

INTRODUCTION: ANAUROCH, THE GREAT DESERT

When we learned their aims, it was too late. We could not strike down what had been done without laying waste to all Toril. Too high a price, we judged—and left them the harsh sands they had created. But for humans, memory is a failing thing, and today we see a savage desert that makes men as cruel and keen-sharp as swordblades, or leaves their bones to bleach in the sun. Not even legends remember fair Netheril as it truly was; folk think of us as decadent, idle, wholly evil necromancers.

I wonder how much else of the history we hold to be true is twisted thus?

—Rhaugilath “the Ageless,”
Lich-King of Orbedal
Of the Fall of Netheril

To folk in the Realms today, Anauroch (pronounced “An-OAR-ock-hil”) is a fierce, unconquerable desert, a vast, sundering shield between the Sword Coast North and the Moonsea North. It forces trade and travel into long, torturous overland routes between the westernmost ports on the Sea of Fallen Stars (chiefly Westgate, Suzail, and Teziir) to Amn, Baldur’s Gate, and Waterdeep, mostly by way of Iriaebor and the River Chionthar.

These strategic places are enriched by the endless stream of caravans, but merchants have always sought shorter, cheaper routes, often braving the “flat” but harsh Great Desert.

Always? Not so, say the sages: little more than five hundred years ago, Anauroch held little sand, and several verdant, wealthy human realms—with lakes and merchant ships of their own. At least one of these lands, Netheril, was then the height of human achievement in magic and the arts.

What happened to so suddenly and thoroughly sweep all this away? DMs will find the answer in “The Secret of Anauroch” chapter; players perusing these pages should resist the beckoning temptation to peek at it, so as to fully enjoy the perils that lurk in Anauroch—

and even reach out to those who sneak along the Desert’s edge.

Most folk of Faerûn see Anauroch as a scorching waste of sand, “The Wall That Near Divides The Heartlands,” a good place never to go near. (What can be found in a barren desert, to be worth the dangers of the trip?)

Most folk, as is often the case, are wrong. The first things Elminster said of Anauroch was that it is not a natural desert, and is not all hot sands. Anauroch today is three deserts: the hot, sandy place most imagine it all to be, called “the Sword” by sages because of the fierce human Bedine nomads who dwell there; a higher, wind-scoured land of bare rock, called “the Plain of Standing Stones,” though very little of it is a flat plain; and in the north, a vast, rift-scored ice sheet overlying bedrock, known as “the High Ice.” These three areas were once very different. All held proud, rich cities of elves, men, dwarves, and others; cities that may still stand, buried or merely hidden by the vast desolation, their riches waiting. Elminster says Anauroch is “the largest—and probably wealthiest—treasure-house in all Toril.” Even those who agree can show few treasures recovered from it, but when this was pointed out, Elminster merely shrugged and held up an ornate, hand-sized carving of a spired castle. Strolling to the door of his ramshackle tower, he tossed it into the air, whispered a secret word—and in the meadow beyond his pool, a huge castle of black obsidian suddenly stood, tall and splendid and very real.

“When too many guests come calling to sleep here,” the Old Mage of Shadowdale said mildly, “I always have this; one of the least powerful magics of the Netherese, but the only one I’ve found in Anauroch. I haven’t much time to go wandering about there; mind—this was just lying on a table, in an old house half-buried in sand. Where?” He smiled, and waved northwards. “Oh—just out there.” This book explores all three regions of Anauroch, for those who want to go “just out there.”



A WHIRLWIND TOUR OF ANAUROCH

The accompanying map provides a quick overview of Anauroch. Folk of Faerun have a tendency to think of the Great Desert simply as an empty but impassable place—and explorers interested in it may hear lots of wild tales about its dangers, but will find almost nothing in the way of hard information about an area that is at least as big as the Inner Sea. Hence this guide. At a glance, one can see that Anauroch has been divided into three regions: the Sword, the Plain of Standing Stones, and the High Ice.

These vast areas (which are admittedly artificial divisions, made by human sages for their own convenience) vary widely in their dangers and character, and are detailed in separate chapters of this sourcebook. Their characteristics are summarized here.

The Sword

The southernmost band of Anauroch is a desert of sand dunes, scorching hot by day, and icy cold at night. Its winters are as harsh as those of the other lands in the North—but in summer, it is a land of killing heat. The most populous part of Anauroch, it is the area most visited by outsiders (usually human merchants trying to find a shorter trade route from the Moonsea cities to the Sword Coast lands, or adventurers seeking the lost riches of long-buried kingdoms). To them, the hot sands resemble the Dust Desert of Raurin, and other, more southerly deserts of the Realms—and because all most folk elsewhere in the Realms know of Anauroch is what such travelers tell of it, most in the Realms think Anauroch is all one Great Sand Sea.

This sandy region is certainly the area of most interest to outsiders—partly for its strategic importance (to those seeking a trade route, or a way past a certain realm, or an invasion route into a land), and partly because of The Lost Kingdoms that lie beneath it, whose buried ruins are widely believed to hold great riches and magic. (Something of the

present-day truth of these fallen realms is explored in the chapter entitled "The Lost Kingdoms.")

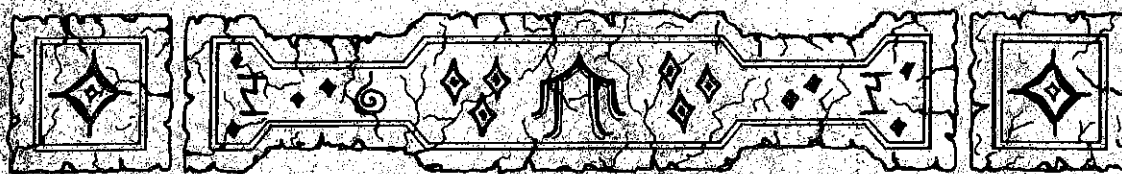
One might expect, given the ready supply of slaves employed by the goblin races and some human peoples, that The Sand Sea would have been dug up into a succession of mounds of sand between huge quarry pits, long ago, searching for this lost wealth.

Almost every year, some daring adventurers do venture into the sands to seek their fortunes—but large-scale mining has never succeeded.

It fails underground because dwarves and others who try to enter by underground ways are never heard from again. Something (or a lot of somethings) slays them. The tunnels known to exist are ancient ways, and come up in the fiercely-defended elven hold of Evereska, the mountains of Tethyamar, and at various hidden places in the Stonelands.

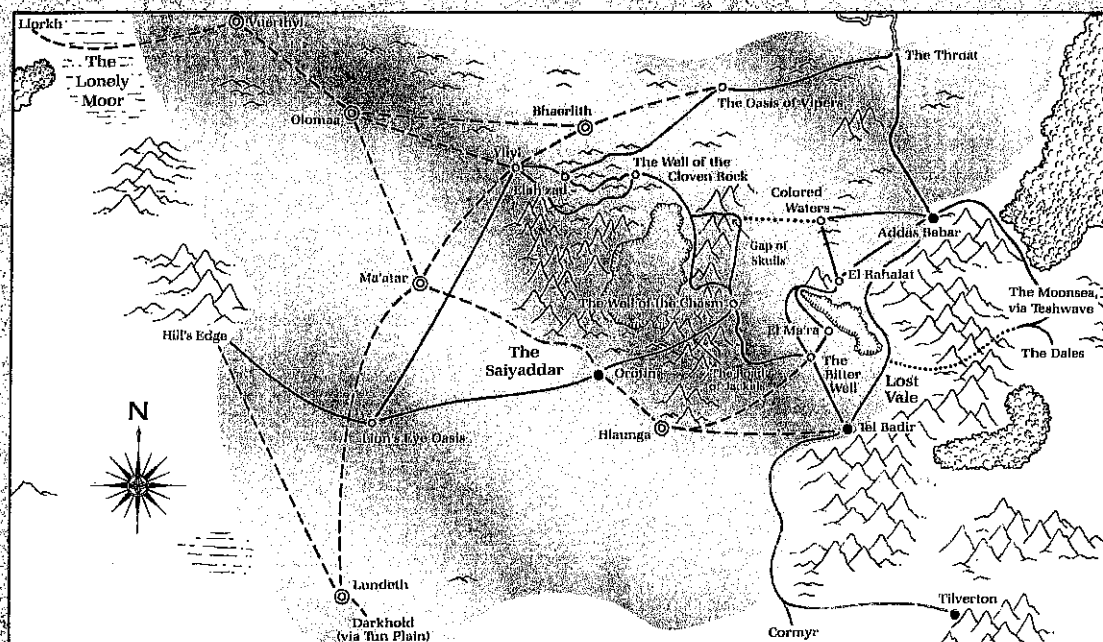
It fails on or above the surface for two reasons: the harsh conditions (both the elements and monsters); the mountains that ring Anauroch are home to many wyverns and dragons, who customarily hunt for prey over the sands), and the Bedine.

