Dominate, Awe (fear), Hive Mind

Cone Ants get their name from the cone shape mounds that they live in. The individuals look like ordinary ants no bigger than 5mm (approx. 1/8 of an inch) in size.

Combat: Cone Ants usually prefer psionic combat to dominate their prey and bring it to the nest where it can be eaten. If a they are attacked they will use Awe to scare off the attacker. It is the mass numbers of the cone that provide the psionics. Should an individual insect out of range it does not have access to them.

Habitat/Society: Cone Ants are social insects with a queen and a variety of castes (workers, soldiers, drones etc..). In larger nests there is quite often more than one queen.

Ecology: Cone Ants quite often find themselves on the top of the food chain within range of the cone. This does not mean that straying individuals do not fall prey to insectivores. The cone is usually situated above a water source and should you dig down far enough you can locate it.

DM's NOTES:
1. The range of the cones psionics is line of sight- assume if they can see the cone it can see them.
2. The single attack is done for simplicity purposes and many bites make up that attack. This means that no system shock roll is required.
3. The Cone Ants will usually only bite a dominated individual. If others attack the cone they will respond - assume that each opponent will receive one attack.
4. At the DM's discretion you may wish to make the Cone Ants poisonous.
5. I was not happy with the current treasure tables so I made one that seemed suitable. Roll once for every 2000 ants (round to nearest 2000).

Treasure Table
Roll d3 To determine Table and then percentile.

1.		2.		3.	
Chitin	01-12	Chitin	01-16	Chitin	01-23
Bones	13-25	Bones	17-30	Bones	24-38
Asst Teeth	26-35	Asst Teeth	31-48	Asst Teeth	39-44
Pelt	36-41	Pelt	49-54	Pelt	45-49
Colored Feathers	42-51	Colored Feathers	55-64	Colored Feathers	50-66
Asst Seeds	52-61	Asst Seeds	65-74	Asst Seeds	67-78
H/H Items	62-77	H/H Items	75-78	Clothing	79-83
Clothing	78-87	Ceramic	79-88	Ceramic	84-88
Armor	88-98	Armor	89-94	Weapon	89-99
Gold	98-00	Gems	95-00	Magic Item	00

Chitin: In amongst the hoard is a useful piece of chitin about 1 foot (30cm) long. It may be made into a part of a piece of armor by someone with armoring proficiency. Multiple pieces of chitin must be used to make a single piece of armor.

Bones: Strewn in amongst the hoard are the bones of those less fortunate than yourself, as regard this debris you notice one of useful length (4d4+4 inches). A person with weaponsmithing can manufacture a blade from the bone (a dagger or short sword).

Asst Teeth: Scattered in the dust about the hoard are the assorted teeth of the creatures prey. Though used as little more as cheap necklaces in civilized society, they represent bargaining chips amongst more primitive tribes.

Pelt: One of the animals that died here is in a minimal state of decay and yields a valuable pelt worth 1d6 ceramic pieces.

Colored Feathers: Blown about by the caprices of the wind are various colored feathers (undoubtedly from scavengers thinking an easy feed) whilst only used for decoration in most cities there are some primitive tribes that will trade for these marks of rank.

Asst Seeds: Carried in on the bodies of long dead carriers are assorted seeds of plants waiting for some water to bring them to life.

%chance	No. of Seeds	Plant Type
5%	1	Deadly Plant (DM's Choice e.g. Bloodgrass)
80%	d8	Weeds
10%	d2	Narcotic (e.g. esperweed)
60%	d10	Animal Fodder
40%	d10	Cereal Crop
10%	1	Forest Tree
5%	1	Fruit Tree

H/H Items: Amongst the remains of the poor (and not so poor) souls who have died here are some items still usable.

Role Percentile:	
Waterskin (empty)	1-30
Fire Kit	31-35
Backpack (empty)	36-40
Belt pouch (empty)	41-50
3d10 feet of Hemp Rope	51-55
Large bag (empty)	56-60
3d10 feet of string	61-69
A clay cooking pot	70-79
A clay drinking bowl	79-93
A wooden pestle and mortar	94-98
A musical instrument (DM's choice)	99-100

Clothing: Draped over the skeletons of unfortunates is various articles of clothing most is just rags but amongst this you find a useful item.

Loin cloth	01-15
Leather belt	16-25
Hat	26-30
Gloves	31-40
Linen shirt	41-46
Cloak	47-56
Cloth Silter	57-63
Sandals	64-78
Linen Trousers	79-83
Bandoleer	84-88
Cloth Sash	89-93
Boots	94-99
A Fine Tunic	00

Ceramic: 1d10 + 10 ceramic pieces

Armor: Some of the fallen warriors have parts of their armor intact, scrounging through the remains you find a useful piece.

Armor Type		Pieces	
Padded Armor	01-15	One Arm	1-24
Leather Armor	16-30	One Leg	25-50
Hide Armor	31-45	Breast Plate	51-70
Studded Leather	46-53	Two Arms	71-85
Brigandine	54-60	Two Legs	86-99

Splint Mail	61-67	Full Suit	00
Scale Mail	68-75		
Banded Mail	76-83		
Ring Mail	84-90		
Chiton Plate	91-93		
Chain Mail	94-95		
Bronze Plate	96-97		
Full Plate	98-99		
Field Plate	00		

Weapons: In the skeletal hands of less successful warriors are the deteriorating remains of their weapons- you find one still in a useful state.

Weapon		Material	
Wrist Razors	1-10	Wood	1-40
Dagger	11-20	Stone	41-65
Widows Knife	21-29	Obsidian	66-85
Sword	30-37	Bone	86-99
Quabone	38-45	Metal	00
Chatkcha	46-50		
Gythka	51-55		
Bards Friend	56-60		
Impaler	61-65		
Alhulak	66-69		
Calhulak	70-73		
Trikal	74-76		
Dragons Claw	77-79		
Crusher	80-82		
Carrikal	83-85		
Puchik	86-88		
Tortoise Blade	89-90		
Masters Whip	91-92		
Singing Sticks	93-94		
Weighted Pike	95-96		
Daichi Club	97		
Forearm Axe	98		
Gouge	99		
Lotulis	00		

Gold: 2d4 Gold pieces
Gems: Roll on Dark Sun Gem Table (pg. 82 The Age Of Heroes)
Magic Items: Roll on Magic Item Table (in DMG)

Deeklee

By Carrie Slavin

Name: Deeklee
Frequency: Common
Climate/Terrain: Rocky barrens, boulder fields
Organization: Singular
Activity Cycle: Night
Diet: Insectivore
Intelligence: Animal (1)
Treasure: Possible
Alignment: Neutral
No. Appearing: 1(2-6)
Armor Class: 7
Movement: 9
Hit Dice: 1
THACO: 20
No. of attacks: 1
Damage/attack: 1d6

