

CODEX CRYPTOZOOLOGICA II

White Light from the Mouth of Infinity

When one thinks of the many books detailing the monstrous inhabitants that stalk the world of Legend, one's mind inevitably turns to the classic research tomes of yore. The scholar-monk Ecgric's *Entire Compendium of Creatures Malign & Mysterious*, for example. Or perhaps the epic *Zoology* of Philomenes, sage of ancient Emphidor. The much-travelled Lord Jadhak's mind-searing grimoire *The Indigenes of the Realms of Demons*. And even Claudio Fiorillo's mysterious *Forgotten Bestiary*. However, these works are mere theses and dissertations when compared to the greatest bestiary of them all: the *Codex Cryptozoologica* of the Krarthian Mage known as White Light, avatar of knowledge.

Every issue of *Ordo Draconis* we unveil hidden lore from the *Codex Cryptozoologica* in the form of new and horrible creatures with which to vex both players and characters alike. Each creature is presented as per the *Dragon Warriors Bestiary*, with a lengthy descriptive section followed by a block of game statistics. The latter part follows the guidelines of the *Bestiary* (pp. 5-8), and includes Category, Number, Habitat and Typical Treasure, along with normal combat statistics. With this issue of *Ordo Draconis* looking at the Nomad Khanates, we present the following denizens from the rolling grasslands and arid basins of the Eastern Steppes...



FLATLAND DEATH WORM

By Andrew Wright

...we had been hunting the tiger for three days across the steppes when its tracks passed by a shallow dell. Therein lay the ruin of an abandoned shrine of the local nomads. Vizkhan, our lead tracker, cautioned against entering the place, but our younger colleagues Gistoc and Ferdulian sensed treasure and ventured forth, with myself someway behind to keep an eye on them. A light dew dusted the crumbling bricks and surrounding grass with a splendour of glittering drops, providing a backdrop of beauty that was utterly at odds with the horrific screams of pain that suddenly rang out!

Dashing forward, I spied Gistoc on his knees and tearing at his face with his hands, while a noxious yellow liquid covered his head and shoulders, burning through skin, hair and cloth alike. The culprit was a hideous fat worm the size of a man, with a ribbed and segmented body the very colour of blood. It reared up and thrashed around blindly, scattering further yellow gobbets of ichor from its quivering maw. Ferdulian, who had been standing still in total shock, drew his sword and lashed out at the beast. The moment his weapon touched the creature, there was a flash and a bang and the air was full of the sharp scent that follows a lightning strike in a thunderstorm. Ferdulian was a blackened corpse and his weapon a twisted lump of metal. The creature, completely unharmed by the altercation, turned and slithered off into the depths of the shrine.

I gingerly backed out, dragging the still howling wreck that was Gistoc with me, careful not to touch his wounds or the acidic poison that caused them. He died not longer after, screaming the whole time until the venom ate finally through his throat and silenced him forever...

- Mestac Vestpline, *Tales of a Tamorian Venturer Abroad on the High Plains*

The Flatland Death Worm is a fearsome and lethal beast from the Eastern Steppes. In appearance it is similar to a gigantic fat leech, mottled blood-red in colour and around two metres long. For this reason the nomads call it *orlghoi khorkhoi* which means 'intestine worm' for its resemblance to the innards of an ox or camel. One end has a triangular mouth, with small fangs at each corner, while the other is adorned with a series of fleshy protuberances that are constantly twitching. This organ is believed to play some role in generating electricity. The Death Worm lacks eyes but it must have other sensory organs of some sort, as it is highly aware of its surroundings in either darkness or light.

The worm is found in arid areas across the steppes, where it lives in shallow burrows among sand dunes or on the shores of dried-out lakes. Here it can sometimes be seen basking in the sun after one of the infrequent rain storms that sweep through the plains. Moisture of any kind appears to drive it to the surface. Nomads say the creature preys on small mammals such as marmots and ground-squirrels, as well as anything larger that is unfortunate enough to cross its path.

The Death Worm's usual attack strategy is to rise up abruptly from its burrow or hiding place and unleash a continuous stream of yellow acidic poison from its mouth. This can be used as either a missile weapon (Short range: 0-5m, Medium & Long: not applicable) or melee weapon. As well as causing some corrosive damage, the acid counts as a strong poison (see *Dragon Warriors*, p. 122).

