

PDF PREVIEW

ARDEN'S ADVENTURES



AGAINST TSATHOGGA

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PRESENTS

AGAINST TSATHOGGA

By Skeeter Green

This Old-School Essentials adventure is “suitable” for 4–6 characters of level 12+. Don’t kid yourself; the characters have NO chance against Tsathogga if he is summoned. If your party is larger or of higher level, adjust the numbers of tsathar clerics and scourges available in the final encounter. The tsathar don’t need to win the combat, they just need to delay the party long enough for the Ranan to finish his summoning. The party shouldn’t be able to stop the summoning, but if they do, that is up to you as a Referee how to proceed. You got this module to use Tsathogga, so you might as well fudge to let the players see it! They know it’s coming; give it to them.

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HISTORY & BACKGROUND

DEEP IN THE HEART OF A LOST MARSHLAND, THE TSATHAR conduct horrid rites to their Great Lord, the dread Tsathogga, Demon Frog-God and Devourer of Life. Only in such a loathsome and wretched den can the tsathar properly venerate a being so totally devoted to destruction.

For ages, the tsathar have gathered here to lay their devotions at the base of this High Altar of Tsathogga. Calling their unholy abode the Ranan Tumulus in honor of their great but absent lord, the tsathar are single-mindedly devoted to bringing forth the Great Devourer to feed upon the world.

Try as they might, never has the Demon Frog-God answered their unholy beseeching. Sacrifices and horrendous rites aside, the Devourer of Life has been silent to his batrachian subjects.

Until now.

Recently, the tsathar unearthed a great treasure in a remote area of the swamp. Guided by visions, the tsathar filth-priests uncovered what they initially thought was a powerful artifact of Tsathogga, an oracular statue of massive proportions. Planning to use the relic as their formal altar in the Unholy Cesspool, the tsathar priests marched out of the Tumulus under dead of night to liberate their prize from the concealing morass.

Drawn to the idol by an irresistible instinct, the tsathar priests spared none of their minions, neither the scourges nor their frog-beasts from the intense labor of drawing the idol from the sucking marsh. Three times the height of any of the tsathar, the stone-like idol dripped viscous marsh-fluid as it was drawn forth from the bog's embrace. Now freed of its muddy prison, the idol was transported to the seat of Tsathogga's clergy to divine what they had discovered. When the idol was finally placed in proximity to the Unholy Cesspool, the pool churned with spastic and jerking movements, as if fitfully awakening from a long slumber.

The idol, too, began to shudder. With a great creaking and a final titanic convulsion, the calcified shell surrounding the being was sundered. No earthly stone, but some form of ichor or slime had hardened to protect the still-living being hibernating within. Viewing the newly hatched emissary in its full glory, and understanding what

*The Unholy Cesspool
in the Temple of Tsathogga*



it actually was, tsathar priests drove the scourges and burden-frogs nearly mad with hideous ecstasy. The creature revealed to the tsathar that which they had forgotten: They now beheld one of the progenitors of their entire race, a dread and horrible ranan!

Falling in supplication, the tsathar pleaded with the ranan to lead them in bringing their master to this plane to devour the world. Rearing up to its full height and towering over the tsathar, the ranan flicked out its unwholesome tongue and devoured several of the scourges, indifferent to their fate. The priests croaked in abject terror that they had offended their lord, but then

the ranan stopped, temporarily sated. Retiring to squat at the edge of the cesspool, it began croaking deep, ancient chants of unfathomable destruction.

The ranan has been chanting for nearly three years now, and his devotion to bringing forth his dread master is nearly complete!

If the characters are to save the world from the loathsome demon frog-god, they must penetrate the Ranan Tumulus, bypass the horrid natural conditions, deal with the tsathar and their frog servants, and finally stop the ranan from summoning the great Tsathogga.



Notes scattered throughout this adventure refer to supplemental material found in *Arden's Notebook*, a companion book of new magic items, gaming articles, and more designed to offer options to add to this adventure.