Special Attacks: nil
Special Defenses: see below
Size: Small
Morale: low (5)
XP Value: 125
Psionics summary:

level Dis/Sci/Dev Attack/Defense
1 1 / 1 / 2 - / MB
MTHac0: 11, MAC: 8, PSP's: 130
Psychokinesis - Sciences: Telekinesis; Devotions: rot (new)

Deeklees are a small two foot long rodent with long legs and an extended snout with a long frog-like tongue. Its varying coloration matches the Deeklee's surroundings and helps to camouflage it with its surroundings. It appears as an anteater with long legs. The most peculiar behavior is the way the Deeklee feeds. It wanders around the rocks in order to find dead animals. When a carcass is found it is brought to a high place or on top of a boulder. Sometimes the Deeklee will go out and collect numerous bodies and bring them to the same place. The Deeklee's Telekinesis is used to help him with bodies beyond his strength. Once the bodies are in place, the Deeklee rots them to attract flies. Then the Deeklee will perch on top of the Carcass(es) and wait for insect scavengers to start buzzing around and he then feasts.

Combat: The Deeklees are non-combatants and will run at the first sign of trouble. however if cornered the Deeklee will leap upon the nearest predator slashing with all four legs in an attempt to scare him off. But because of the Deeklee's general lack of ferocity, it is an ineffective attack and only does d6. The Deeklee has a special ability to have incredible bursts of speed when being pursued. It literally quadruples its movement rate in order to get away. This is what the Deeklee usually does at the first sign of trouble.

Habitat/Society: They usually travel alone and only meet other Deeklees to breed. at this time the mother and father raise the children equally and part when the children have reached maturity. the duration of pregnancy is 2 months to a standard litter of 5, but it has been known to have litters up to nine and as low as two. The offspring gain maturity in 10 months and then all the Deeklees scatter. Usually these families are located near an oasis. Where the family will sit there and grab bugs out of the air.

Ecology: The Deeklee is an insectivore and is hunted by flying creatures. Most land creatures cannot keep up with the Deeklee and the Deeklee is likely to see an approaching predator from his perch. However this perch makes them primary targets for flying predators. Also the collection of dead matter that they perch on is a valuable food source to many wild scavengers who dine after scaring off the Deeklee. Sometimes the Deeklee with perch on a humanoid and sometimes their equipment will still be on the body. Many a missing traveler has turned up fly bait for a hungry Deeklee.

Desert Bore

By Adam White

Name: Desert Bore
Climate/Terrain: Tablelands
Frequency: Common
Organization: Solitary
Activity Cycle: Any
Diet: See below
Intelligence: Animal
Treasure: None
Alignment: N

No. Appearing: 1-3
Armor Class: 6
Movement: 12
Hit Dice: 1
THAC0: 19
No. of Attacks: 1
Damage/Attack: 1-4
Special Attacks: See below
Special Defense: See below

Magic Resistance: None
Size: S (2' long)
XP Value: 100
Psionics: None

The Bore is one of the most resilient creatures on Athas. He can spend all day long in the hot sun and can go for days without food. The Desert Bore is a short, armadillo-like creature with a tough shell on it's back. It's head and many feet can be drawn inside the shell for protection. The Bore's shell is very light, and in the Athasian sun is hard to distinguish from the surrounding sand. The Bore's many clawed feet and sharp pincers enable it to move very quickly and burrow into the sand with deceptive speed.

Combat: If threatened directly, the Bore will burrow into the sand and retreat into it's shell. If pursued it can move around under the sand at 1/4 it's movement rate. The Bore is not without defense, it move quickly and silently providing the stealth necessary for surprise. It can then lash out with it's pincers for d4 points of damage. If the victim is surprised, the Bore does d6 points damage.

Habitat/Ecology: The Bore is essentially silent, moving quickly on the sand, but it is not a predator. The little beast will often follow other creatures as they pass in the desert and wait for them to 'relieve themselves'. The Bore will then eat the waste matter. One human's waste is enough to sustain the Bore for up to one week, other creatures would provide more or less sustenance depending on the volume of the waste. The Bore prefers this type of sustenance, but will not pass up the opportunity to feast on dead animals. However, the bore does not have the digestive system to break down the meat in it's stomach. After such a feast, the Bore is sluggish moving at half it's movement rate. The Bore makes a satisfying meal and can be cooked and eaten in it's shell.

Dipper Plant

By Gerald Lewis

Name: Dipper Plant
Climate/Terrain: Stony Barrens
Organization: None
Activity Cycle: Pre-Dawn
Diet: Photosynthesis
Intelligence: Non (0)
Treasure: None
Alignment: N/A
No. Appearing: 2-12
Armor Class: 7
Movement: None
Hit Dice: 1
THAC0: 16
No. of Attacks: 1
Damage/Attack: 1-4
Special Attacks: None
Special Defenses: See Below
Magic Resistance: None
Size: S (4' tall)
Morale: N/A
XP Value: 15
Psionics Summary: None

The Dipper Plant is a small plant that grows mainly in the Stony Barrens. It is an integral part of the food chain here, as it can provide a great deal of water. The plant consists of a small base with three 4' leaves stemming from it. These leaves are roughly triangular in appearance and are dark green in coloration. Throughout most of the day, the Dipper Plants leaves are pointed upward and are closed in on themselves (put your hands together so that your palms line up -- this is how it is shaped). In the hours just before dawn, the plants leaves spread out (open your hands, but leave the wrists joined). It's multitude of jagged thorns are now exposed, this is usually enough to ward off any predators. At this time, the leaves collect the dew from the air. When daylight comes, the plant folds up again, trapping the valuable water between it's leaves.

Combat: The Dipper Plant has but one mode of attack. If the any foreign object is placed between the leaves when they are open (be it a hand, or a water skin), the Dipper Plant will

clamp down upon it, hoping to save it's water. This attack causes 1d4 hp of damage initially, and 1 hp of damage is lost every round after that due to bleeding. The hold can be escaped three ways: kill the plant (thus causing injury to yourself), make a successful BB/LG roll, or wait until the next dawn, when the plant will open up again. The Dipper Plant has a very durable husk, conferring it an AC of 7.

Habitat/Society: The Dipper Plant is an integral part of the food chain, as it provides a great deal of water for large creatures who can eat the plant. A typical plant will yield one gallon of water, but large ones have been known to yield up to three gallons.