The creature has one further trick to play. If struck in melee combat, it will immediately release a powerful blast of electrical energy that causes 6 Health Points damage to whoever hit it (with no Armour Bypass roll needed). In addition, the person striking the worm will suffer further damage if they are wielding a metal weapon, or wearing metal armour. This damage is equal to 1 Health Point for every point of Armour Factor or damage inflicted by their weapon, plus 1 further Health Point if they are using a shield. Thus if Sir Thiagos (sword, shield, plate armour) hit a Flatland Death Worm, he would suffer 6 HP + 4 HP (sword) + 5 HP (plate armour) + 1 HP (shield) for a total of 16 Health Points damage. The person's metal weapon will also be destroyed in the attack, except if it is enchanted.

It is unknown as to whether there are limits to the amount of acid spittle or the number of electrical shocks that the creature can produce, as those few nomads who have survived the onslaught of a Flatland Death Worm attack have not left detailed accounts of their encounters. Sustained missile fire however, will cause the beast to retreat to its burrow, and this is the tactic the nomads usually employ in order to drive the creature away.

FLATLAND DEATH WORM

ATTACK 18, Acid Spray (d10, 3 and strong poison) or Electric Shock (see above)

DEFENCE 2

MAGICAL DEFENCE 4

Health Points 2d6 +10

Rank-equivalent: 6th

AF 1

Movement 10m (25m)

EVASION 2

STEALTH 18

PERCEPTION 7 (panoptical)

Category: monster, **Number:** 1, **Habitat:** deserts, plains, **Typical Treasure:** none

Adventure Seed: A band of assassins from a city near the steppes (Tamor perhaps, or Ta'aqan to the south) hear of the Death Worm and its virulent toxin. They hire the characters to travel to the steppes with one of their brethren in search of a Death Worm from which to extract poison. To complicate matters, the poison must be extracted while the Death Worm is alive, as its potency deteriorates rapidly after death. In addition, there is the ethical dilemma of how to test the poison for its efficacy on people, and whether the assassins want the adventurers to remain alive after such an important mission has been successfully completed.



YELLOW MURDER WORM

By Andrew Wright

...later, following a period of mourning, Vizkhan told us of a smaller relative of the orlghoi khorkhoi, that traveled in vast packs, burrowing across the steppes and tearing apart whatever prey they could find. He called them the shar khorkhoi, or 'yellow worm'. I never saw any on all my travels through the Khanates, but there were times when the guides would lead us carefully past seemingly empty stretches of grassy sward, saying quietly: 'Sshh! The shar are sleeping...'

- Mestac Vestpline, *Tales of a Tamorian Venturer Abroad on the High Plains*

The Yellow Murder Worm – known to the nomads as the *shar khorkhoi* – is a close relative of the Death Worm. However, it is about half the size – around a metre long – and a dirty yellow in colour. Its triangle-shaped mouth is also quite large, proportional to the rest of its leech-shaped body, and packed with many sharp, hook-like teeth.

It lives in the same arid areas as the Death Worm, where it inhabits complex communal burrow systems and savagely attacks any trespassers on its territory. During the wetter seasons, Murder Worms have been known to migrate across the steppes to higher ground, in menacing packs that are given a wide berth by all other creatures who dwell upon the steppes.

Unlike its larger relative, the Murder Worm lacks both poison spittle and electrical shock attacks. Instead, it assails its prey in huge swarms of up to fifty creatures, smothering them in a rippling wave of repulsive bodies. Each worm continues to bite flesh off the unfortunate victim until all that is left is a bloody and tattered skeleton.

Some scholars, such as Fiorillo of Selentium, speculate that the Yellow Murder Worm is simply a larval stage of the Death Worm, acquiring the size, solitary disposition, and fearsome weapons of the latter as it matures. However, in the absence of definitive data (and the potentially fatal difficulties involved in obtaining such information!), such hypotheses remain unproven.

YELLOW MURDER WORM

ATTACK 13, Bite (d6, 2)

DEFENCE 5

MAGICAL DEFENCE 3

Health Points 1d6 +3

Category: monster, **Number:** 5-50, **Habitat:** deserts, plains, **Typical Treasure:** none

Rank-equivalent: 1st

AF 0

Movement 15m (25m)

EVASION 3

STEALTH 16

PERCEPTION 7 (panoptical)

Adventure Seed: A shrine of the nomads lies abandoned on the steppes and infested with Yellow Murder Worms. Spirits have spoken to the local shaman and told him that the shrine must be restored by the blood of outsiders. Thus, the characters, as passing itinerants, are hired to clear the shrine of its wriggling denizens. However, the shrine's physical structure must not be harmed during the extermination campaign. How can the characters rid the ruined shrine of Yellow Murder Worms while leaving it completely intact?