THE APPROACH

Against Tsathogga may be placed in any remote swampland setting. The only requirements are that it is far from civilized lands, located in a deep and scary marshland, and be physically difficult for normal (non-amphibious) bipeds to reach. At the suggested level of play, normal travel shouldn't be a problem for the characters. The trouble isn't getting to the Tumulus; it's getting out intact.

The nearest settlement to the Tumulus is a borderlands trade-town about 75 miles away. The terrain is trackless swamp. Movement on foot (assuming a Movement rate of 120) is 12 miles per day. If the characters travel on foot, it takes just over a week to reach the mound. None of the locals go that far into the swamp; legends speak of enormous swamp bulettes, roving lizardmen, giant alligators, black dragons, and much worse (referees should feel free to elaborate to create the perception that this is a very bad place).

Encounters in the swamp are mercifully, but strangely, scarce. Few real predators are seen, and they scatter if the characters make any amount of noise (the native denizens know the tsathar sit at the top of the food pyramid and don't attack bipeds). At the characters' level, random encounters with native swamp life are effortless, so they are not included here (though the referee is encouraged to roll up a few random swamp denizens as needed). One item of concern is the bugs. Gnats,



An idol of Tsathogga

mosquitoes, and no-see-ums are a constant irritation. Characters traveling without some protection from these pests must save vs. poison every evening or contract a virulent strain of bog rot from bug bites. Additionally, spellcasters must make save vs. spells each night or be unable to sleep through the constant buzzing and droning of the insects (this effect is unique to the Ranan Tumulus marshlands).

Tsathoggan Bog Rot: Creatures afflicted with Tsathoggan bog rot lose 2d6 hit points per day. Until the disease is cured, infected characters do not heal naturally, and magical healing provides only one-quarter benefit. Only cure disease (or greater magic) removes the affliction, and it cannot be cured while the victim remains in the swamp.

RANAN TUMULUS

RANAN TUMULUS

Deep in the swamp, the characters find a colossal mound of earth and debris, easily the highest point in the area. Surrounded by brackish and stagnant waters roughly two feet deep, the mound is approximately 1,000 feet in diameter and nearly half that in height. Viewed from the air, it looks like an enormous boil emerging from the landscape. Slick rivers of slime and polluted moisture cascade down its sides.

Climbing the mound is gut-churning at best. The thick, muddy surface sloughs away like a leper's skin. The entire area

reeks of decay and filth, and any characters not actively doing something to take their minds off the stink of the place must save vs. poison or suffer a -2 penalty to all rolls (even dwarves; it's that bad).

Circling the mound shows two obvious entrances. Due south, the characters find the Maw of Tsathogga (Area 1), a huge yawning cavern offering easy, if intimidating, access just out of the stagnation. They also discover the Fetid Pond (Area 2), a half-submerged tunnel leading into complete darkness in the northeastern slope at the waterline of the marsh.

CHALLENGE

WANDERING MONSTERS

Most intelligent, non-batrachian creatures avoid the Ranan Tumulus. However, a few native molds and plants live in the area and have gained a degree of sentience through proximity to it. This sentient vegetation can be a hazard to travelers. Roll a wandering monster check on 1d20 once per hour:



AN EXPEDITIONER'S TRAVELOGUE

Check out different hooks to get characters into the tsathars' swamp in *Arden's Notebook*.

1d20 Encounter

1	1d6 Shambling Mounds (roll 1d6: 1 = 7HD; 2 = 8HD; 3 = 9HD; 4 = 10HD; 5 = 11HD; 6 = 12HD)
2	Festering Lung
3	1d4 Ooze Weirds
4	Ebon Ooze
5	4 Tendriculos
6	4 Phycomids
7	3 12HD Shambling Mounds
8	Bogdancers of the Fetid Maw (2d4 gnolls)
9-20	No encounter

ARDEN'S ADVENTURES

Arden's Adventures will offer new, short adventures for Old-School Essentials' games. *Against Tsathogga*, the first adventure, sends high-level characters into the swamp to face the Demon Frog God's minions.