Ecology: There are many uses for a Dipper Plant. They provide much needed water (if you can get to it), their thorns can be used for darts, and a mild poison can be derived from their roots. While the plant is too tough for most things to eat, it is strong and pliable enough to be made into many useful things.

Drajian Terror

By Matthias Roschke

Name: Drajian Terror
Climate/Terrain: Any
Frequency: Common
Organization: Swarm
Activity Cycle: Dawn till dusk
Diet: Carnivore
Intelligence: Non (see below)
Treasure: None
Alignment: N/A
No. Appearing: 100 - 10000 (or more)
Armor Class: 0
Movement: 18 (flying, class A)
Hit Dice: 1/10 hp per creature
THAC0: N/A
No. of Attacks: 1 per creature
Damage/Attack: Continuous damage (d20 + AC) per round per 500 insects
Special Attacks: paralysis (poison)
Special Defenses: None
Magic Resistance: None
Size: T (1")
Morale: Fearless
XP Value: 1 per 10
Psionics: None

Nobody knows the exact origin of the Drajian Terror, but legend has it that it is the result of an out of control experiment by a Drajian Sorcerer (or Templar, depending on whom you ask). They are a perfect example of the evils such foul magic can bring over the people. They first appeared about two kings ages ago, near the city of Draj.

The Drajian Terror is a highly aggressive, carnivorous insect, which has been known to attack and kill even large creatures (including giants). Mostly they hunt for smaller creatures though (or feed on carrion). A swarm can easily strip a human down to the bare bones within an hour.

Combat: When their hive is threatened, or they are out hunting, the Drajian Terror will always attack in large numbers (the larger the opponent the larger the swarm). The warriors attack with their poisonous bite, which is not lethal but (temporarily) paralyzes even larger creatures, if it is administered in sufficient amounts (save vs. poison every round). While the warriors attack, the workers will start to bite off the skin and meat from the victim, and carry it back to the hive. The victim is quite literally eaten alive. It is interesting to note that the insects sometimes attack with a definite strategy. The warriors (and workers) focus their attacks on the more vulnerable spots of the victim (such as the eyes, the throat, or major arteries). This happens about 10% of the time when the attacking swarm is directed by a general (see below).

Habitat/Society: The Drajian Terrors live in hives with 5000 to 500000 insects, and build strong fortresses (up to 15 feet high and 50 feet across) out of whatever material is available

(usually small rocks and clay). Within the hive, each insect has its specific function. There are five basic categories:

Workers are colored in shades of green or blue, and about 3/4" in length. It is their job to find food (dead or alive) and bring it back to the hive (in pieces of course). For this purpose they are equipped with relatively large and sharp teeth. They are also responsible for the proper storage of food and keeping the hive clean. They make up about 75% of the insect population.

Builders are the largest of the insects. They are brown and about 2" long. Their only job is to build, repair, and expand the fortress. Only hives which are currently expanding or need to repair a highly damaged fortress, will have more than a few of these. They require too much food and water to be kept alive other ways - it takes about a dozen workers, working full time to support one builder.

Warriors are easily recognized by their bright red or yellow coloring. They are about 1/2" long and have poisonous fangs, which allows them to immobilize their opponents. Their function is to defend the hive and support the works in hunting. About 20% of the insects are warriors.

Guardians are a larger (about 1" long) and more deadly version of the warrior. They tend to be colored black and their poison kills most animals including humans (save vs. death). Fortunately, they are almost never encountered as it is their job to guard the royalty (see below), and they will not attack unless a royal insect is threatened. As many as 5% of the hive can be made up of guardians.

The final category is the Royalty, which includes the queen and the generals (all male). Their primary purpose is reproduction. They are slightly larger than most of their hibernates (1.5" long), and posses a rudimentary intelligence (Int:3). This allows them to guide the hive and adapt it to changing conditions, which is probably why the Drajian Terrors have been able to spread out so far.

Ecology: Drajian Terrors are not part of the naturally evolved food chain of the Table Lands. They have either been imported from elsewhere, or were created by magic (no one knows for sure). Because of their extreme adaptability and rapid spread, they had initially put a huge strain on the eco-system, since they had no natural enemies (even humans frequently ended up as their food). Effective techniques, involving fire and protective spells, have been found to keep their colonies away from human settlements. Some predators have also found ways of feeding on these insects (they are high in protein). Various drakes, whose tough skin protects them from the bites (and who seem to be immune to the poison) have discovered a taste for the Drajian terror (usually destroying the colony in the process). The royal insects and builders can be used as spell components for various spells -- they tend to be hard to obtain undamaged though.

Fidari

By Robert Adducci

Name: Fidari
Climate/terrain: Any
Activity Cycle: Night
Intelligence: Animal
Frequency: Common
Organization: Solitary
Diet: Omnivore
Treasure: Varies

Alignment: Neutral
No. Appearing: 1-6
Movement: 12(Leap 15)
AC: 5
THAC0: 18

HD: 3
No. Attacks: 3 or 1

Descriptions: Claw/Claw/Bite or head butt
Damage/attack: D4/D4/D6 or D12
Special Attacks: Head Butt
Special Defenses: Leaping, Immune to Poison
XP Value: 100

Size: M 4'long
Morale: 10
Psionic Description: None
MAC: 9 MThac0: Nil

Fidari are creatures that resemble a cross between an Alligator and a Kangaroo. Their skin is rough like the alligator's and they have an elongated snout like an alligator. Their body shape is that of a kangaroo, with large hind legs, a long tail, small fore arms, larger ears, and a pouch. Their skin is camouflaged with grey, brown, and yellow stripes. The teeth in their mouth are like that of a humans in regards to the shapes not the size. Some are sharp for rending meat while others are flat for grinding plant matter. They are about six feet long and mostly stand on all four appendages. They feed themselves with their front arms, which have 4 fingers. Their tail is used to balance them when they stand on their hind legs to reach foliage on higher branches. The top of their head is covered in bone plates down to the tip of their snouts.

Combat: Fidari detest combat. They are shy and extremely skittish. They leap away at the nearest sign of danger. The only exception to this is if their young are endangered. When in combat they will try to head butt the enemy(D12) on the first attack to knock them off balance (save vs. breath weapon). They can only head butt if the opponent is at least 10 feat away. Their leap caries them the distance. They can leap up to 20 feet. If the opponent if knocked down they will attempt to leap away. If the opponent is not knocked down they will attack twice with their front claws(D4) and a viscous bite(D6). Fidari are completely(100%) immune to all poisons.