OSSIFRAGE

By Andrew Wright

...six days out of the Citadel of Dzel-Daran, on the edge of a range of nameless southern hills, I spied on the wing the immense feathered raptor that the nomads call the Bone-Breaker Bird. Of course, I recognized its broad-winged shape immediately, as being the same as the legendary Ossifrage. These great birds were once common in Coradian lands – indeed, one is famous in ancient history for dropping a tortoise onto the head of the Emphidian sage Zooides, killing him instantly! However, they

thankfully now appear confined to the Eastern Steppes and beyond, where they soar across the face of the sky, seeking prey alive or dead...

- Mestac Vestpline, *Tales of a Tamorian Venturer Abroad on the High Plains*



The Ossifrage or Bone-Breaker Bird, is a giant species of vulture. Formerly widespread in historical times, it is now restricted to areas such as the Eastern Steppes, and the Harogarn Mountains. Its wingspan approaches four metres, and it is covered in coarse grey plumage. The feathers on its head are off-white and its black beak is long, sharp and perfectly adapted for stripping flesh from bone. The Ossifrage's surprisingly muscular legs terminate in cruel grasping talons.

Ossifrages especially enjoy eating bone-marrow and have perfected a technique of carrying bones up into the sky, before dropping them onto rocky ground, where they shatter, allowing the bird to feast on the bloody morsels within. They are also smart enough to employ this strategy to defend themselves. Nomads tell tales of the birds hurling bones from the skies at their prey with startling accuracy. If disturbed while feeding, or near a supply of bones, the Ossifrage will grasp one in its claws, rise up into the air, and throw it at its foes, with the same range as a thrown rock (Small: 0-10m, Medium: 11-15m, Long: 16-20m). Otherwise, and especially if hungry and facing lone prey, it will attack using its talons.

OSSIFRAGE

ATTACK 17, Talons (d6, 4), or Bone (d8, 5)

DEFENCE 12

MAGICAL DEFENCE 3

Health Points 1d6 +10

Category: animal, **Number:** 1-3, **Habitat:** plains, mountains, deserts, **Typical Treasure:** none

Rank-equivalent: 5th

AF 0

Movement: Flying 20m

EVASION 5

STEALTH 9

PERCEPTION 7 (normal)

Adventure Seed: Where the steppes meet the foothills of the Harogarn mountain ranges come tales of an eyrie of Ossifrages that not only drop bones on their enemies but wield them as clubs while flying down to attack. These unusual birds are actually under the enchantment of a Hag, who has ensnared the largest of their number with her Night Bridle (see *Bestiary*, p. 56). Surrounded by her feathered cohort, the Hag leads raiding sorties down into the lowlands that have attracted the ire of the few nomads and traveling caravans that wander these parched southern prairies. During a stop at one of the dusty depot-towns in these parts, the characters are approached by a nomad who offers to lead them to the Hag's lair if they can dispose of this menace once and for all. Surely the harridan has acquired much loot from her depredations against the local populace...



DIRE WIND

By Eric Olson

...while traversing the southern steppes, Vizkhan told us of a once rich city called Rakundus, sheltered in the foothills of the Harogarn Mountains, that turned its back on the spirits. Despite a variety of omens, the city refused to appease their ancestors. On the morning after the Summer Solstice, the winds began to howl as the angry spirits descended on the city. In one blood-filled day, hundreds were killed and thousands more were forced to flee into the mountains or out onto the plains. To this day the angry spirits roam the city streets protecting the treasures left behind...

- Mestac Vestpline, *Tales of a Tamorian Venturer Abroad on the High Plains*

The nomads of the Great Plains revere the spirits of the earth, sky, and their glorious ancestors. To show their reverence, hunters offer a portion of every kill, herdsman burn incense at the time of birthing, families paint pictograms on the inside of their yurts showing the deeds of their family, and they offer delicacies to appease their ancestors' spirits during the winter and summer solstices. The nomads believe that failure to show proper respect to the spirits brings misfortune and curses the dead to manifest their wrath in the form of a Dire Wind.

The Dire Wind is a supernatural creature able to whip the air in a 10m radius into a

howling storm, turning shards of rock and other debris into lethal weapons. The Dire Wind seeks to punish the living and steal their blood. It will target one person at a time surrounding it in a fearsome wind, making it difficult to move or speak. The Dire Wind has no form until it begins to shed its victim's blood; then the wind will change color taking on a crimson hue and coalescing into a roughly human shape.