The Bedine (described later in this book) are fierce, nomadic human tribes. Although they fear "sorcery," some among them are masters of desert magic, and their fearlessness, warlike nature, and expert knowledge of the desert make them deadly foes, in Anauroch. It is their ways (raiding both each other and any outsiders who venture into the sands they roam) that have given the sandy southernmost region of Anauroch its colloquial name: "The Sword." The Sword stretches from the midst of The Lonely Moor in the west to the northern end of the Border Forest in the east, and from west to south to east (ignoring mountain ranges and the broken Desertsedge borderlands) borders on the Sword Coast "backlands" (once the dwarven realm of Delzoun, in the north, and the human realm of Netheril, south of that), the elven fortress-realm of Evereska,



Trade Routes of Anauroch

- Oasis
- ⊙ Zhentarim-Controlled Oasis
- Caravan Route
- - - "Zhentarim Only" Caravan Route



and areas that once made up the dwarven realm of Oghirann, the human settlements of the River Reaching Highlands, the Zhentarim-controlled Sunset Mountains area, and the nomad-roamed Tun Plain.

Then it touches on the kingdom of Cormyr (through the Goblin Marches and the Stonelands, which Cormyr has always claimed but never really ruled), the independent Dalelands (including Lost Vale, the ruins of now-vanished Tarkhaldale), the long-vanished dwarven realm of Tethyamar (now peaks roamed by goblins, orcs, and bugbears), and the Border Forest. The Goblin Marches is an ill-defined area of crags, drumlins, and bogs, cloaked with many thorny thickets—and home to goblins, orcs, and kobolds.

It lies below the heights of the Stonelands, which is a broken region of pine forests, ridges, tors, and tangled ravines that surrounds the Stormhorns mountain range, and runs east of it almost as far as Shadow Gap.

Most merchants reach the dwellers in the desert by means of a narrow, long-dry river valley that divides the broken heights of the Stonelands from Alauthwaerd, "the Watcher," southernmost peak of the Desertsouth Mountains. This valley, Raudilauth (which means "Desertdoor" in an ancient tongue; the language and its speakers are forgotten, but the meaning has survived) links the overland trade road through Shadow Gap with the lands of the D'tarig (a race described in the "Other Peoples of Anauroch" chapter).



Let us see the Sword briefly through Bedine eyes. The Bedine know that the sand sea where they live is vast indeed—and although a hard land, it is alive. Many plants, insects, birds, and animals live on or burrow under the endless dunes—and there is a dark, dangerous world lurking below: the catacombs of the Buried Ones. The meager pastures of Anauroch support few men and camels: in a year of riding from pasture to pasture, a Bedine tribe might meet as many as two other tribes. In this harsh land, such meetings are seldom friendly.

Most Bedine know that the desert gives way to a wind-scoured land of barren rock on all sides. In some direction—probably to the south—this must give way to areas settled by men, for occasionally non-Bedine “paleskins” or “bonehide” men come into the desert. These intruders (most Bedine use the term “outlanders”) seldom live long.

The Desertsedge

In actuality, the edges of the Sword rise into rocky foothills, dotted with scrub plants and marked by caves, breakneck ravines carved out by small, rushing streams (that plunge down into the desert, where they soon vanish, drunk down by the thirsty sands). This uneasy border area is lashed by winds and frequent storms (where hot and cold air clash), and roamed by many fearsome monsters. It is known as the Desertsedge (or “Desert’s Edge,” depending on the cartographer), and aside from temperature, varies little from the northern and easternmost explored mountains of the Sword Coast lands, to the infamous Stonelands, to The Glittering Snows.

The Plain of Standing Stones

The middling region of Anauroch begins where the sands of Anauroch give way to bare rock, and rises in a plateau—a plateau broken

by so many rifts, and sculpted into so many spires, and fantastic crags that its name of “plain” is a bitter travelers’ joke.

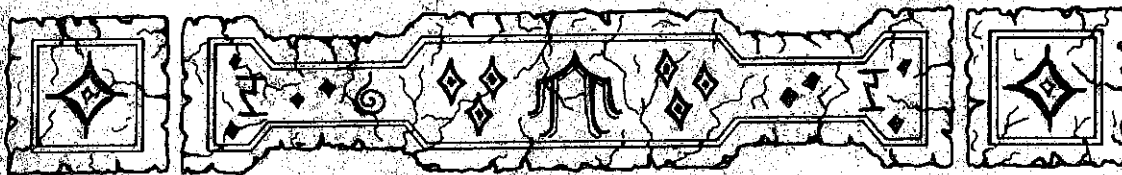
The “Plain” is considered to end where the ice begins: the icy cliffs that are the southernmost edge of the massive glacial ice sheets that make up the High Ice.

This wind-lashed, cold, rocky region is known for its mineral wealth and many monsters. Comparatively few folk know that it also holds hidden valleys, many of which have water, rich meadows, and even support large wild herds of crag sheep. The outlaws, dwarven bands, human and hobgoblin barbarian tribes, and ogre, hill giant, and verbeeg groups who dwell here don’t welcome intruders—except as food or victims.

The Plain is bordered on the west by the “Frozen Sea” (discussed in the chapter on “The High Ice” in this book), which runs down the Desertsedge as far as the northern Lonely Moor. On the eastern side of Anauroch, there is no real boundary between it and the Tortured Land—except that the latter holds far more moisture, and with it both wind-sculpted ice and many more plants. Where the plants end and bare rock begins, going west, travelers consider Anauroch to have begun. Few stay long enough to map or even get a good look at the border area; it is a cold and savage wilderness of marauding monsters.

The High Ice

Least known of the three regions of Anauroch, this glacial wilderness has no known (as yet) northern border—it is said to stretch on forever. Although a traveler would search in vain for trees, there is a surprising amount of life here, growing scant inches upwards from the ice and rock. Here yeti, remorhaz, white dragons, and other chill horrors reign over a frigid land that few humans have ever seen—and fewer want to.



THE SECRET OF ANAUROCH

The name "Anauroch" once meant just what is now called the High Ice: a rift-scarred glacial ice sheet, that gave way (as one traveled south) to rocky uplands where many wild sheep roamed, and thence to thick forests where stags reigned and dryads dwelt. Those uplands, now scoured to bare rock, are known today as the Plain of Standing Stones.

South of them were rich, verdant human kingdoms and independent cities—small, but governed by long years of peace and plenty, and bustling with trade. These, whose very names are forgotten by most in the Realms today, are the Lost Kingdoms (and are described in the chapter of that name, later in these pages).

That was less than five hundred years ago—but since then, the meadows and forests of the wild uplands have been swept away, and the woods, farms, lakes and cities of the Lost Kingdoms all buried in the howling sands of the Sword.

Impossible, sages who know little of magic might say—and have. No desert comes out of nowhere, to cover so much of Faerun, so fast.

True enough; no *natural* desert grows so large, so quickly. A magical change, however, can be as sudden and violent as its maker has the power and will to cause.

The Phaerimm

In caverns under the rich human kingdoms, in an area of the Underdark known as the Phaerlin, dwelt a race of ancient, fell beings who had long worked at mastering magic to defend themselves against the predators of the Realms Below. This race, known as the Phaerimm (they are fully detailed in an entry in the "Monsters of Anauroch" chapter of this book), are foul and dangerous to human eyes, but they work magic as dragons do, and in aggressiveness and intelligence are not very different from humans.

The Phaerimm thought of the area as their own realm, and ignored those who dwelt on

the surface (in which they had little interest). That changed when the human residents of one of those surface territories rose suddenly in magical strength, to challenge (however unwittingly) the power of the Phaerimm. Phaerimm magics were interfered with, or destroyed. Magic (in the hands of the human wizards of Netheril) was used to slay encountered Phaerimm "monsters" as the humans began to explore, mine, and alter the underways, seeking gems and metal ores.

They found death. The most powerful Phaerimm worked together to develop a mighty spell that would destroy the things that humans lived on: the *lifedrain*.

The Lifedrain

This spell was cast, and cast again, by brave Phaerimm venturing onto the surface by night, over all the lands of men that menaced the realm of the Phaerimm. Once it was set in motion, the Phaerimm hurled themselves into a spellwar, attacking Netherese wizards, trying to steal or destroy their spellbooks, and trying above all to disrupt their researches, thin their ranks, and keep them too busy fighting to have time enough to learn the secrets of the mightiest Phaerimm spell—or to have time to act against it.

The Phaerimm prevailed. As the well-protected Phaerimm struck magically at each Netherese wizard and every simple everyday magic practiced by the Netherese, and the realm erupted in ceaseless chaos, the drying effects of thousands of *lifedrain* spells spread. Castles were made uninhabitable by bold Phaerimm casting the spells within their walls—and the folk of Netheril who could not work magic were slaughtered and terrorized by the score in the magical fray. The Phaerimm did not care what happened to the surface, and lashed out with spells or laid them in waiting as traps, freely.