The book offers short, contained adventures:

- ▶ **Themed settings:** Need a short city adventure? How about something set in the desert?
- ▶ New monsters and magic.
- ▶ Links to articles found in *Arden's Notebook*.



COMING SOON FROM FROG GOD GAMES

ARDEN'S NOTEBOOK

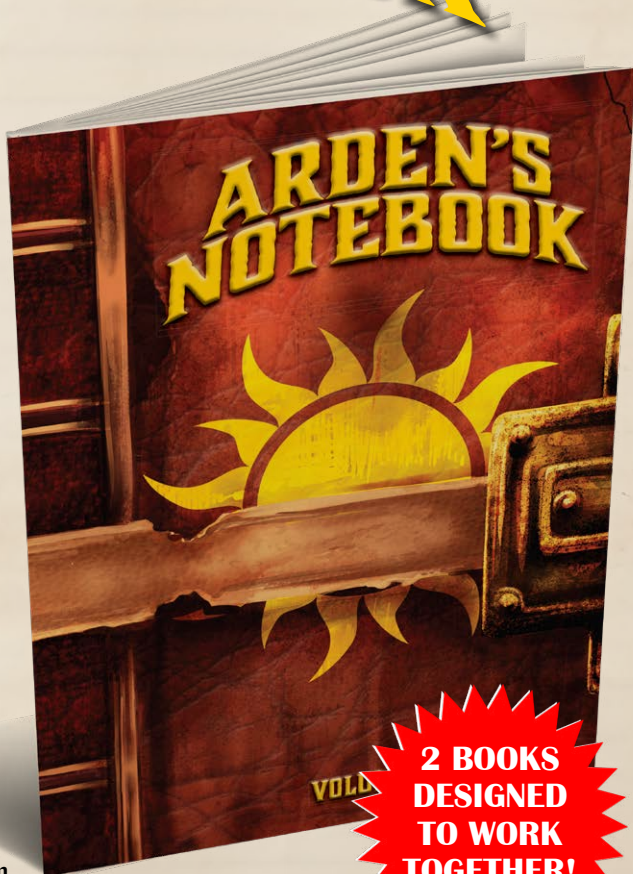
Arden's Notebook builds off material presented in *Arden's Adventures*. This additional content can be dropped into your game to expand the adventure.

More for your game:

- ▶ Articles on gaming or adventuring, as well as tips for managing your game.
- ▶ Additional monsters and magic, most based on the adventure's theme or setting.
- ▶ Unique NPCs, factions, spells, and equipment.
- ▶ **Tropes**, a new comic just for this book.