Prior to the Dire Wind gorging on its victim's blood, it can't be hit by normal weapons. Once it has taken blood, the Dire Wind begins to take on the form of an enraged warrior, and may now be hit by normal weapons. Each round that it successfully sheds its victim's blood by wounding them, the Dire Wind's Armour Factor reduces by 1 point, to a minimum factor of 2.

DIRE WIND

ATTACK 18, Shards (d10, 5)

DEFENCE 12 (immune to missile weapons)

MAGICAL DEFENCE 10

Health Points 2d6 +15

Rank-equivalent: 6th

AF 8 (see above)

Movement 20m (40m)

EVASION 8

STEALTH 0

PERCEPTION 14 (panoptical)

Category: undead, **Number:** 1-6, **Habitat:** ruins, battlefields, plains, **Typical Treasure:** good

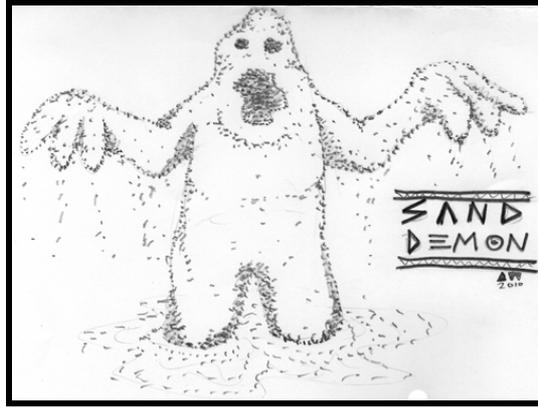
Adventure Seed: The characters find a tattered map in the nest of an Ossifrage on an isolated crag in the steppes. Taking it to a local sage, they discover it reveals the location of the lost city of Rakundus, once the outpost of the Selentine VIth legion (see *Dragon Warriors*, p. 176). However, they are not alone in their search. Several other groups, including renegade nomads and fortune-hunters, also hear of the city by 'persuading' the sage. What follows is not just a race across the steppes to the ruins, but also a savage game of last man standing as the various bands of treasure-seekers are picked off and drained of blood by the savage Dire Winds that prowl the once-bustling streets of Rakundus...

SAND DEMON

By Andrew Wright

...at this point we joined the camel train of the merchant Zelkhung as it wound its way through the gritty wastes of the Izbhelbelay Dunes. On the second night the caravan was attacked by Sand Demons. Our weapons were useless, carving harmlessly through their shifting forms. We would have surely perished had not the quick-thinking mage Xulta pulled a vellum scroll from a case on her belt and uttered a spectacular enchantment. Instantly, in a mighty blast of sorcerous flame, the Sand Demons were vitrified into blackened glassy statues. The few stragglers were then dispatched with goutts of fire from Xulta's fingertips, or instead chose to flee. They disappeared back down into the ground they had come from, or coalesced into swirling dust-devils that went whirling off across the barren sandscape...

- Mestac Vestpline, *Tales of a Tamorian Venturer Abroad on the High Plains*



Sand Demons are malicious elemental spirits that inhabit the driest and most arid parts of the steppes. They have also been reported from further afield, including the Kaikuhuran Desert and the Desert of Songs. They appear as amorphous, vaguely humanoid beings composed entirely of sand, rising up from the ground to waylay travellers, and occasionally attacking encampments and small settlements.

They attack with fists of abrasive sand, pulverizing flesh and armour alike. Sand Demons are immune to all non-magical weapons – blades or arrows will simply pass harmlessly through their bodies. However, they are particularly susceptible to magical fires, such as a *Dragonbreath* spell – such attacks will cause an extra +1HP damage against a Sand Demon. Magical weapons, including enchanted arrows, wound them normally.

When a Sand Demon is reduced to a quarter of its Health Points total, it will immediately dissolve into a mini-sandstorm that looks like a man-sized whirlwind. In this form it will surround its victim and implode upon them, causing 1d10 HP damage (less the victim's Armour Factor). If this fails to kill the victim, the Sand Demon will attempt to flee, either down into the sands, or out and away across the endless dunes...