The bewildered Netherese fought back—but they had become a decadent, refined, wealthy



race of self-interested, independent individuals, with interests all over Faerun, and all too little time to spare for anything save what they chose to spend it on. The Netherese had lost the need to stand and fight together, and were given no time to regain it. As the magical onslaught continued, the desolation of the *liferain* spells continued, driving folk from their homes and farms. Dust storms lashed Netheril for the first time, and displaced beasts of all sorts, from harmless scurrying things to dangerous monsters, roamed the land that was left desperate and bewildered, quick to lash out at the disorganized humans.

The Netherese began to flee. First the common folk, with no leadership or salvation from the wizards in sight, little food and water, and the land risen against them, fled with what they could carry, south and west, to Amn, the Sword Coast, Iriabon, Cormyr, and the cities all about the Sea of Fallen Stars.

Then the mages left, deserted by those who fed them and provided for their needs, and in most cases intent on their own researches and aims over everything else. They scattered all over the known North, settling alone in a thousand remote valleys and hidden fastnesses. Large bands of them flew far to the south in the magical flying ships devised a decade earlier, to found the wizards' realm of Halrua.

The desolation continued; east of Netheril, a desert formed as the Narrow Sea dried up, and winds carried away the dried-out soil. This devastation was viewed with alarm by the elves of Evereska and the Elven Court, who—like the Netherese wizards before them—could find no way to check the advance of the spreading desert.

After this foul magic destroyed the land's flora and fauna, and stripped it of the ability to retain water and grow new things, the winds and the harsh climate did the rest, creating the Great Sand Sea we know now.

The Sharn Act

Fortunately for all surface life on Faerun, the Phaerimm were not the only magically powerful race who dwelt in the North. To the west of Phaerimm territory, across a vastness of "wild" Underdark, were the tunnels claimed then by the Sharn (from about Secomber to the Sword Coast, in a narrow region centered on the channel of the lower Delimbiyr, reaching about as far north as Sarcrag). A mysterious, whimsical spellicasting race, the Sharn are sometimes encountered in the great dungeon of Undermountain today, and are detailed in their own *Monstrous Compendium* entry in *The Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set.

Most Sharn only dabble in magic; beyond personal abilities (detailed in their monster entry), they command only what magic they can seize in the form of items, potions, and scrolls. A few Sharn, however, study magic, and these can rise to rival the most powerful human wizards in magical might.

Elminster warns that Sharn wizards avoid human contact, and should not be pursued if they are inadvertently discovered. In game terms, most range in power from about the strength of a 19th level wizard to a match for a 26th level mage; most employ magics not known to humans, and some seem able to cast two separate spells in a round! It is certain, however, that the magical efforts of certain Sharn, five hundred years ago, saved Faerun for all surface-dwellers—and that the Sharn have made no move to rule or even influence what they saved since. The Sharn wizards checked the advance of the Phaerimm-invoked devastation with newly devised, awesomely powerful spells of their own.

These unidentified spells halted the advance of *liferain* spells, and somehow confined the Phaerimm within the area they had already devastated. The Sharn took no further interest in the Phaerimm, and windswept, desolate Anauroch today remains the prison of this proud, terrible race.



The Phaerimm, Now

Like all caged beasts, the Phaerimm want out of their underground prison. They are working tirelessly to overcome the Sharn spells that bind them in a certain area of the Underdark, using magically-influenced agents (laertis, Zhentarim who foolishly venture into their reach, and far worse creatures) to reach out beyond their prison. These agents seek out and bring back whatever magic they can seize, and spread rumors of rich treasure, to attract humans to Anauroch. The Phaerimm await the prey that their agents send—waiting to devour, enslave, and interrogate, in hopes of learning ways to defeat the Sharn magic.

More details of current Phaerimm life, aims, and affairs are given in a later chapter of this book, "The Phaerimm."

Restoring Anauroch

Beings who want to destroy the desert conditions of Anauroch will find that even the most powerful spells will not prevail against *life-drain* effects until the Phaerimm are gone. Even then, expunging those deadly magics will necessitate great amounts of magical power (perhaps involving the sacrifice of mortal wizards' lives, magical items and artifacts, and perhaps even divine aid).

The result will be large "magic-dead" areas, their effects as described in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures* sourcebook. They will make restoration of living things all the more slow and backbreaking: water, grasses, and all must be brought in by hand, with weather magic (to bring rains and stop soil-blowing winds) available only on the borders. Decades—even centuries—of work will be needed to make the desert only a memory.



THE PHAERIMM

These sinister beings (detailed in the "Monsters of Anauroch" chapter) are the present rulers of the Buried Realms, and the creators of Anauroch as we know it today. Their mind-controlling spells hold even illithids in thrall, and influence—in a subtle but all-pervasive rule—all creatures beneath Anauroch. PCs in the Buried Realms must make Intelligence Checks at least once per turn, or fall under a Phaerimm *charm* or *suggestion*.

Through controlled minds, the Phaerimm rule an entire nation of beholders who think themselves independent, dwelling in several ruined cities of the Anaurian Underdark. The beholders are mighty, employing Death Tyrants (undead beholders) and orc, hobgoblin, and xorn slaves of their own, as they mine for wealth and scheme to expand their realms southward and up to the surface world. They are, however, loosely ruled by an Elder Orb (a spellcasting beholder of great powers; its type is detailed in *The Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set)—and that Orb, Bilalhdool, is the pawn of the Phaerimm.

So the Phaerimm rule—haughty, scheming always among themselves, but keeping behind a screen of mind-controlled slaves from mind flayers to giants, goblinoid of all sorts to humans. Ever they vie with each other for supremacy in non-violent, subtle confrontations of brinkmanship, one Phaerimm demonstrating the superiority of its strategy, forethought, and influence over that of another, and even they seek to break the spell-bonds the Sharn have placed on them, and expand their influence over more and more of Faerun. Where the Phaerimm cannot (yet) go, their agents can reach. What agents? The Phaerimm are busily subverting the Red Wizards of Thay, any adventurers who come within reach (i.e., into Anauroch), and the Zhentarim who have intruded into Anauroch, too. Even Elminster must tread warily around these titans of magic and intrigue; he can tell us little of the spells they have developed.

Phaerimm enjoy magic, and exult in wielding its unleashed power. They are fascinated by new spells and effects, and admire those who show genius in the mastery and devising of magic: such as Phaerl, "The First." Phaerl perished in the War Against the Sharn, but Phaerimm still venerate his memory, and obey Phaerl's one-time colleague, Ooumraun "The Seeker," a ancient, huge, wrinkled Phaerimm who developed many of the Phaerimm spells (and, it is whispered, others of awesome power not yet revealed to fellow Phaerimm, with which Ooumraun has defended itself against the challenges and treacheries of ambitious Phaerimm over the years).

Although Phaerimm memorize spells much as human wizards do, they cast spells by effort of will alone, and can also adopt a single spell of each level as "natural." The spell (which cannot be changed, once chosen) is retained in their brain structure. Phaerimm regain "natural" spells without study, every day. Phaerimm are true masters of magic; some sages believe that their meddling may have created most of the magic-using monsters that menace the Realms today (including, perhaps, the beholder races!). Even the least experienced and powerful Phaerimm are capable of developing strange and terrifying new magics (providing DMs ideal opportunities for testing or introducing new spells into a campaign), and the veterans of the race know or can anticipate every nuance and side-effect of magic they observe being wielded. No elder Phaerimm will be caught unawares by a spell's range, precise effects, the results of its combination with other magics, or the like; but Phaerimm may be slow to unleash magic at intruders, for fear of playing into the plans of a rival Phaerimm.

The moisture-drinking magics of the Phaerimm that created the wastes of Anauroch hold sway over the surface, but rarely stray into the depths beneath.



THE ZHENTARIM IN ANAUROCH

The most violent, persistent, and numerous group of outlanders active in Anauroch today are the Zhentarim: the evil cabal of wizards and priests who have long ruled Zhentil Keep, and have spread their influence and rule over much of the North. The strength of the Zhentarim is their magic, but one can't eat a spell, or use it (often) to buy things. The wealth of the Zhentarim comes from the caravan-trade they control, carrying valuable goods of all kinds (including stolen goods, slaves, and other illegal, high-priced wares) from place to place.

The Zhentarim merchant reputation is built on their no-questions-asked practices of handling goods (even kidnap victims or stolen temple gold), of using magic and strong armored forces to guard their caravans, and always getting cargo through regardless of the perils of the road. The 'Black Robes' try to get goods where they're going faster than everyone else, and to do this, they have set about sabotaging competitors (an ongoing campaign of local vandalism, murder, and arson spread all over the Realms) and establishing strategic trade routes under their own control.