Habitat/Society: Fadari live in small family groups consisting of a mother, father, and up to 4 young. They mate every year for about one month. The mother carries the young for 4 months. The litters are 1-4. The young grow up within the year and when the mother gives birth the next year the young will leave as soon as she gives birth. If no young are born then the previous years littler will stay with the parents. Both the mother and father take care of the children. Both sexes have pouches which are used to store food. The pouch is like a third stomach. It slightly digests food which is then given to the young. The young can eat this kind of predigested food for the first three months, then they may go on regular food. After the young have been alive for three months the acid secretors in the pouch dry up and the mother/father use the pouches to store their own food.

Ecology: Fadari are hated by all civilized folk. They are a scourge to both the herders and farmers. Even though they are skittish they hunt livestock. If they cannot find a suitable herd they will feast on a farmers garden. They will even eat carrion if necessary. They have been known to eat everything. When eating an animal they will eat and digest all parts including bones, the same goes for parts of plants that are not edible to normal animals. This is due to their strong stomach acids and complicated digestive system. They have 3 stomachs each with powerful acids. There are many parts to this animal that are used by humanoids for their daily survival. The hide can be made into excellent armor (AC 6). The stomach fluid is a potent acid capable of eating through metal in 1d6 rounds.

Their stomachs are highly durable and if made into pouches will only tear on a 1 on a d20 roll. (Their stomachs will hold about the size of a large cantaloupe or bowling ball.) Their meat is inedible due to the fact that they eat poisonous plants.

Khorg

By Darknight

Name: Khorg
Climate/Terrain: Any desert
Frequency: Common
Organization: Solitary
Activity Cycle: Day
Diet: Sun flies
Intelligence: High (13-14)
Treasure: None
Alignment: Neutral Good
No. Appearing: 1 or 2d4
Armor Class: -5
Movement: 6

Hit Dice: 10
THAC0: 18
No. of Attacks: 1 (Charge)
Damage/Attack: 4-40 + see below
Special Attacks: Psionics
Special Defenses: Psionics, hit only by magical weapons, immune to poison
Magic Resistance: 70%
Size: H (17' tall when adult)
Morale: Fearless (20), see below
XP Value: 7000

Psionics Summary:

Level	*Attack/Defense*	*Power Score*	*PSP's*
15	*All/All*	*17*	*100+2d20*

Power summary:
Special: pheromone discharge, mindlink
Clairsentience: aura sight
Psychokinesis: telekinesis, kinetic control, control body, molecular rearrangement
Psychometabolism: energy containment
Telepathy: invincible foes, domination, impossible task

Khorgs are huge behemoths which live in all of Athas. Their carapace, which covers their body entirely, is said to be as thick and strong as the skin of the dragon. Khorgs have small eyes on the sides of their heads which is connected to the body by a short neck. Their large mouth has no visible teeth. The rest of the body vaguely resembles that of a mekillot, in fact some speculate that the two species are relatives.

Combat: Despite their aspect and size Khorgs are peaceful creatures. Their natural defenses as long as their powerful psionics make them hard opponents for most people of Athas. To the day no one can claim to have killed a Khorg. If threatened Khorgs use psionics to disable the attackers without harming them if at all possible (they will use invincible foes and impossible task to scare opponents and let them leave) but if cornered they will become aggressive and probably will continue to fight to the death.

Habitat/Society: Khorgs are solitary but enjoy the company of other intelligent species, they communicate by telepathy and may use mindlink at no cost. For a month every year groups of Khorgs meet to mate, it seems like there is no competition among the males. Maybe it's very difficult for a female to be pregnant, in fact the mating lasts for the entire month.

Ecology: Khorgs feed almost exclusively of Sun flies. They have developed a unique and extremely successful apparatus. They use their natural pheromone discharge power to lure the insects until they are near enough to be inspired by their enormous mouth. The inspired air exits from under some plates on the Khorg's back. In fact these creatures don't close their mouths for entire hours filtering the air around them. Khorgs are very specialized creatures, they have almost no natural enemies. Their droppings are highly toxic. See the Sun flies entry for more information.

Sun Flies

By Darknight

Name: Sun flies
Climate/Terrain: Any desert
Frequency: Common
Organization: Swarm
Activity Cycle: Day
Diet: Psionics Photosynthesis
Intelligence: Animal (1)
Treasure: None
Alignment: Not applicable
No. Appearing: 1000-10000
Armor Class: Not applicable
Movement: 24 Hit Dice: 1 hp per 10 individuals in the swarm
THAC0: Nil

No. of Attacks: Nil
Damage/Attack: Nil
Special Attacks: Nil
Special Defenses: Nil
Magic Resistance: Nil
Size: T (G swarm)
Morale: Unreliable (2)
XP Value: 5 (maybe)
Psionics Summary:

Level	*Att/Def*	*Power Score*	*PSP's*
1	*-/-*	*Always succeeds*	*Infinite*

Power summary:
Special: photosynthesis

Sun flies are small white flies with rainbow-colored wings.

Combat: There is no point in attacking Sun flies, and the flies won't harm anyone.

Habitat/Society: Sun flies are organized in large swarms which fly across all the Tyr region. It seems like swarms have no hierarchical organization and only a weak bond exists between individuals of the same swarm, in fact if two swarms meet there are equal chances that one new larger swarm is formed or that the two swarms continue on their path, the size of the single swarms may change during these meetings, probably a strategy to mix genes faster between different groups.

Ecology: Sun flies don't feed on anything except the light of the sun so they are at the very start of the food chain. The females of this specie bring within themselves a lot of eggs at all times, these eggs are ready to hatch but won't until some days after the mother is dead.
Sun flies have developed a quasi symbiotic relationship with Khorgs. In fact the eggs of the Sun flies are not digested by Khorgs and are left in their droppings which are highly toxic for other animals. In a matter of hours or at most 2-3 days the Sun flies larvae's leave the eggs. Protected from other animals by the toxins they grow until they become full adult individuals (within 3-4 days) and then become a new swarm.

Little Hunter

By Robert Adducci

Name: Little Hunter(translated from Thri-Kreen: Tik'dri)
Climate/Terrain: Scrub plains, grasslands, verdant belts
Frequency: Uncommon
Organization: Pack
Activity Cycle: Any
Diet: Small-medium animals
Intelligence: Semi
Treasure: None
Alignment: Neutral
No. Appearing: 2D20
Armor Class: 2
Movement: 15 Ground (Fly:21)
Hit Dice: 1/2
THAC0: 18 each, 10 if in a pack
No. of Attacks: 3
Damage/Attack: 1-2/1-2/1(plus poison)
Special Attacks: Poison (paralysis)
Special Defenses: Cannot be surprised
Magic Resistance: nil
Size: T (6-8"Tall)
Morale: 20
XP Value: See Below
Psionics: Group Telepathy, All Around Vision, Combat Mind #

Experience Value: XP value depends on the number of creatures as follows; 1-5=25xp apiece; 6-10=50xp each; 11-20=75 xp each, 21-30=100xp each; 31-40= 125 xp each.