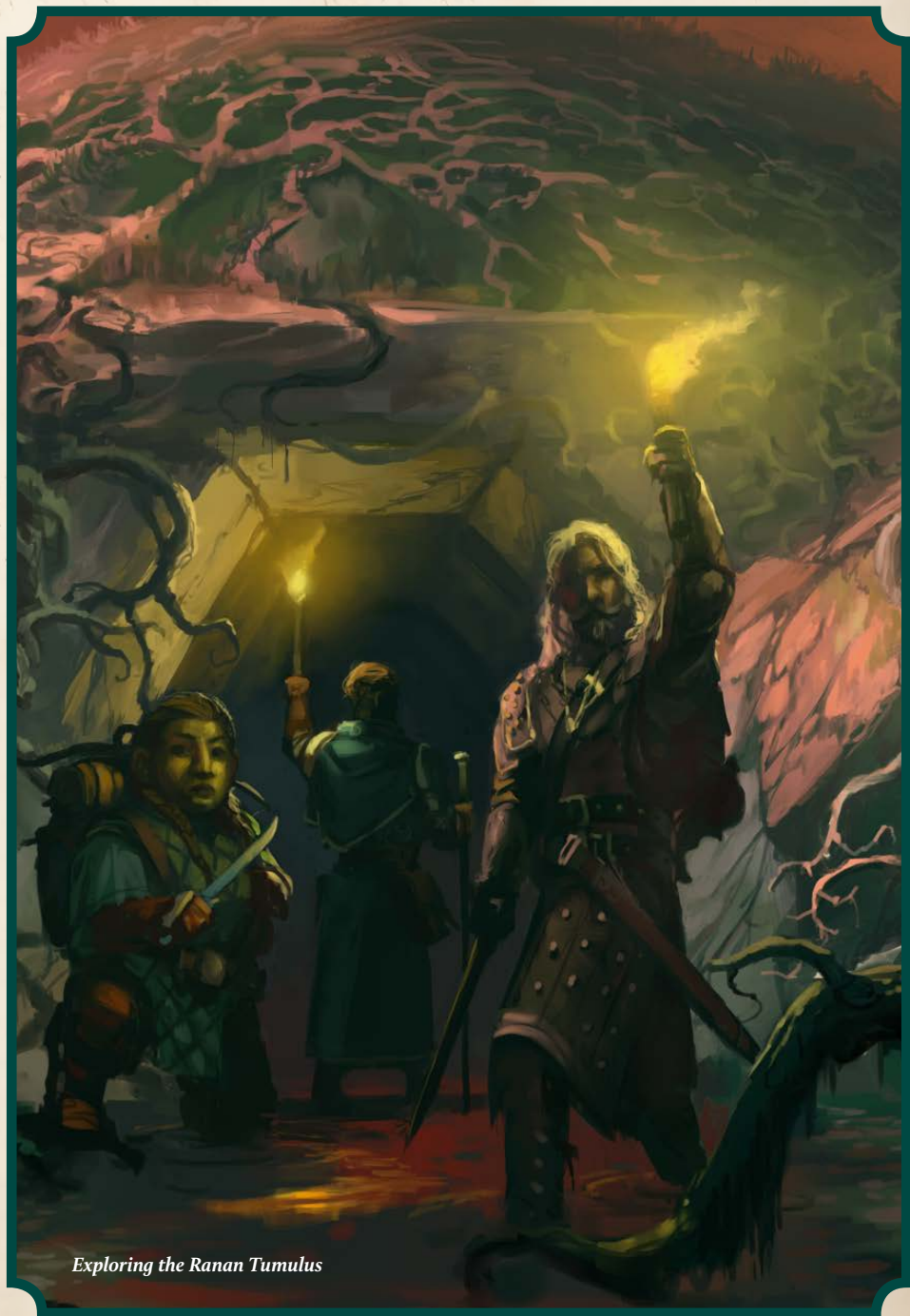
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Exploring the Ranan Tumulus

ARDEN'S NOTEBOOK



VOLUME 1

Helman's Haberdashery

FOR THE WELL-APPOINTED ADVENTURER!

BY THOM WILSON AND GLYNN SEAL

A collection of strange and unique items from around the land.

TONICS, SALVES, AND POULTICES OF THE BACKCOUNTRY

Mainly through trial-and-error, hermits, shamans, and witches have learned to survive the backcountry swamps with a cupboard full of strange concoctions and prepared brews. With the careful cultivation of rare ingredients, moonlight rites, and sinister sacrifices, these knowledgeable crafters provide potions and salves to locals and travelers alike — for a price.

The following list represents but a fraction of the tools these swamp dwellers have at their disposal to combat the harsh environs of their homesteads and villages.

FROG SPIT

"We git some frog shit, pond sludge, and bark of the cypress, mix it all together in a pot. We dump three 'n ten live frogs into the boil while utterin' curses to our goddess, Fellanna. A clump of frog spit is all what's left by the time the sun rises." — **Grukka the Witch, Master Boiler**

Thick in texture and foul in flavor, this wad of greasy plant mixture is placed in the mouth between the cheek and gums. After one round of intolerable chewing, it produces an immense amount of bitter brown and green juice that can be spat at a single target up to 10 ft. away. Those struck by the pungent spittle must save vs. poison or fall into violent retching for one round (–2 to all actions). The chewer may make one such attack per round for up to three rounds, though they must also save vs. poison before each attack or swallow some of the mixture and suffer the same penalties listed above.