The major route planned by the Zhentarim links the Moonsea (from the city of Zhentil Keep) with the Sword Coast, running just south of Anauroch. The map on page 30 shows the ways in which Zhent goods move, and future Zhentarim plans for caravan travel. Through the years, these plans have involved the Zhentarim in battles with Hillsfar (to control Yulash and to lessen Hillsfar's importance as a rival trade-center), and with orcs and brigands throughout the North. There have also been skirmishes with Cormyr (who annexed Tilverton to avoid having Zhentil Keep openly seize it), Shadowdale (which continues to resist Zhent efforts to conquer it, thanks to Elminster, Storm Silverhand and other Harpers, and The Knights of Myth Drannor), and Daggerdale. Local folk in the Corm Orp area, Hill's Edge, Llorkh, Loudwater, and the Dragonspear Castle area are also experienced

Zhent-fighters

The Zhentarim continue to be enriched by trade with the drow (whose tunnels come to the surface near Shadowdale; only Thay and certain folk in decadent Mulhorand seem willing to compete with the Zhents in trading openly with the dark elves), but must spend a lot of money to maintain their present route, thanks to the aggressions of goblinoid and human brigands in the Stonelands, Cormyrean patrols, and the resistance of locals all along the chosen way. Darkhold, for instance (detailed in the *Castles* boxed game accessory), exists entirely to protect the trade route; there are many smaller cave strongholds protecting Yellow Snake Pass, that collectively cost more than Darkhold does to staff and provision.

To pile up gold pieces in numbers they love and foresee, over the long run, the Zhentarim need to establish a secure route that is shorter and safer than the present one; one that is less vulnerable to the whims and aggressions of strong nearby realms like Cormyr. Zhent agents work tirelessly to foment unrest in Sembia, Cormyr, the Dale's, Hill's Edge, Iriaebor, and strategic Sword Coast communities, both to keep these places busy with their own troubles (and therefore unable to spare the time or arms to menace passing Zhent caravans), and to keep the present route profitable. This is not enough, according to the Zhentarim leaders: a shorter route must be found. That means crossing Anauroch.

The Zhentarim have been trying to do just that for more than twenty winters now, with (so far) decidedly limited success. They haven't stopped trying, however, and a player character who ventures into Anauroch today will almost certainly encounter Zhentarim agents, and (hostile to everyone else) Zhentarim activity.

The Zhentarim face the same harsh, forbidding conditions in Anauroch that have stopped everyone else from using it as a fast traveling route before the Zhents came along. At first, the Zhentarim assumed that they could neu-



tralize these perils with magic or use magic to avoid them, by flying over the desert, or digging a route underneath it.

They failed. Both the skies above Anauroch and the depths beneath its sands are home to magic so strong and complex that the Zhentarim have not yet managed to overcome it (and may never do so). The reasons for this can be found in the chapters on "The Phae-rimm" and "The Secret of Anauroch." These magics continue to thwart Zhent agents, and in some cases subvert the minds of agents to make them unwittingly work against Zhent plans.

The only part of Anauroch useful for a shorter trade route is the Sword. The Stonelands, the Plain of Standing Stones, and the High Ice are all broken terrain, full of barriers—and with hostile aerial creatures ready to disrupt any regular trade that tries to fly over the natural barriers.

The Zhentarim tried establishing bases in the hidden valleys of the Plain, and flying caravans across. Each and every trip, once their attempts became regular, was imperilled by a gauntlet of wyverns and dragons that actually lined up in midair to await the intruders. Blasting a way through the skies with spells proved too costly in wizards (the Zhentarim are hated throughout the North; to survive at all, they need many healthy wizards active on the ground) for the Zhents to continue it—and a few forays over the Stonelands brought forth both an aerial Cormyrean cavalry, and a number of independent menaces (including flying Harpers, and dracoliches from the Thunder Peaks, alerted by the rival Cult of the Dragon) to endanger the air-way.

So, summing up the costs in magic, personnel, and supplies of all these longer detours by air or over the more northerly parts of Anauroch, the Zhents were left with only one choice for their route: the blazing sands of the Sword.

Crossing the Sword means dealing with the treacherous D'tarig (if there's to be any trade

across Anauroch, the D'tarig aim to control it and grow fat on it) and the fierce Bedine.

The D'tarig are foolish, disorganized, and selfish enough that the Zhentarim can treat them as they did the folk of Melvaunt, Phlan, and other rivals in the Dragonreach lands. They used magic to spy out D'tarig individuals and communities, hired certain D'tarig as their agents, and killed or impoverished (by vandalism, arranged misfortunes, and the like) certain others, to effectively persuade the D'tarig into leaving them alone or helping them. (The D'tarig themselves are detailed in the chapter on "Other Peoples of Anauroch.") The Bedine, used to fighting each other and almost everything else they encounter, present a tougher obstacle to overcome. Very few of them can be bought, and none of them can be intimidated by threats or magic; the use of hostile magic by an outlander makes them determined to destroy that being, not to surrender or obey him.

The Zhentarim tried their usual bullying methods, and sending "strike teams" of powerful wizards heavily protected by magical items to slay key Bedine leaders; but these had little lasting effect (the new sheikhs were of the same essential nature as the slain ones, the Bedine will not tolerate an outsider as a sheikh, and the Bedine tribes are too small to fool anyone with magic, to install a Zhentarim agent as a sheikh in the magical guise of a Bedine), and even attracted the attention of Harpers, Dragon Cultists, independent meddlers such as The Simbul of Aglarond and Elminster. Some of these acted directly against the Zhents, or sent agents to work against them.

The Zhents then adopted a new, two-pronged strategy (anticipated by Harpers such as Lander of Sembia). This consisted of a velvet-gloved hand of friendship—and a strong, treacherous sword of force.

The Black Robes approach a Bedine sheikh, offer him a friendly trade-treaty (with bribes of steel, rare and valuable in the desert, used for making the best weapons, and gems), and find a pretext to invite the sheikh's family or



other important members of the tribe into their camp. Then they hold these 'guests,' controlled by magic, to guarantee the tribe's submission.

Zhentarim agents are then installed to watch over the tribe: magelings with enough magic to spy for signs of rebellion and to crush it or call in magic-powerful reinforcements. At the same time, the Black Robes begin to enrich the tribe, introducing coins, gold, gems, wine, and rich food. The most troublesome tribesmen are plied with drink to keep them docile. Should their fighting fury be needed, there are other means to rouse them. By magic, the Zhentarim learn of any famous or respected elders of the tribe who have died, and use their magic again to send images of these dead by night to speak to the tribesmen and convince them that it is right to follow the way of the Black Robes. When the tribe is loyal to them, the Zhentarim move on to the next one.

At the same time, the Zhentarim hire armies of over three thousand man-eating, desert-dwelling laertis (detailed in the "Monsters of Anauroch" chapter of this book), and promise them protection by day against any Bedine who try to avenge fellows whom the laertis ate or slew at night (the laertis must hide from the sun during the day). This protection is provided by several hundred Zhentilar warriors, accompanied by Zhentarim priests and wizards. This human army goes into the desert carrying all the food and drink they need with them (when they defeat a Bedine tribe, they'll butcher its camels and roast them to gain a "free" feast).

If diplomacy fails or falters, the army is used to subdue a dozen tribes, and then use hostages, bribery, and violence to enslave the others. The controlled tribes are used to overpower the others, the laerti allowed to feed freely on Bedine so long as they leave Zhent caravans alone (if they become a problem later, the laertis can themselves be exterminated with spells) and the Zhentilar army leaves the desert, its task done. The Zhentilar

warriors are highly disciplined fighters, experts at defending fortifications against sieges and at performing "dirty tricks" in overland battles. They are not hampered by the rules and traditions of their Bedine foes, and can quickly acquire desert lore (if not the deep knowledge and instincts of a native Bedine) through magical interrogations and mind control of captured Bedine.

The FORGOTTEN REALMS® novel *The Parched Sea* describes one Zhentarim campaign to defeat the Bedine. The silky-moustachioed, heavily-scarred warrior El Zarud, a Zhentilar warrior, is the spokesman of the Black Robes among the Bedine until slain. His superior (who posed as his assistant) is the Zhentarim wizard Yhekal, and under their direction, the hired laertis attack tribe after tribe, traveling by night, and accompanied by the human Zhentilar warriors, who establish protective camps (at the oases they have seized from the Bedine) by day.

With the help of magic and Harper agents, the Bedine fight back. Bedine war parties harry the Zhents from all sides with arrows, and scatter at night into small bands camped wide distances apart, so Zhents seeking revenge have to hunt them by night instead of traveling on to the next oasis; the invading army must travel on, or lose its riding and pack-camels to lack of food and water (the Bedine camel herds are limited in size by the available forage in the desert; the huge Zhentarim army needs far more beasts than any one oasis can support). To counterattack means to starve the camels.

The increasingly desperate Zhentarim do not hesitate to poison oases: the ultimate atrocity in Bedine eyes, but one that may ultimately win the Zhents victory, if they have magic enough to *neutralize poison* for each and every one of their own caravans, once the Bedine have been wiped out.