Little Hunters is a direct translation of the Thri-Kreen word for these creatures. The Little Hunter's appear to be small thri-kreen's 6-8 inches tall. The difference is that they have another pair of appendages that are blade-like appendages similar to real world Praying Mantis'. They also have a set of wings attached to their back. They vary in color depending on where they're from.

Combat: Little Hunters are fierce in combat. not because they are individually strong but because as a pack they are deadly. Little Hunters take Thri-Kreen pack mentality to the extreme. They will never leave once combat is initiated to the point of their own death. Knowing this they fight savagely, working together. Because of their pack mentality and their psionics they work in unison to confuse a creature. One small creature will act as a decoy while others attack open areas, hence their low THAC0. Their Paralytic poison also works on this idea. Individually the poison is weak (save vs. Poison +4) but each time a victim is bitten by a different creature the save is made at a cumulative -1, So the first bite is +4,then +3, +2,+1 etc. down to a max. of -5)If the victim makes a save up to the -5 modifier then they no longer need to make save from subsequent bites. Dwarves for some reason are completely immune to the effects of the Little Hunter's poison. The Little Hunter's low AC is due to their speed and the fact that their Armor is harder then that of a normal Thri-Kreen's

Habitat/Society: Little Hunters live in packs of 5-40 creatures. Small packs take down small animals to feast on. While packs of 30-40 have been to take down very large creatures such as mekillots. While normal packs only get up to about 40 animals there are rumors of a Little Hunters pack that numbers in the hundreds, supposedly this pack has decimated villages.

Ecology: Little Hunters are a scourge to the common man. They kill live stock many times larger than they are capable of consuming because of this carrion is left which attracts scavengers and disease. Because of their immunity to Little Hunter's poison, Dwarven Exterminator (From the Dwarves HB) are often called in to deal with the problem. LH's are prized among Thri-Kreen as hunting companions and pets. The LH's psionics also work with Thri-Kreen. If a Thri-Kreen owns a pack of Little Hunters they may use the psionics of this animal as if they were a Little Hunter. A Thri-Kreen may only have up to 10 Little Hunter hunting companions at any one time, any more and the whole pack will fly off.

Morning Gory

By Peter Nuttall

Name: Morning Gory
Frequency: Uncommon
Climate/Terrain: Scrublands
Organization: Solitary
Activity Cycle: Pre-Dawn to dawn
Diet: Photosynthesis, insectivorous
Intelligence: Non (0)
Treasure: None
Alignment: N/A
No. Appearing: 1
Armor Class: 10
Movement: None
Hit Dice: 1 hp
THAC0: 21
No. of Attacks: 1
Damage/Attack: 1hp
Special Attacks: Blood scent
Special Defenses: See Below
Magic Resistance: None
Size: S (6" tall)
Morale: N/A
XP Value: 5
Psionics Summary: None

The Morning Gory is a small flower that grows mainly in the scrublands. It uses small insects for food and pollination, and large insects for disseminating its seeds. Its name comes from the butcher-shop-like smell during the morning hours when its damp crimson petals are spread open.

The blood-like smell is too much for most insects to resist. Smaller insects like flies and wasps are gobbled up and absorbed by the flower's petals, while larger insects tend to devour the flower, and spread Morning Gory seeds through their droppings.

Rotting Sand

By Andrew Poli

Name: Rotting Sand
Climate/Terrain: Sandy wastes, tablelands,
Frequency: uncommon
Organization: none
Activity Cycle: Seasonal
Diet: Fungal
Intelligence: Non (0)
Treasure: None
Align: N/A
 # Appearing: 1
AC: 10
MV: Nil
HD: Nil
THACO: Nil
 # Attacks: Nil
Dmg: Nil
Spcl Attacks: None
Spcl Defenses: See Below
Size: L-G (10' to 300' sq.)
Morale: N/A
Level/XP: 10
Psi: Nil

Description & Ecology: Rotting Sand is the name given to a fungal parasite/symbiote that lives in an almost dormant state 90% of the time. The name comes from the smell of the enormous flowers that bloom for a couple of days after every rain. (Does anyone see where this is from yet) the fungus lives within pretty much any plant - and many herbivorous animals. Within a plant, fibers inhabit most of the living structure of the host. The fungal fibers then stretch throughout much of the sand/dirt surrounding the host. If the fungus encounters another plant as it grows (1 foot / year or so) it infects that plant as well and starts spreading from that host as well. The fungus gains its sustenance from both the host and by breaking down biological matter as it spreads. The fungus is almost unkillable not only because of its almost non visibility but also because of a survival trait from centuries of defiling. The fungus itself is completely resistant to defilement. That is mages find it almost impossible to draw energy from an area infected by the fungus. The fungus is immune and almost all bio matter in the area is contained within the fungus. Plants infected by the fungus receive a large portion of nutrients from the fungus itself.

In return the fungus gains moisture. Without a host or group of hosts a fungus will become completely dormant. Even with a host the fungi's activity is quite low. Both these states (completely dormant and semi dormant) dramatically change when there is any significant amount of rain. Immediately the fungus suddenly sprouts flowers out the ground approximately 1-1.5m in diameter. These flowers smell strongly of rotting meat and vegetable matter, the flowers attract scavengers and insects to them allowing spores from different fungi to mix and spread.

Sandwolf

By Wolfgand Enrique Kook Camero

Name: Sandwolf

	Sandwolf	*Greater,*	*Psidire*	*Duneworg*
Cli/Terr:	*Sand Dunes*	*TableLands*	*TableLands*	*TableLands*
Freq:	*Uncommon*	*Very rare*	*Very rare*	*Rare*
Act.Cycle:	*Any*	*Any*	*Day*	*Night*
Diet:	*Carnivore*	*Carnivore*	*Special*	*Carnivore*
Int:	*7-10*	*4-6*	*8-12*	*5-7*
Treasure:	*Nil*	*I*	*I*	*Nil*
Alignment:	*Neutral*	*Neutral*	*Neutral*	*Neutral*
#App.:	*3-18*	*2-8*	*2-7*	*3-9*
AC:	*5*	*3*	*5*	*3*
HD:	*3+3*	*5+5*	*3+3*	*7+7*
MV:	*21*	*18*	*18*	*12 (15)*
Thac0:	*17*	*15*	*17*	*13*
#At	*1 or 3*	*1*	*0 or 1*	*1, 3 or 5*
Dmg/Att.	*2d8 or 2d8/d4*	*3d4+1*	*d4+1*	*5d4, 5d4/d4/d4 or 5d4/d4/d4/d4/d4*
SA:	*Sandstorm, jump, psionics*	*Psionics*	*Psionics*	*Stand, jump*
SD:	*Sandstorm, psionics*	*Psionics*	*Psionics*	*None*
MR:	*Nil*	*Nil*	*Nil*	*Nil*
Size:	*S (3'long)*	*M(6'-7'long)*	*S(3'long)*	*L(7'-8')*
ML:	*10*	*13*	*10*	*16*
XP:	*270*	*420*	*270*	*650*