GATOR AIDER

"I ain't gonna say how you gotta git that gator piss, but it ain't the easy way you's probably thinkin'." — **Geral Boon, Ingredients Gatherer**

Generally found in a stoppered glass bottle, gator aider is a viscous, brownish-yellow tonic that smells something akin to urine mixed with vomit. A CON check is required to drink it entirely to get the full effect, which is determined by rolling 1d6:

GATOR AIDER EFFECTS

1d6	Effect
1	Skin toughens into leathery feel (unarmored AC improves by 2).
2	Teeth grow oversized, adds a bite attack to any close combatant (1d4 damage).
3	Target can hold breath for 5d6 minutes.
4	Target lets out a strange howl that summons 1d2 + 1 alligators that follow commands.
5	Target grows a tail that can be used to attack close foes (1d6 damage).
6	Target polymorphs into an alligator.

Unless otherwise noted, effects last 1d4 + 1 rounds. After the tonic's power fades, a save vs. breath is required to avoid one round of retching while prone.

LIZARD'S TAIL

"I done seen an arm grow back on a fellar, I did. Quite a sight." — **Swamp Shaman Surgell**

When the root of the rare lizard's tail plant is shaved, crushed, and combined with its boiled leaves and then made into a coarse paste, it can be applied to exterior wounds to accelerate healing. The poultice serves as a mild sedative and a pain reducer, doubling all healing for six hours (some herbalists say that if enough poultice is applied for several consecutive days, its user may regrow lost limbs). The poultice must be stored in fresh lizard's tail leaves to remain potent; it loses its power after 12 hours in any other vessel.

SLIMESKIN

"Slipperier than a greased gator, you be. Ain't no one gonna wanna try 'n touch you after you done used this." — **Buggol, Hermit**

Made from rare herbs and plants, this slippery green paste can be applied to areas of the body to prevent foes from grabbing or grappling their target. The poultice requires two full rounds to apply and lasts up to one hour or three grapple/attack attempts before sloughing off. While smeared with slimeskin, armor class improves by 4 (grapples) or 2 (normal attacks). This poultice can also be applied to walls and ladder rungs to challenge even the best climbers.

WHISPERNETTLE

"The dead are around ya, and then the dead are in ya!" — Dharga, Cruel Witch of the Swamp

There is truth to the stories that the dead in the swamp can be heard by some — especially if those listening have drunk the broth of whispernettle. After several dozen stalks of the stinging plant are boiled down into a green broth, they are added to a mixture of dead flesh, swamp water, and bones, resulting in a thick soup. Consuming the soup provides a modified ESP or telepathic connection with those who have died in the swamp: thoughts are heard clearly, and some questions may be answered. The soup's effects last for 12 hours. When the duration ends, the imbiber vomits any soup that remains undigested and requires bedrest for 12 hours afterward.

WORMSEED

"Them crawly bastards will worm their way away from ya. But yer friends may, too. You'll stink so bad." — Grokta, Swamp Witch

When ingested, crushed or whole wormseeds create an awful body odor that repels insects, worms, maggots, centipedes, and other crawling monstrosities, much like a cleric repels the undead. To determine efficacy, roll on the cleric Turn Undead table, with wormseed acting as a 4th-level cleric. Wormseed is generally sprinkled over food or drink, but it can be consumed by the handful. If eaten alone, wormseeds require a CON check to avoid vomiting. If crushed, wormseed must be consumed within one hour or its effects are lost. Elves and halflings are particularly averse to the odor; they do not approach within 20 ft. of

anyone who has consumed wormseed (or they suffer a –1 penalty to actions).