If the present campaign fails to force a way through the Bedine, across the desert, the Zhentarim will mount another. The Zhentarim



leadership has, as usual, sent ambitious Zhentarim magelings into Anauroch to "prove themselves." The reward is wealth, magical power (by items and even scrolls of spells, given by superiors) and rank in the Black Network, and to refuse means either instant death, or orders so dangerous as to make an inglorious death inevitable, so mages will continue to risk the perils of the Sword to conquer it for the Zhentarim.

Some of these Zhentarim agents use *rings of invisibility* and *blinking*, and (a Zhentarim specialty) rings that allow them *dimension door*. They always have magic enough to overwhelm and capture individual Bedine, and to interrogate them, and they have coins and metal enough to buy what loyalty they can. A few (such as the wizard Yhekal, who is at least a W9, and has skin and hair as pale as white sand, flashing blue eyes, and wears a hooded purple robe and silver wrist-bracers) are powerful or influential enough to have clones or other magical means of resurrecting themselves, should they be slain in the desert.

The Black Robes have offered D'tarig and some Bedine five hundred gold pieces "per head" for identifying Harpers to them (telling the desert folk that the Harpers are a tribe of meddling fools who stand in the path of free commerce and the growth of kingdoms). They know that Those Who Harp will be their chief foes in their attempt to set up a trade route across Anauroch.

This tendency of Zhent commanders to get things done with a minimum of risk and bother to the main organization by letting (or forcing) underlings to "prove themselves" by doing difficult things in any unsupervised, sloppy, and reckless manner they want to, just to get the job done, allows DMs to freely tailor Zhent forces to challenge PCs. A Zhentarim band can be a dozen warriors led by a W4 or W6, or anything up to an army of several hundred under a dozen wizards, each of up to 12th level.

DMs are also free to have Zhentarim acting personally against PCs in Anauroch, in run-

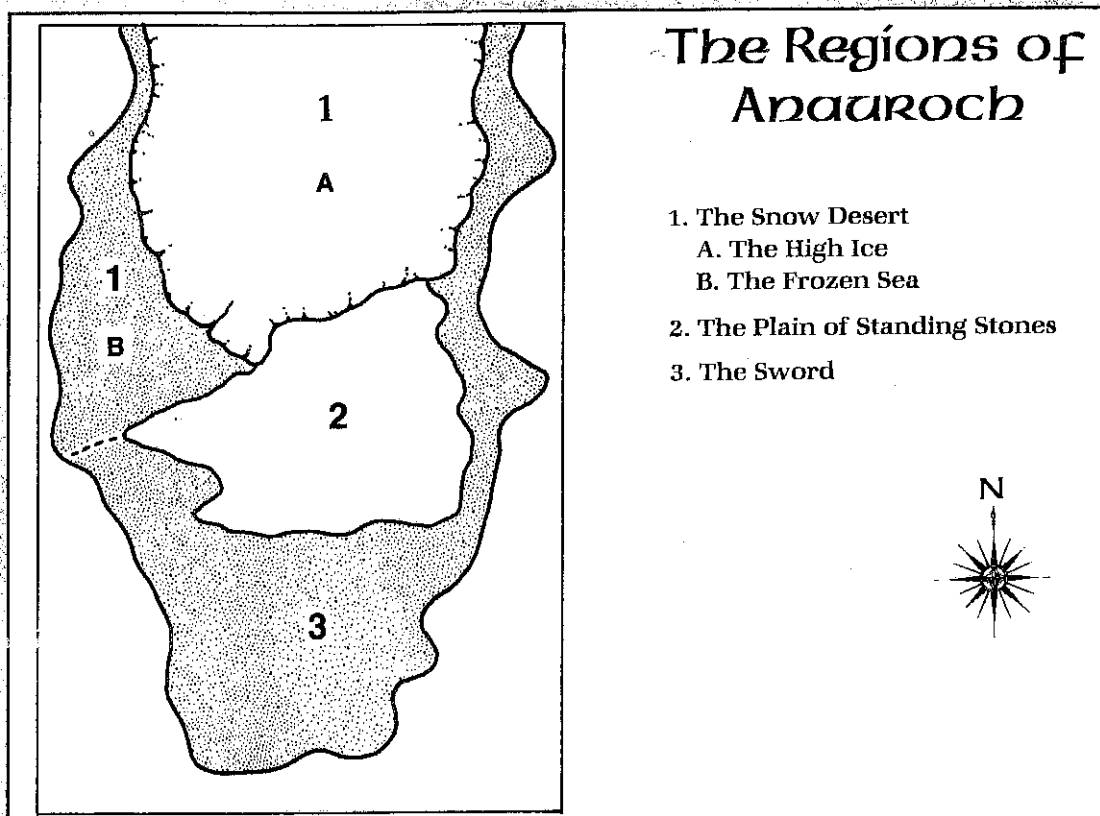
ning fights, without any efficient organization that alerts one group of Zhents when the PCs are fighting with another (necessarily, if the PCs are too weak to survive). Zhentarim can be of any rank or influence the DM wishes, not even Elminster knows what ambitious mages, wizards, priests of Bane, Cyric or the other evil gods, thieves, and warriors have joined the Zhentarim recently.

Please refer to "The Sword" chapter for details of Zhentarim bases established in the desert (including an ingenious practice of "growing" an oasis around a *decanter of endless water*). At least five such bases are known to exist in the desert: Bhaerlith, Haunga, Ma'atar, Olomaa, and Vuertthyl.

The Zhentarim can rely on supplies and reinforcements from a Zhentilar encampment in Arntethyl, the high alpine valley where the River Tesh is formed, and spills out of the mountains (down gorges to the valley of the Tesh, where the main Zhentilar and mercenary encampments are located, around the ruins of Teshwave) and from Darkhold (in emergencies only; the man who calls for these when they are not needed will pay with his head—after suitable torments have been visited upon him).

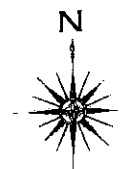
At least a thousand warriors are in Arntethyl, and at least twenty Zhentarim magelings (W3s to W9s). They are under the command of the wizard Ruatheene, Man-shoon's latest favorite. She is only a W6, but maintains order with the help of a beholder of awesome size and powers, Araunglauth, whose abode Arntethyl has been for almost seventy years.

Ruatheene will not enter Anauroch, whatever happens—but she will unleash the eager magelings under her; if the Zhentarim suffer reverses in the desert. They include Mhaumask of Mordulkin (LE hm W9); Ologhyn of Vooblar (NE hm W7; known for his collection of rare and strange wands); Hlartenth of Procampur (LE hm W8, a wizard under a curse that changes him from male to female,



The Regions of Anatroch

1. The Snow Desert
 - A. The High Ice
 - B. The Frozen Sea
2. The Plain of Standing Stones
3. The Sword



or vice versa, every few hours); Arachhar Sevenstar, of Yhaunn (NE hm W6, a young genius known for devising many new spells and for his frequent, giggling bouts of insanity); Aglast Thimm (NE hm W5, a grim man who has worked for the Zhentarim as a poisoner in many cities around the Inner Sea, until his skills became too widely suspected for continued usefulness); and Orauna Speldarnshar (CE hf W6, a one-time Calishite dancing girl, who hates men and enjoys magically destroying them at every opportunity).

The Zhentarim intend to enslave the D'tarig even if their attempts to conquer the Bedine fail. When the Desertsmouth Mountains are firmly in their control, they intend to gather and breed hill giants to unleash in Shadow Gap

and the Tilverton area, and begin a slow conquering of the desert by building forts and wiping out the Bedine tribe by tribe, advancing across the desert step by step. If this becomes necessary, Manshoon intends to send powerful Zhentarim to capture at least one Bedine sorceress, and learn from her (forcibly, if need be) the desert-related magic of the Bedine (the main spells of which appear in the "Wind and Sand Magic" chapter of this book).

When running Zhentarim forces, the DM should keep in mind two things: the Black Robes did not get as far as they have in Faerun already by being stupid; and, as Lander of the Harpers tells a Bedine sheikh, "Threats are the only truthful words you will ever hear a Zhentarim speak."



OTHER PEOPLES OF ANAUROCH

Many peoples, monstrous (to human eyes) and otherwise, dwell in or under Anauroch. Here we look briefly at some of them.

The D'tarig

These diminutive folk (averaging just over four feet tall) may be descended from marriages between humans and dwarves in the Tethyamar area. They are the desert folk most commonly encountered by outlanders.

The D'tarig dwell on the eastern and south-eastern fringes of Anauroch, where they herd goats and sheep in the foothills, and make rare trips to Tilverton to trade. (Since the Zhentarin started coming to them, these trips have grown even rarer. Why go to the trouble and expense of travel, when it is easier to let greedy buyers come to you?) D'tarig tend to be self-serving and rather cowardly. They will switch loyalties readily, to those who pay them most highly.