Psionics Summary:	Att/Def	MAC	Mthac0	PSP's
Sandwolf:	MT/MBk	7	16	60
Inertial Barrier, Control Winds, Telekinesis				
Greater:	MT/ToIW	6	15	70
Regenerate, Adrenaline Control, Flesh Armor, Double Pain				
Psidire:	MT/MB	5	13	100
Contact, Domination, Probe, Awe, Invincible Foes, Invisibility, Special				

Sandwolf: Rider of Sandstorms, the Athasian Sandwolf is an intelligent opponent, who likes to surprise its opponents (who have a -3 penalty), and then attack, with the protection of the storm. It uses formidable psionics in combat without restriction, and likes to jump at its opponents, adding its claw attacks to the normal bite.

Greater Sandwolf: The bigger counterpart of the Sandwolf has no metabolism to ride sandstorm, so it relies in raw strength and psychometabolic powers to hunt.

Psidire: More related to Zhakals than to Sandwolves, the psidire feeds on PsP's, rather than fear. Psidire have a special attack form that enables them to draw psp's from a contacted mind.

Duneworg: The most terrible of its kind, the DuneWorg has adapted to walk standing, so it can attack with its claws. If on four legs, its speed increases, and it can attack in a jump, with its four claws, due to its blinding ability.

Habitat/Society and Ecology are the same for normal, earth-like wolves, centuries of instincts cannot be forgotten.

Sand Lice

By Thanatos

Name: Sand Lice
Climate/Terrain: Sandy Wastes
Frequency: Uncommon
Organization: Grouped
Activity Cycle: Any
Diet: Thermovore & Silicon
Intelligence: Semi(2)
Treasure: Nil
Alignment: Neutral
No. Appearing: 10-40
Armor Class: 10
Movement: 3
Hit Dice: 1hp per 10
THAC0: 20
No. of Attacks: 0
Damage/Attacks: 0
Special Attacks: Jump & Itchiness
Special Defenses: nil
Magic Resistance: nil
Size: T(1/2 inch long)
Morale: N/A
Level/XP Value: 1 per 100

Sand Lice are small blind grub-like insects which live off heat and silicon. They are a sandy color, with small black slits for the eyes and mouth. They are typically found in places of excess heat in the sandy wastes (like anywhere). They are a popular supply of food for many of the smaller creatures on Athas. Crodlu are particularly fond of the small critters.

Combat: They have no combat statistics, and are easily killed. As a side effect of their death, the fluids remaining cause skin irritation and a mild rash develops which is uncomfortable (incurs no penalties). Humans, Muls, Dwarfs, Elves and Half-Elves find the though of consuming these sickening, and if they do they are affected by a mild poison (save for no effects) which causes retching and stomach pains for 1d4 turns. Other creatures suffer no adverse affects from eating them. They are also able to jump up to 5' forwards which enables them to move about.

Climate: They are found in places of heat, being their primary source of energy. They also remain in the sandy wastes due to their coloration

Ecology: They eat silicon for trace elements and convert heat into energy (much like photosynthesis, except they use heat instead of light). They convert heat into energy which sustains their existence. The trace elements they consume through the silicon enables reproduction asexually and acts as a catalyst for converting the heat into energy. As a by-product, they leave a small trail of cyan colored semi-phosphorescent castings. This creates an eerie effect where a lot of the sand-lice are living.

Sand Parasite

By David Hasenoehrl

Name: Sand Parasite
Climate/Terrain: Desert
Frequency: Rare
Organization: None
Activity Cycle: Any
Diet: Blood, Water
Intelligence: Animal (1)
Treasure: Nil
Alignment: Neutral
No. Appearing: 1 - 10
Armor Class: Nil
Movement: 1

Hit Dice: 1hp
Thaco: Nil
No. of Attacks: Nil
Damage/Attack: Nil
Special Attacks: Nil
Special Defense: poison
Magic Resistance: Nil
Size: Variable
Level/XP Value: 10
Psionic Summary: Sense water and living flesh, 1 foot radius -- innate.

Sand Parasites look like sand. They are small animals with a shell which looks like a grain of sand. Because of the small size and weight of a Sand Parasite, a light wind will move them. If in contact with water or living flesh they will start eating and drinking and they will start growing. A Sand Parasite can grow to an size of 1/2 feet.

Combat: Because of their small size, they are not able to attack but it is very hard to see a living grain of sand in the desert. The big SP is also easily destroyed, but the water in his body is now poisoned and causes illness by everybody who drinks it.

Poison: Saving throw against poison * -2 ST and KO for 1D4 days
* -5 ST and KO for 1D10 days and the character needs the double ration of water until the effect is over

Habitat: A small Sand Parasite can move into any amount of water (e.g. hose, oases,..). They will drink water until fully grown. After that they will produce some eggs (1-10) inside their body and explode to set their eggs free (if there is enough water or blood for the next generation). After one day the eggs will open and there is a new small SandParasite. The water a Sand Parasite drinks will be poisoned inside his body and so it is sometimes possible that a whole oases is filled with poisoned water. If there is no more water or blood the big Sand Parasite can live over a month without drinking and he will shrink to the small form.

If a Sand Parasite is in contact with living flesh it will move under the skin and into the bloodstream and will start growing. If you destroy the Sand Parasite under your skin without extreme care it will explode and some of the poisoned fluid will come into your blood and you will suffer the effects.

Ecology: Some animals and monsters of Athas can drink/eat SP without suffering the ill-effect. Some Elven-tribes know a method to clean the water (without using priest-spells).