Although they appear somewhat intelligent, Sand Demons do not value treasure, and also need no food. As such, their attacks appear purely for amusement value, causing as much mayhem and violence as possible. Certain shamans of nefarious disposition have been known to use Sand Demons as minions, stealing riches from caravans or sowing strife among the various clans of nomads.

SAND DEMON

ATTACK 15, Fists (d6, 3) or Whirlwind
(see above)

DEFENCE 9

MAGICAL DEFENCE 10

Health Points 1d6 +8

Rank-equivalent: 4th

AF 0 (immune to non-magical weapons)

Movement 10m (20m)

EVASION 5

STEALTH 13

PERCEPTION 10 (panoptical)

Category: supernatural, **Number:** 2-12, **Habitat:** deserts, **Typical Treasure:** none

Adventure Seed: Rival clans of nomads are attempting to cement a tribal alliance by marrying the daughter of one chief to the son of another. However, an exiled shaman from one of the clans seeks to disrupt the proceedings by using Sand Demon hirelings

to abduct the bride and carry her off to be sacrificed to dark spirits. The clans are in an uproar and conflict seems likely. Can the characters calm things down and, along with the groom, rescue the bride from the clutches of the Sand Demons and their master's evil ceremony?

Encounters in the Eastern Steppes

One surprising omission from the Encounter Charts in the *Bestiary* was a table for encounters on the plains and steppes of Legend. Given this issue of *Ordo Draconis* is partially given over to exploring such places, we present the following Encounter Table as a suggestion.

Plains

Terrain Type: Steppes, flatlands, grasslands, prairies
Chance of Encounter: 20% (check at dawn and dusk)

<i>d100 roll</i>	<i>Encounter</i>
	Humans-
1-18	Nomads (6-60)
19-24	Adventurers (2-8)
25-32	Merchant caravan (3-30)
33	Hermit
34-37	Outlaws (2-12)
38-44	Buffaloes (3-30)
45-48	Centaurs (1-80)
49	Chonchon
50-51	Flatland Death Worm
52-53	Dire Wind
54-58	Dholes (2-8)
59-62	Steppes Eagles (1-3)
63-65	Ossifrages (1-3)
66-70	Wild Horses (3-30)
71-72	Almas (2-12)
73	Lycanthrope
74-75	Manticore
76-78	Giant Viper
79-81	Sand Demons (2-12)
82-83	Steppes Tiger
84	Thorn Demons (2-16)
	Undead-
85-86	Skeletons (2-8)
87-88	Zombies (2-8)
89	Ghouls (1-3)
90	Grave Gaunts (1-12)
91-94	Wolves (3-18)
95-97	Wild Boar
98-00	Yellow Murder Worms (5-50)

Explanation of entries:

Buffaloes, are usually present in great herds and use the same stats as Bulls (see *Bestiary*, p. 26), though this will only apply to the 1-3 males that are accompanying the rest of the group.

Dholes are a type of Wild Dog (see *Bestiary*, p. 27) that inhabit both the steppes and more distant eastern lands.

Steppes Eagles are large birds of prey, sometimes trained for hunting by the nomads. They use the same stats as Giant Eagles (see *Bestiary*, p. 34).

Almas are a type of hairy Apemen (see *Bestiary*, p. 18), peculiar to rocky and hilly areas of the steppes.

Lycanthropes are mainly Werewolves, though other types are known, such as Weretigers and Wereboars.

The *Steppes Tiger* is much larger and woollier than its southern jungle-dwelling counterparts. Its pelt is valued highly by both nomads and cultures further afield. Assume stats similar to the Sabre-Tooth Tiger (see *Bestiary*, p. 45)

Thorn Demons are often found in damper areas of the steppes, among stands of spiny acacias and mimosa trees.

The various lesser *Undead* usually shamble forth from ancient battlefields or the sites of more recent bandit attacks. Some steppes cultures once practiced interring their dead in enormous stone funerary jars that dot the plains in large numbers. These are often infested with *Ghouls*. *Grave Gaunts* on the other hand are found closer to the cliffs and valleys where the steppes meet the highlands.

Author's Note: The Flatlands Death Worm is actually based on the Mongolian Death Worm, a cryptozoological critter rumoured to haunt the wastes of central Asia (and the Yellow Murder Worm is based on one its lesser-known relatives). The Ossifrage is a souped-up version of the real world Lammergeier, with elements of both the extinct Teratorns and Haast's Eagle thrown in for good measure. The Sand Demon was inspired by a picture of a Sand Giant from *Giants*, an old children's book by Christopher Rawson and Stephen Cartwright.

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