They like to travel in large groups, well-armed with poisoned javelins and bolts for their crossbows. The sticky brown venom they have developed is a secret preparation, known only to a few elders of the people. It causes sleep in humans (save vs. poison to avoid), but tends to be fatal to orcs, goblins, and other related humanoid (save vs. poison at -2: success means 2d4 points of additional damage, failure means death in 1d4 rounds).

D'tarig have their own throaty language, and largely avoid contact with other humans. The exceptions to this are the most adventurous of the tribe, who tend to be younger. They are often hired by outsiders who want guides into the desert, for they typically claim to be experts who know every dune and oasis of great Anauroch. The unwary are warned of the Sembian merchant saying about D'tarig claims: "If you have an infant son, and the son dies when a D'tarig is in town, the D'tarig will show up claiming to be the son of your son, and try to take everything you own." In the desert, D'tarig wear white burnouses and tur-

bans, with splay-footed sandwalking boots. Only their dark eyes, puggish noses, and leathery brows are exposed.

Older, more greedy D'tarig who are braver than their fellows are known as "desert walkers," for they venture into the desert to trade metal (usually metal weapons, though pots and other vessels are also valued) to the Bedine in return for camelloads of collected resin from cassia, myrrh, and frankincense trees. Some D'tarig can collect these resins for themselves, from trees growing on the verges of the Sword, on the banks of streams that come down rocky ravines from the Mountains of Tethyamar to meander among the dunes, and ultimately sink into the sand, and vanish. But it is easiest to let Bedine do all the messy, hot, long work of gathering—and the demand for the resin far outstrips the supply provided by the few trees that the D'tarig can reach. The D'tarig sell their jars of gathered resin to merchants sponsored by the Zhentarin. The friendly Black Robes then sell it to temples all over the Realms for the making of incense.

D'tarig have been known to keep slaves, but tend to regard them as too much trouble. Slaves have to be watched constantly, for the D'tarig are a suspicious people. They boast that "no one and nothing can beguile the D'tarig." D'tarig are selfish, brutish folk. They have none of the land-lore and stone-skill of dwarves; most do not even know that lodestones (and therefore, compasses) exist, and must find their way in the desert by learning the oasis-trails and the stars. They tend to keep to themselves out of fear for trouble. More than one D'tarig has said, "Only a fool strays from his path to search out another man's trouble." On the other hand, D'tarig are not humorless or wretchedly craven in their fear of danger; witness this exchange between Bhadla of the D'tarig and Lander, a Harper (from the novel *The Parched Sea*, by Troy Denning):

Bhadla shook his head. "This is foolish business," he said. "It will probably get you killed."



"Perhaps," Lander agreed. "I'll try not to take you and Musalim with me." "Good. For that, we would charge extra," Bhadla said.

DMs should portray D'tarig as suspicious, taciturn, even sullen folk who are too short to wield long swords or longer and heavier weapons, and whose stature forces them into comical climbs into camel and horse saddles. Otherwise, they should be considered normal humans, save that a few (10%) seem to have inherited the uncanny sense of direction (even in dark, underground, or unfamiliar surroundings) possessed by many dwarves.

Oh, and one other thing—a D'tarig always has six or seven more tricks, double crosses, escape routes, fallback plans, and poisoned weapons up his sleeves, down his boots, in his hair, or even up his nose. (Short-tempered barbarians of the Savage North have been known to cut down D'tarig on sight, just to avoid all the irritating, wearying intrigue and treachery they know will come.)

Most D'tarig that adventurers will meet with are fighters or thieves of 2nd to 5th (1d4+1) level. They tend to guide visitors to the trading villages of Tel Badir and Addas Babar. Most D'tarig have a house or place of business in one or both of these settlements, but keep their families safe in comfortably furnished cave homes higher in the mountains. Orc and goblin attacks have made regular patrols in the heights necessary; adventurers are warned that these patrols tend to employ ambushes, poisoned weapons, trip-wires, and boulder avalanches first, and ask questions of the survivors (if any) later.

The Laertis

These ruthless, aggressive, desert-dwelling, intelligent lizards are fully detailed in the "Monsters of Anauroch" chapter, but deserve mention here because of their dominance over the desert underways of the eastern Sword. Forced to shelter from the heat of the day, the

laertis can roam the desert surface by night, and over the years have slain many Bedine both for food (they eat the soft organs of humans) and for the pleasure of killing. The Bedine call them *asabis*, which means "The Evil Ones Below." Recently, the laertis have been hired by the Zhentarim as mercenary troops in a war of extermination against the Bedine as the Zhentarim try repeatedly and forcibly to create a trade route across the desert, controlled by themselves, to link the rich Moonsea trade with Waterdeep, Baldur's Gate, and the Sword Coast trade that those cities can reach. The Zhentarim see this "shortest and cheapest" route as the key to achieving supremacy over Amn in trade matters. Only the years will tell if they can forge and hold such a "golden road through the sands."

The Lamia

The infamous flesh-eating race of lamia are rarer in Anauroch than in more southerly deserts (such as those of Calimshan). Perhaps because flesh to eat is rare and the laertis compete for the same diet, lamia tend to be found in the western end of the Sword, and in the Frozen Sea.

The largest and most powerful lamia community is in the city of Hlaungadath (described in "The High Ice" chapter), but they are also known to roam the desert due east of Hill's Edge (where they often battle expeditions from that city and Zhentarim patrols out of Yellow Snake Pass), and to dwell at Lion's Eye Oasis, the most verdant spot in the western Sword.

The lamia of Lion's Eye are currently led by The Glaendra, a female lamia noble of striking height (9') and beauty. She is said to command both much wealth (in the form of rubies and emeralds looted from sand-covered ruins in the area controlled by the lamia), and a formidable arsenal of magical weapons and items, gathered over the years from Netherese tombs, abandoned towers, and storage crypts.



Outsiders

There aren't many sane folk who choose to visit Anauroch more than once (most visitors perish on their first trip into the Great Desert). As might be expected, some of these are desperate outlaws trying to hide from pursuers, and others are adventurers overly convinced of their own heroic invulnerability. The most numerous group, however, are merchants: those who come to make a coin or two.

Some, notably the Zhentarim, come in force, and try to make their way by force. They must be powerful indeed to overmatch the fierce Bedine, the desert beasts, and the claws of the desert itself.

Some dream of the fabled wealth of the Lost Kingdoms, and hire adventurers or even try on their own, to scurry into the desert to scoop up the heaps of gold coins and rivers of gems that they fondly hope must be just lying around, guarded only by a few camels and vultures.

The wisest merchants set their sights on less grand dreams. They come to the desert verges, bringing coins, food, fine cloth, and iron-work such as chains, belt-buckles, drinking cups, buckets, cooking pots, knives, forks and ladles, and the like. They trade these to the D'tarig and others who dwell along the Desertsedge, for resins and the occasional caged desert beast or Lost Kingdom tomb-artifact. These incense traders travel along the Desertsedge, in well-armed groups, and then depart, leaving the dangerous task of trading with the Bedine out on the sands to the D'tarig. These merchants make much smaller heaps of coins than the other sorts, but they make them year after year, and may even live to retire on them (a fate that seldom befalls the other two sorts of merchants).

Prominent among the veteran independent incense traders currently active in the Anauroch trade are Bruithyn Ammacaster (LN hm F6), and Guldagh Ironfist (NE hm F7) of Westgate.

Bruithyn is known to carry an *iron bands of Bilarro* sphere, to deal with those who threaten him. He is always accompanied by a loyal bodyguard of at least three Sembian mercenary warriors, and a priest of Lathander for healing purposes, hired at the temple in Eveningstar. These priests are always well paid, and Bruithyn is popular at the temple for the extra gifts he makes to the cause, when his trade goes well.

Guldagh is the sort of thug that one prefers never to deal with. He would steal the shroud off a corpse (and has). His band of nine or fewer (the number varies with the number of fatal skirmishes gotten into on the present trip) thieves are drawn from the poisoned dagger boys of Westgate's dirtier alleys. Guldagh persuades them to take a chance to get rich quick (and usually, to flee certain death if they stay in the city, due to feuds they've gotten themselves drawn into), and then plunges across Cormyr or Sembia in an orgy of petty theft, vandalism, and muggings.

Guldagh then leads his band to D'tarig territory, does the same sort of thing there until he's gained as much incense as possible by illegal means, and then heads west along the Desertsedge, trading for as much more as he can get. If enemies show up, his band darts into the Stonelands. Increasingly, orcs have lain in wait for him. It is whispered that he has a fortified lair somewhere in the Stonelands, but no one has ever found it.

An organized bandit troop is also said to lair in the Stonelands, raiding orc-holds, Bedine encampments, and caravans in northern Cormyr with equal stealth and boldness. Known as The Desert Wind, this band is a myth, or a memory of a desperate band now dead in some misadventure, or able to lie low for years on end—for no one has seen them in recent seasons.