Wormseed does not repel crawling reptiles like snakes.

YELLAROOT

"Ya pluck it from the dirt and pop it in your bag so the sun don't smile on it. Ya don't want sun-kissed roots — that'll kill ya!"

— Forstok, Hermit

The crystalline shavings of the yellaroot vegetable are often found in a small, dark-colored vial, as exposure to sunlight turns the root to poison. Added to tea or water and ingested, the shavings coat the stomach lining and protect against imbibed poisons and rotting food for 1d6 hours. During this time, the target is immune to any toxic liquid or food consumed by mouth. Yellaroot does not provide immunity to poisons absorbed by the skin or bloodstream, and its flowers are poisonous.

WEAPONS

SNAKESKIN BOW OF GRALHOLLOW

The settlement of Gralhollow was abandoned when the fetid swamp consumed it. In its devouring wake, it left a rotten timber carcass protruding from the black water like rotten teeth in an ogre's maw. Morag Rumspittle — a black hag — makes the sodden ruins her abode and stalks the murky waters attended by serpentine servants. Adept at fashioning magical items, she crafted a long bow from dried python skin to kill intruders and feed her pets.

The bow imparts a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

TRIBAL BOG CANOE

Vessel	Cost (gp)	Cargo Capacity (Coins)	Usage	Length	Beam	Draft
Tribal Bog Canoe	2,000	6,000	Swamps	15 ft.	3 ft.	1 ft.

		Rowing (Oarsman)			Sailing (Sailors)		
Vessel	Requires Captain?	Req. Crew	Miles/Day	Movement Rate	Req. Crew	Miles/Day	Movement Rate
Tribal Bog Canoe	No	1*	18	90 (60)	—	—	—

* Crew acts as rowers, sailors, and fighters.

Vessel	Maximum Mercenaries	Armor Class	Hull Points	Ram?	Catapults?
Tribal Bog Canoe	—	7 (12)	20	—	—

- ▶ **Weapon Qualities:** Missile (5 ft.–60 ft. / 61 ft.–120 ft. / 121 ft.–180 ft.), two-handed.
- ▶ **Strangle:** On a natural attack roll of 19 or 20 to hit, an arrow fired from the bow constricts around the target’s neck (if applicable) and chokes them to death in 1d3 + 3 rounds. Victims drop whatever they are holding but may break free with a successful Open Doors or STR check (referee’s discretion).

Can be piloted by unskilled characters provided they know the command words.

- ▶ **Light:** Despite being carved from a large tree trunk, the canoe is surprisingly light due to its enchantments, weighing the same as a standard canoe.
- ▶ **Self-propelled:** Does not require paddling or steering. The vessel is operated with barked and snarled commands.
- ▶ **Buoyant:** Cannot be tipped over.
- ▶ **Affinity to Swamps:** Outside of a swamp environment, the tribal bog canoe functions as a standard canoe (see Old-School Essentials Water Vessels).

EQUIPMENT

TRIBAL BOG CANOE

The Bogdancers of the Fetid Maw are a feared tribe of gnolls. Their success is attributed to their mastery of traversing the swamps in canoes the tribes revere as generational artifacts. Carved from a cypress tree trunk using axes ritually enchanted by their shamans, a tribal bog canoe can seat up to four human-sized creatures.

SWAMP BRIQUETTES

These specially prepared and ensorcelled briquettes of swamp peat can be placed in any lantern instead of oil. In swamp environments, a single briquette burns for eight hours and provides 60-ft. illumination range (reduce to two hours and 15-ft. illumination outside of a swamp).

ZOO-Illogical

BY GLYNN SEAL

ANACONDA CYPRESS

A terrifying cross between a bald cypress tree and an anaconda. The result of a crazed tribal shaman's experiment, the creature's serpentine body rises from the swamp. Its long tail coils at the surface and appears to be the emerging trunk of a cypress tree. Their skin is tough, cracked, and mottled like cypress bark. Long sinewy tendrils sprout from their bodies and sway like branches — until they wrap around prey that stumbles within reach. The head of the anaconda is camouflaged to look like the tree's thickened trunk. Anaconda cypress are stationary, moving only to find more abundant hunting grounds.