Singing Fire Snake

By Matthias Roschke

Name: Singing Fire Snake
Climate/Terrain: Arid, Rocky regions
Frequency: Rare
Organization: Solitary
Activity Cycle: Any (except midday)
Diet: Small animals (rodents, lizards, etc.)
Intelligence: Animal

Treasure: None
Alignment: Neutral
No. Appearing: 1 (except for in mating season)
Armor Class: 3
Movement: 6
Hit Dice: 1
THAC0: 18

No. of Attacks: 1
Damage/Attack: 1-2 (plus poison)
Special Attacks: Poison (20/death)
Special Defenses: None
Magic Resistance: Nil
Size: S (4' long)
Morale: N/A
XP Value: 100
Psionics: None

Every terrain, even the most harsh, has its share of creatures, which perfectly adapted to living there. The rocky badlands of Athas are no exception, and the singing fire snake is a perfect example of this. Like all fire snakes, it has a tough and brightly colored skin, which protects it from dehydration, and warns all would be predators to stay well away. Any predator ignoring this warning is unlikely to ever repeat this mistake. This remarkable creature has been blessed with an extraordinary palette of senses, including normal vision, infravision (60 feet), an acute sense of smell (through its snakes tongue), as well as excellent hearing and ability to sense minute vibrations in the ground. This allows the singing fire snake to hunt during night as well as by day. It is also nearly impossible to approach this snake without being noticed. The singing fire snake owes its name to the strange and hauntingly beautiful sound which it makes in order to attract a mate. This ability is unique among the snakes of Athas. Many myths and legends have grown over the years about this 'song of the badlands'.

Combat: The singing fire snake relies on its extremely well developed senses to detect any approaching danger. It is nearly impossible to take it by surprise. When danger approaches, it coils itself up and gets ready to strike at its opponent. A whistling sound, similar to its mating call, but far more threatening and less harmonic in nature serves as a final warning to the attacker. If the attack persists, it strikes at its opponent with its poisonous bite from up to 3 feet away. The fast acting poison can paralyze and kill most small or medium opponents within one round (it takes a little longer for larger opponents). Its quick movements, and relatively tough skin, makes the singing fire snake rather difficult to hit (see AC).

Habitat/Society: The singing fire snake is found mainly in the remote areas of the rocky badlands and the foothills of the ringing mountains. While quite capable of defending itself, it nevertheless avoids larger animals and humans. It is almost never found near places frequented by humans (or humanoids). The snakes do not seem to like the noises and smells associated with most humans. The singing fire snake lives a strictly solitary life, except during the mating season, when their songs can be heard from miles away. The mating and associated courtship rituals takes about 10 days, after which the female lays about 30 eggs, which must be well hidden under rocks and in cracks, in order to avoid detection. The couple then splits up again to resume their solitary life. The eggs and hatchlings are left to fend for themselves. If they survive (only about 1 in 10 does), they will be fully grown within a year.

Ecology: There are not many predators which will attack a fully grown fire snake, and get away with it. Notable exceptions are various birds of pray, which can surprise the snake by attacking from the air, and some highly specialized predators, who have developed an immunity to the poison (even the blood of the snakes is poisonous to most creatures - humans included). The eggs, hatchlings and young snakes on the other hand, are a welcome meal (or snack) for many. They are almost completely defenseless, as they do not develop their poison (or their distinctive coloring) until about half a year after hatching. The skin of the snakes is highly prized, because of its beauty and coloring. It is also possible to enchant the skin with certain fire retardant spells. The blood and poison sacs of the snakes are used by various elf tribes to produce a fast acting and lethal poison, with which they enhance their weapons.

While the singing fire snakes generally avoid humans, a few hermits have been known to keep them around their huts (or caves, tents). They make superb guardians, ensuring privacy by discouraging uninvited guests.

Zyhon'o

By Jose Felix (creature previously called "Road Kill")

Name: Zyhon'o
Climate/Terrain: Tablelands and hinterland
Frequency: rare
Organization: pack
Activity Cycle: day
Diet: Carnivore (special)
Intelligence: semi (2)
Treasure: nil
Alignment: neutral
No. Appearing: 9-12 (1d4 + 8)
Armor Class: 6
Movement: 15
Hit Dice: 4 + 2
Thac0: 17
No of Attacks: 3
Damage/Attack: 1d8/1d3/1d3
Special Attacks: Surprise, neck breaker.
Special Defenses: Play dead
Magic Resistance: nil
Size: Medium (5' long)
Morale: Steady (11-12)
Level/XP Value: ?
Psionics: attraction (special maintenance, special target)
MAC: 6, Mthac0:15, PsP's:30

The Zyhon'o is a hyena-like creature which feeds on necrophagous animals, mainly vulture types. It tricks the target into thinking that it is dead, by laying by the ground and secreting a fluid (from skin glands) which resembles and smells like blood. This fluid comes out of the body only when the Zyhon'o "hunts". It has developed a symbiotic relation with a type of desert flies. The flies feed on some of the fluid (which is a little more nutritive than common blood) and their very presence is a benefit to the Zyhon'o. It makes their act more believable to mammals, especially intelligent ones. They are very much like hyenas in aspect and their hierarchy is based on the same concept (matriarch rules the pack) but are larger and dirtier. Their skin isn't spotted like that of most hyenas but rather is a dirty brown.

Combat: The Zyhon'o are almost always found in numbers of one, but an experienced Zyhon'o will tell you that where you find one Zyhon'o, you can always be sure you'll find more. They stand in wait lying on the ground apparently bleeding and producing no sound. They breathe but it is very discreet: only in an actual attempt to see if the creature is breathing will it be shown, and, even then, a surprise roll is needed to see the Zyhon'o breathing. When some creature gets close enough to the Zyhon'o it immediately attacks with a +2 bonus to surprise the opponent. If the opponent is surprised, the Zyhon'o attempts to grab on to its neck. It can grab the victim's neck if the attack roll was 2 numbers above what it needed (already modified) for birdlike creatures (except giant-sized and above) and 5 numbers above what it needed for humanoid creatures (except large and above. If it fails the Neck Breaker attack but still scores a hit it causes no damage. If it scores the Neck Breaker it does 2d8 of damage in the first round and 1d8 per round thereafter unless the victim breaks loose of the grip (requiring a successful dexterity roll. After this surprise it uses the standard attacks: one byte for 1d8 and two claws for 1d3 each. If the Zyhon'o is loosing a fight (when it reaches half its normal hit points) it starts a low bellowing to call it's pack mates which are nearby "hunting". The second round after which the bellowing started there will appear in the scene half the original pack. On the next round, half the half and so on until all the pack is in the scene of attack. They will attack whoever is attacking their mate, even if it's already dead (they can tell).

Habitat/Society: Zyhon'o are a rare species because their play dead ability was only recently developed through mutation (maybe a direct consequence of the Pristine Tower). They live on the Tablelands and Hinterlands but prefer places where they can hide from themselves such as rocky badlands or stony barrens so as to be isolated from the group for the kill. Their pack is run by a female Zyhon'o which has maximum hit points. However, each Zyhon'o eats what it catches, being the only exception if the matriarch or its female children are hungry in which case the matriarch "steals" from some other Zyhon'o. They are a tight group and behave a little like hyenas in matters of mating, etc.