THE LOST KINGDOMS

Many have heard of the Lost Kingdoms, those fabled, rich realms of long ago, that lie buried somewhere beneath the shifting sands of The Sword in Anauroch. These lands are the source of a lot of fanciful tales, a lure for lots and lots of adventurers who'd like to get rich, and a subterranean home for the sinister Phaerimm (see "The Phaerimm").

The Buried Realms are (correctly) said to be riddled with ancient, unmarked magical gates, allowing passage—often unintentional—from the Realms to other planes and worlds, and vice versa. Many strange creatures appear hereabouts, and more than one famous (or infamous) being of Faerun has vanished here—such as Gondegal, who stumbled between two mist-shrouded standing stones and found himself in the demiplane of Ravenloft.

Stairs, shafts, ravines, and even broad roads lead down from the Stonelands and the sands of The Sword to the Lost Kingdoms below. The folk of those buried realms have become the nomadic Bedine, fearing and shunning the depths and the magic that was once theirs.

More is said of those dark underlands, the Buried Realms, in the chapter entitled "The Phaerimm." This chapter is a guide for DMs in placing treasures and features in the depths; here we explore the glory that was, surveying the lands that were once proud. Included in this sourcebook is a map from the Year of the Tusk (112 DR), showing these Three Realms—and the beginnings of the desert created by the Phaerimm, known then as the Great Sand Sea ("Anauroch" then meant the glacier to the north, called "the High Ice" today).

Time has stolen many of the hard facts and details of the Three Realms; here we do a "whirlwind tour" to catch a few ideas of what life in the Lost Kingdoms was like, then.

Anauria

Richest of the Lost Kingdoms, Anauria was a human-ruled land of humans, elves, and half-elves, where nobles hunted boar, stags, and

monstrous game while the farms of the commoners produced food for the Three Realms, and spare grain enough to sell to all the lands about the Inner Sea.

From its glittering capital, Amazandar, the City of Gems, Anauria dominated overland trade to and from the Three Realms. Rich gemmines lay underneath Amazandar, reached by well-guarded deep shafts that were kept as secret as possible by the noble families that owned them.

The most powerful noble families of Anauria were the elven houses of Nymtynel and Olyrnn, and the human lines of Thardresk (the royal house), Nemrin, and Maluradek. Anauria's greatest king was Thausimbel "The Wise" (a.k.a. "Greybeard" and "The Long-Lived"). He had elven blood, and ruled for three hundred and sixty-odd years, arranging alliances, marriages, and business dealings that wove long-lasting peace between elves, the dwarves of Oghrann, and humans in what was to become known as the Dragonreach.

The city of Anauril was noted for the making of fine steel swords; the best human smiths produced in the Moonsea North at that time. Anauria's best forges were here, working plentifully with iron and tin (but lacking much copper and zinc). Helvara was Anauria's main agricultural market and farm outfitting center. The prosperity of the land was guarded by the fortresses of Tower Hlithal (which guarded against the goblins of Araugul, nomadic orc hordes, and occasional outlaw raiders out of Asram) and Tower Ramanath (which patrolled against brigands and monsters out of the Hunters' Hills).

Asram

Second richest of the Three Realms, Asram was governed from rich Phelajarama, the City of the Serpent, known for its gold-leaf-covered carved serpents, but the most important city of the realm was Orolin, the City of Magicians. In this land, magic was used in everyday



things (not reserved for a ruling elite, as in Netheril). Magicians could be hired on every street of Orolin, and their wealth and works made the city a sprawling place of villas and orchards, clustered around a circular city core with canals, parks, and a fortress.

Spell-guarded expeditions went out from Orolin to secret places in the Great Sand Sea and brought back much gold, rarer zinc, and the finest copper known in those days. If Anauria was proud, Asram was decadent. Parties went on for days, and every citizen pursued his or her own whims, trusting to the magic of the realm to defend them against foes. Jaded young nobles even invented a sport of "monster-baiting," wherein they wore outlandish costumes and sought out monsters in their lairs, to flee through the night for the excitement of it all, until searching friends laid the pursuing beast low with magic.

The Asramian city of Ulshantir was noted for its coppersmiths and fine brass goods, whereas the port of Miirsar was known for its finely-crafted ships. Many small-net fishermen dwelt in Miirsar, going out in the dawn mists of Lake Miir every day to fish for the blue-scaled brench and the spicy crabfin.

Blondath

Least powerful of the Three Realms, northerly Blondath was a land of loggers and herdsmen (who kept sheep, goats, and shaggy cattle). Its capital was Mhaelos, but its most important city was Rulvadar, a fortified refuge against marauding ogres, orcs, hobgoblins, bugbears, and flind for folk in the Moonsea North. Companies of spearmen made many forays into the Border Forest. Under their protection, Hlundites made sturdy wagons, fine furniture, paper, and lumber to ship to other lands.

Independent Cities

Port Miir was a lawless, roaring place, the center of commerce for goods entering and leav-

ing "the West Kingdoms" (as they were called then, being west of the Teshan Mountains, now known as the Desertmouth Mountains). The goods came and went east out of the port on Berothir's Trail (named for the ranger who established it, slain by orcs in doing so).

It was a city of moneylenders, caravan masters, and "quick money," where a loose band of ruling wizards struggled to keep down the numbers and successes of thieves.

Oum was a crossroads-town, where roads and merchants met. It straddled the border between Blondath and Asram, belonging to neither (and at times, was a source of tense hostility and confrontation between the two kingdoms). It became a place of bookshops, sages, and proud craft-folk, who made mirrors and glass windows (both rare in those days), fine clothing, jewelry, lamps, pottery and ironware.

Other Features

Mt. Shaddath (westernmost peak of the Desertmouth Mountains) and the Shaddan Hills (now lost in the sands of Anauroch) were both named for Shaddara, the legendary child-queen who was called "the Fair" and grew up to be a proud, keen huntress who often hunted boars and monsters in the Hunters' Hills. She was the greatest Queen of Anauria.

Mt. Shaddath is today known as Rausrawna, which means "westernmost" in the tongue of the D'tarig; its former name survives as "Shadow" in the name Shadow Gap.

"The Burn" was once a goblin-infested forest, eradicated (with magical fire, that let no trees grow again for many a year) by an Anaurian army led by Olzogath "the Grim." Or-lath Wood, on the border between Anauria and Asram, was named for Olzogath's son, who chose to hunt goblins there, not raze a forest as his father had done. The everpresent goblins had a stronghold at Araugul (pronounced "Ar-ah-gOOL"), also known as Goblin-mount.



THE GODS OF ANAUROCH

The Phaerimm and the beholders of Tbril do not venerate gods, though some of their races who dwell on other planes and worlds do. Some semi-intelligent Anaurian remorhaz worship Augaurath, a gigantic white dragon, who dwells in the High Ice (she in turn worships Task, detailed in the *FOR1/Dragonmilon* accessory book). The lamia of Anauroch worship many different gods, both human and others, and are currently searching for a "true faith." None of these deities are described here.

D'tarig worship the same gods as other humans, and the faith of "The Lord of the Sands" vanished with The Lost Kingdoms. Of old, the Bedine knew and worshipped all the human gods, but after the Scattering (see the "Bedine Society" chapter), they believe most of the gods turned away from the Bedine and in response, the Bedine turned away from them.

The Bedine do not have priests who are granted spells by the gods (although in rare cases, fervent prayers have caused a deity to manifest magically to aid a Bedine supplicant). Bedine are devout, following the dictates and wishes of the gods as interpreted by learned elders ("holy men") and sheikhs, reading natural signs, but they do not have a priest "class" in the AD&D® game sense.

Recently, some Bedine have joined The Cult of the Sacred Skull, a splinter faith that worships a talking skull. (In reality, the skull is magically animated by a mind flayer High Priest, his nature concealed behind a skull mask; he is a tool of the Phaerimm, and utters what they bid him to). The Sacred Skull faithful are a ragtag band of fanatic Bedine warriors and thieves. This cult is especially active in the eastern Sword, as the Phaerimm try to offset growing Zhentarian influence.

Bedine tend to fear and obey their deities, rather than worshipping them. Chief among them is At'ar the Merciless, the "Yellow Goddess." She is the sun, seen as a spiteful, faithless woman. Of old, "At'ar" was called "Amaunator" in full, and was the male sun deity of Netheril. At'ar tends to ignore the Bedine

completely; if a DM wishes her to manifest, use the entry for Horus-Re in the *FR10/Old Empires* sourcebook.

Elah is the Bedine moon goddess, and is the same deity known elsewhere in the Realms as Selune. Priesthood details for Selune are given in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures* sourcebook; clergy of Selune will be tolerated in Anauroch, but not obeyed.