An anaconda cypress with a bulging trunk is a sign that the creature has recently fed — and is digesting its meal. Any treasure is found in the tail-root system, where the digested remains of previous meals are deposited.

ANACONDA CYPRESS

AC 4 [15]; **HD** 10* (45 hp); **Att** 1 x bite (1d10), 4 x branch tendrils (1d6 + constriction); **THACO** 11 [+8]; **MV** 0 (0) / 3 (1) when relocating; **SV** D6 W7 P8 B8 S10; **ML** 12; **AL** Neutral; **XP** 1,600; **NA** 0 (1); **TT** U

- ▶ **Branch tendrils:** Its branch tendrils can reach up to 30 ft. and attack separate targets. No more than two branches can attack the same human-sized or smaller target.
- ▶ **Constriction:** When a branch tendril attack succeeds, the branch wraps around the victim and begins to squeeze, inflicting 2d4 automatic damage immediately and on each subsequent round.
- ▶ **Hard skin:** Hard skin like cypress bark improves its **AC**. A victim can break free with either a successful Open Doors check or a successful STR ability check (referee's discretion).
- ▶ **Monster type:** Treated as a snake and not a plant or tree for the purposes of spells and effects.
- ▶ **Tip vessels:** Can tip swamp-going vessels that pass within range of its branch tendrils.

ROLE CALL!

NPCs TO LIVEN UP YOUR CAMPAIGN

BY SKEETER GREEN

A couple of NPCs who may help — or hinder — the party as they explore the swamp.

BENEFICE MONTROE

AC 6 [13]; **HD** 6** (23 hp); **Att** 1 x *trident* +1 (1d6 + 1) or 1 x *sling* (1d4) or spells; **THACO** 17 [+2]; **MV** 120 (40); **SV** D9 W10 P12 B14 S12 (Drd6); **ML** 10; **AL** Neutral; **XP** 950

- ▶ **Spells:** (1st-level) *faerie fire*, *speak with animals*; (2nd-level) *cure light wounds*, *obscuring mist*; (3rd-level) *call lightning*, *water breathing*; (4th-level) *cure serious wounds*; (5th-level) *protection from plants and animals*.
- ▶ **Items:** *ring of controlling animals*, *bag of holding*, *trident* +1, *fish command*, *potion of diminution*, *potion of gaseous form*, leather armor, wooden shield, 6 vials of holy water, mistletoe

Benefice seldom stays in one area for more than a few days. He has seen much, experiencing wonders and horrors from one end of the world to another. Currently, he is taking refuge in the deeper bog areas. What Ben is searching for — or trying to avoid — is a mystery.

A tall, thin human, Ben reminds observers of a sapling, pliant and reedy. He avoids



direct conflict with obviously superior foes but does not flee a necessary conflict. Ben typically surrounds himself with local animal companions and speaks with as many of the natural creatures of an area as he can find.

Ben is armed with a magical trident that encourages land-dwelling creatures to back off and aquatic beings to stop and converse. His magical bag lines the inside of his backpack, making it appear as if the shoulder pack can carry a far greater load than it seems. All his gear is utilitarian, with his traveling clothes appearing well-worn, even shabby. Ben is not one for fancy accoutrements.

TROPES

I HAVE A **SWORD**!

I HAVE A **HAMMER**!

I HAVE A **BOW**!

YEAH WELL I HAVE
THE **MAP**, SO....

WHY DO THEY
ALWAYS DO THIS
BEFORE A
CRAWL?!

I DON'T
KNOW!

WRITING/CONCEPT: SKEETER GREEN

THE ART STUFF: CHET MINTON

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH
**OLD-SCHOOL
ESSENTIALS**