Ecology: Being a new introduction to the cycle of life and death, it is destined to wreak a little havoc at arrival but also to settle down the population of necrophagous birds and mammals which are so numerous in some places that they (the necrophagous) often die of hunger. It has no marketable products so far since the stench of death seems to continue in their hide even after several washes (and several washes is something most people cannot afford). However, their blood-like fluid has been use by some wizards as components of some illusions and can replace blood as a material component but with only a 25% chance of actually working.

Notes on Other Possible Athasian Creatures

By Dark Sun List Members

Athasian Locusts

The Athasian Locust is an example of an insect that could be widespread in Athas, providing a food source for larger creatures as well as for humans and other sentient races.

Darknight noted that the Northern African agriculture reacts around insects because of locusts as they destroy entire fields in a matter of hours. The people of those areas have developed a way to deal with these nasty creatures: they eat them. Locusts are highly nourishing and they seem to be quite tasty once you are familiar with the strange taste. Also, other kinds of insects exist like the termites and ants (they survive anywhere) that can add nutrition to a desert dweller's diet.

Felix added that the people around Lake Victoria in Africa have developed a straw-made net (not exactly a net, because it has no holes, its sort of a concave surface) which is attached to a long pole. When a swarm of flying insects (I don't remember what species) comes from the lake from where they grew and turned into adults, they swirl these nets in the air and the insects just smash against it. In the end, they cannot pick different insects form their nets as the insects are all sort of blend together in a paste. Then these people actually make cakes from this paste, which can be eaten raw but is normally cooked (or fried or grilled, I don't remember). I think most of the crops don't survive even with the people's eating. There are too many bugs and very few people. Still, the locusts supplant their diet, and locust numbers vary yearly, so some years crops survive with only minor damage, and in other years harvest must take place earlier to minimize damage. Athasian villages might trade locust cakes to other villages that were less affected, gaining traditional produce in return. Brax remarked that a typical village scene during these times of the year might include children of the village running around with little nets all day catching insects for supper!

Mosquitoes

Many of the notorious insects on Earth could serve as the basis of even more notorious creatures on Athas. The blood-sucking mosquito could be a lot of fun in

the Athasian setting, and it could be expected that a similar creature would exist on Athas. Certainly, with moisture being so important, one could expect that blood would be a desired food source. This type of insect might be one of the most likely to survive evolution and the Pristine Tower, since it sucks blood. You might see hordes of them around cities, where the people are hemmed in like cattle.

As Andy (freemen Standov) pointed out, Earth mosquitoes need water, since they lay their eggs in water. The Pristine Tower, however, could have evolved mosquitoes that lay eggs under the soil, where temperatures are not so harsh. One list member had PCs face mosquitoes in the Crescent Forest. He used the stats for a Stirge, with minor visual modifications. The players very scared of the creatures!

Of course, DMs always have to be careful when transplanting Earth ecology into Athas. If not done well, players can find the monsters ill-conceived or humorous. DMs can't simply bring every interesting creature from Earth to Athas, because the Athasian ecology is different. The best recourse is that the players will not recognize the inspiration behind a creature you bring to Athas from real life. The moment a player says "So, this creature is basically a giant mosquito," you no longer have their imagination and you have failed to make Athas unique. With mosquitoes, the Athasian version might be larger, with a chitonous shell, get its moisture solely from the creatures it attacks, lay its eggs in hosts, have no wings and move by levitation. Alternately, they might be attracted to blood, living dormant until they smell blood, then crawling from the desert sands (no wings) to climb up a creatures legs, drink blood, and lay eggs. The eggs might consume the host, kind of like rot grub.

Chameleon Lizards

Chameleons are known for firing their tongues at insects to snatch them off a leaf, and scientists recently discovered a salamander that can inspire a new kind of attack for Dark Sun monsters. This salamander uses its long tongue much like a chameleon, but it actually "fires" its tongue into its prey. The tongue's skeleton completely leaves the body like a little harpoon, still attached via the tissue of the tongue. The bone spears the prey, and the tongue's elasticity then snaps the prey back towards the salamander's mouth. The tongue tip has a sticky pad, just like a chameleon, to immobilize the prey until it can be brought into the mouth.

Chapter 5

Resources

Web Resources

By Teos Abadia

Never Consider our current level of wealth to be sufficient. Seek out more resources for your King and you will in turn be rewarded with greater personal wealth.

-Giltram's Textbook, Chapter One, taken from the body of an instructor of Urikite Templars.

In creating this Netbook, the authors have at times traveled the Web searching for resources on Deserts, Ecology, and Athas. This section lists some of the sites that contain valuable information, images, and links on subjects relevant to this Libram. As with any media source, the information on these sites may contain inaccuracies, and is copyrighted by the author(s).

- Desert USA: http://www.desertusa.com "The ultimate desert resource", with nice graphics and a professional feel. The site is very informative and well organized. Coverage of animals and plants is great, and has monthly features on plants and animals, explaining how they adapted to the desert. The site explains a lot of the concepts this Netbook touched on, such as strategies animals and plants use to avoid water loss.

- Mojave: http://www.gis.uiuc.edu/mojave/mojave_baa/mojave.html which has some GIS maps of landscape over the Mojave desert. A lot of the maps show a surprising amount of plant coverage. You might want to take a look at some of the maps and use these kinds of landscape distributions in your game. That is actually a good idea, to show different types of dominant plants (and different soil/sand types) as a party travels through the wastes.

- Desert Landscape: http://www.well.com/user/schweich/md2/mdj.htm has more information, and lists a plant coverage of about 25% for this desert. I would imagine that the scrub plains of Athas could have this much vegetation. The party still won't find water, and food won't be easy to find either (no fruit except perhaps on some plants after a rain), but there could be herbivores and predators.

- The Unofficial Dark Sun Pages: http://www.bright.net/~bicycles/athas.html has a list of every plant ever mentioned in a Dark Sun novel. Each listing includes a description of the plant, including size, coloring, and practical uses. Excellent for adding a little realism to your Dark Sun campaign. Site maintained by Tom Slattery.

- Dark Sun Net Projects http://www.xs4all.nl/~jjp/index.html This site contains the various net-driven projects concerning the world of Athas.

- Dark Sun Web Ring http://www.bright.net/~bicycles/webring.html By traveling the Web Ring, visitors can gain access to a wealth of information about Dark Sun, and find extensive net material and links to other sites.