Kozah is the Bedine god of tempests; he vents his wrath by causing sandstorms (the sand left in the air for days after a major storm, that colors the sky crimson as the sun rises, is known as "Kozah's mark"). Desert storms show his fury at the faithlessness of his wife At'ar, as the harlot enters N'asr's tent night after night (= the sun goes down). Kozah is the god Talos; priesthood details are given in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures* sourcebook. Clergy of Talos who enter Anauroch will be tolerated but not obeyed.

N'asr, the Lord of the Dead, is the Bedine name for Cyric, the god of death, murder, and tyranny (who has taken the place of Myrkul). The great white-bearded vultures of the desert, known as "N'asr's children," are said to ferry spirits to the camp of the dead, taking the dead to N'asr's tent (which is somewhere westwards, beyond the setting sun), where the Pitiless One awaits.

Djinn serve N'asr; he gives the dead who displease him or who don't measure up to them for sport, and then food. The worst fate of a Bedine is to wind up the slave of N'asr, so Bedine dead are washed to cleanse away the odor of life, to avoid offending N'asr. Clerical details for Cyric appear in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures* sourcebook; the Bedine fear such priests, and will attack them.

The Bedine claim N'asr is the sun's lover. The sun, At'ar, forsakes her lawful husband Kozah every night to sleep in N'asr's tent.

Shaundakul, the Treacherous Lurker In The Sands, is the mischievous, malicious trickster of the desert. He appears as a jackal-headed man, but corresponds in powers to the deity



Beshaba. He blinds folk, causes oases to dry out, travelers to lose their way, and so on. Shaundakul is blamed by the Bedine for all misfortune. His servants, the capricious "Windghosts" of the desert, are actually mad watchghosts (detailed fully in *The Rules of Under Mountain* boxed set, and described in the "Aneurian Adventures" chapter of this book).

Under these "great gods," who are not actively worshipped (and so take little interest in Anauroch) are the "spirits of the earth," or "little gods." These gods the Bedine have daily dealings with; they are the spirits that the Bedine believe to inhabit every place or feature of the desert. The Bedine worship these demigods (largely by the sacrifice of camels or treasure), and they are very real, if seldom seen. Every oasis except those recently created by the Zhentarim, or as yet undiscovered by the Bedine has its Place Spirit, as do most other major desert features.

As demigods, all Place Spirits have the following powers: 70% Magic Resistance (40% vs. other demigods, 20% against deities of greater power); the ability to know what is happening in their territory, be it a single tor, a mountain, or an oasis), and in the area around for up to a mile distant; and the ability to see and attack into those regions of the ethereal plane touching on their place of power. Some Spirits can project a single manifestation. It can do two things at once, but can't leave the place of power. If it is destroyed, the spirit needs a full year to create another.

Place Spirits have a base saving throw of 4, and can never leave their place of power. They can communicate by speech, from a manifestation or from a "focal point" in their place of power (such as a pool at the center of an oasis). Rituals to, and commandments of, these deities vary from one to another—but most Bedine know "the rules," and no place spirit will act vengefully against an intruder who is wholly ignorant of what is right or expected; blasphemy lies only in wilfully and deliber-

ately flouting the wishes of a spirit.

Every Place Spirit can temporarily imbue any being in their territory with spell ability, granting them any spell of 5th level or less (one spell per being, per day).

Through direct contact between the chosen being and a Place Spirit's manifestation or focal point (e.g. the being steps into the pool, or touches a certain standing stone), a spirit can also manifest its powers as follows: once a day, it can grant the *limited wish* of another being; twice a day, it can *heal* or *raise dead* (i.e. it can use one power twice, or use both of them, once each); and it can also cast one of the following spells, once each day: *regenerate*, *reincarnate*, *restoration*, or *resurrection*.

In addition, all Place Spirits can by mental contact (within their place of power) guide beings to water, communicate its absence or hide it, and can turn water to poison or make it melt away from the body of a being trying to touch it. If they can appear as a manifestation, the manifestation can always at will emit effects equal to a *rod of terror* (described in the *DMG*) or a *repulsion* spell.

All Place Spirits also have an attack power related to their territory (the spirit of a mountain can hurl rocks or shake the entire mountain, to cause climbers to fall off; the spirit of an oasis can cause all creatures there to be alert and hostile to an unfavored being, or cause trees to fall on the being), and so on.

These spirits are not given Legends & Lore format descriptions here because they are weak, retiring, and lack clergy; they are of most use to Bedine trying to resist outlanders.

Two sample Place Spirits are described here: El Ma'ra Dat-ur Ojhogo (= "The tall god who lets men sit upon his head") and Rahalat.

El Ma'ra inhabits the sandstone spire that bears his name. This is a lone spire of yellow sandstone (described in "The Sword" chapter of this book), which stands near an oasis, and serves Bedine as a lookout place. A fall from the spire will kill most men, and El Ma'ra can try to throw an unwanted being off. The un-



wanted one must make a Dexterity check at -4 every round, or fall from the spire. No companions or nearby beings are affected. Bedine lookouts atop the spire who pray to El Ma'ra and sacrifice a drop of their drinking-water to him (let it fall on him) can see the desert below clearly, even when the sands blow. (This ensures clarity of sight; it does not reveal what is magically concealed or extend one's range of vision.) Rahalat was a Bedine sorceress, abandoned at a mountain oasis by her tribe. She used magic to prevent Bedine from using the oasis, until a tribe murdered her to get to the water.

The oasis spring turned to blood, and any who drank from it for ten years perished. Now, every tribe that camps at the oasis

(which bears her name) must sacrifice a camel to her, or the water goes bad (turns to Type J poison, except to beings favored by Rahalat).

Rahalat's herd of goats still lives on the mountain. The goddess warns away those who approach too closely by causing the hollow knell of goat bells to ring in their minds.

Rahalat's manifestation can appear in the oasis or on the mountain. She manifests as a silent, translucent white floating image, looking as she did in life: an unveiled Bedine woman, her face young and strong-featured. Her face has a weary, lonely, heartbroken appearance. She cannot be turned or dispelled, and speaks only in the minds of those she meets. If she wishes, non-Bedine who are present cannot see her.



NEWS AND RUMORS OF ANAUROCH

News tends to be old and poor in remote Anauroch, with Bedine tribes avoiding each other as much as possible (unless bent on killing each other, which is not likely to present good opportunities for chatter and gossip).

Whenever the PCs have peaceful encounters (e.g. with traveling merchants), the DM may pass on some of the following rumors. Role-playing should be encouraged; NPC merchants won't simply babble all the latest news whenever they see an unfamiliar face. If Bedine are passing on these bits of "news," the DM should alter the wording in light of Bedine knowledge of the Realms outside Anauroch. Some of these rumors could mask DM-prepared adventures; others can be simply wild fancies.

- Belarchass the Slayer, a notorious slave-dealer who captures humans and demi-humans at swordpoint to sell them into slavery in the cruel South, is hunting people again. He is somewhere north and east of Arabel, with "at least twenty" warriors.
- There is powerful magic awake in the desert: beware old stone pillars, and archways that lead to nowhere! Some who step wrongly, near such, have vanished in an instant, stolen away—by magic!
- Strange whirlwinds, seen in calm conditions, not just in storms, are growing more common everywhere on the sands. They are evil things, "Wind Walkers," who serve an evil Elder Race That Dwells Below, under the sands. The ancient evils must be awakening again!
- There is an oasis, somewhere deep in the Quarter of Emptiness, that is hidden by magic. Only women dwell there: cruel women, who use magic and can change their heads to take the forms of fanged, hissing serpents! They are ruled by a queen whose lower body is like that of a huge snake, but whose upper form is that of a beautiful woman. She eats all men who fall into the hands of her subjects—after they have been forced to breed, to swell the ranks of the women of the hidden Oasis of the Serpent. All male babies are eaten; all females must master magic or be cast out into the desert.
- Certain stone pillars in the northern sands move about by themselves; when the nights are dark! They sometimes move as far in a night as a fast, driven camel does, by day—and they cry out to each other at times; horrible deep, groaning sounds that make one's teeth itch, to hear them! One is moving steadily toward The Oasis of Vipers!
- A great spiralling pit, like a sucking mouth, has been seen somewhere nearby, west of here. It moves along, in the sand, and things that tumble into it vanish, and are never seen again. It must eat them! A gazelle has been seen to disappear into the mouth, and so did a hunting dog that got too close!
- An oasis has been found where there has never been one before! It looks old, and well established, with several trees and a deep pool. It is no mirage—and camels who drank from the pool were well sated. Fresh-gnawed bones were found under one of the trees, though—human bones.
- In the sky, a few nights back, a ghostly camel and rider were seen, white against the velvet blackness, riding east. The rider wore a turban, and waved a naked scimitar. In his other hand, he carried a globe of spinning lights, like tiny stars, that whirled endlessly around. He rode on the air, but quite low down, and soon vanished below the horizon, to the east. No one knows who or what this apparition was; none can recall having seen it before.