

If there's one thing I've learned in my life, it's that any empire that rises will fall. They all come crashing down.

—Volo

in the organization. Among these are the beholder's accountant, chamberlain, chief messenger, doctor, fish-keeper, fortune-teller, lawyer, master entertainer, monster trainer, trap-setter, and warden for its private prison. The individuals in these roles generally serve the Xanathar for months or years, because replacements that have the same specialized skills can be hard to come by.

WHAT OTHERS KNOW

The organization's grunt-level employees—thieves, slavers, and ordinary thugs—work for the Xanathar Guild because it pays well. They don't necessarily know their leader is a beholder; they just know the boss is powerful, dangerous, and doesn't tolerate mistakes. Although previous Xanathars carefully guarded the facts of their true nature and allowed only a handful of their lieutenants to know the truth, the current Xanathar treats the matter more like an open secret. All of its lieutenants, as well as many mid-level members of the guild that the Xanathar trusts, know that the guild is run by a beholder.

Most of the guild's low-ranking members have an idea that the boss isn't human, especially given how long the Xanathar has been in power (they aren't aware that several beholders have held the job). Most believe their leader is a member of a long-lived race, perhaps a dwarf or an elf. Some think the truth is more monstrous, and that the Xanathar is a drow or perhaps a dragon in humanoid form.

The people of Waterdeep are generally aware that there are one or more guilds controlling criminal activity in the city. Rumors occasionally surface about a monstrous crime lord, such as a demon or a dragon, that guides its organization from the shadows. Most common folk dismiss these rumors and the fools who circulate them, asserting that the Lords of Waterdeep would never allow such creatures to roam the city.

GIANTS: WORLD SHAKERS

The saga of giantkind began in the dawn of the world. Elves had yet to set dainty foot out of the fey realm when the thunder of the giants' steps shook the world to its bones, and even the dragons were yet unaware of the power and glory they would attain. The record of that early age had already vanished into the mists of legend by the time humankind came onto the scene. Now, not even the giants know the full truth of their beginnings.

All that the giants and their kin know for certain is that they are sibling races. Humanoids such as elves, humans, and dwarves are more similar in size and shape than the disparate giant types are to one another, but those races have no shared heritage. In contrast, every true giant, regardless of type, can trace its ancestry directly to Annam the All-Father. Most giants believe

that Annam took a number of consorts in addition to his mate Othea, accounting for the variety in appearance and abilities among the types of giantkind.

Giants and giant kin rank among the world's most fearsome creatures, literally towering over the other, younger beings that crowd the world. Yet nowadays most giants live in isolation or in obscure locations, exhibiting none of the collective grandeur and power of their forebears.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Encountering a giant can be an awe-inspiring and disorienting experience. First comes a rhythmic booming, felt more than heard, that resolves slowly into the sound of footsteps: a giant is near! Loose stones vibrate and tumble down the hillside. Trees sway, then bend aside as the colossus emerges. How can anything be that big? Is it a trick of perspective?

When giants first appear before a band of adventurers, they demonstrate the qualities that make them spectacular to behold:

Giants Are Huge. Most giants can easily peer in a second-floor window. The larger ones would have to stoop to get down to that level! A giant's metal hammer could serve as an anvil for a human smith, and a giant's shield is bigger and heavier than a feasting table.

Giants Are Heavy. If a giant sits on a wagon, its wheels and axles are liable to snap like twigs. A giant can crush a house or capsize a ship simply by carelessly shifting its weight. An ox that strays too close to a sleeping giant could wind up pinned or crushed if the giant rolls over suddenly.

Giants Are Loud. The footsteps of giants in the distance are often initially mistaken for thunder, even on a clear day. The sounds of a giant beating a weapon against its shield and bellowing a challenge to foes are strident enough to knock dishes from shelves and rattle doors in their frames.

Giants Are Strong. A charging warhorse at full gallop, capable of bowling over a line of human warriors, merely crumples against the bulk of a giant. A giant could kick a cart with enough force to send it smashing through a house, and a giant's club—the size of, if not actually, an entire tree—could level the same house with a single blow.

CHILDREN OF THE ALL-FATHER

In an age before human and elf, when all dragons were young, Annam the All-Father put the first giants upon the world. These giants were reflections of his divine offspring and also children of the world, birthed from the marrow of mountains, the hot blood of volcanoes, and the breath of hurricanes.

Annam conceived the giants to be masters of the world. He gave them great height so they would look down on all they ruled. He created a hierarchy for his children—the ordning—so that all would know their status with respect to one another, and would know who among them stood nearest the knee of the All-Father.

United in purpose, Annam's children built Ostoria, the fabled empire of the giants, where they lived according

to the ordning. Storm giants ruled all from both below and above. They held sway over the oceans from undersea fortresses and lorded over the land from castles in the sky. Cloud giants built immense floating cities and served the storm giants as their strong right hands. Stone giants and fire giants settled on the mountaintops and in the sprawling caverns beneath them, where they carved and forged the greatest works of giant art and craft. Frost giants defended Ostoria with the might of their arms, not just on the chilly peaks and glaciers but on every frontier. Hill giants sprawled over all other lands, subjugating lesser creatures through brute force.

BEGINNING OF THE END

All told, the empire of Ostoria dominated the world for four millennia before its decline began in a genocidal struggle against the dragons that came to be known as the Thousand-Year War.

Dragons had lived in and around Ostoria in relative peace since the empire's foundation. Conflicts between dragons and giants in those days were personal, not tribal or regional, and usually involved bragging rights or hunting territory. Differences were settled by individual contests of might, wits, or skill. That situation persisted for generations, until the red dragon Garyx inflamed the greed and envy in its followers by railing against the giants' prosperity, and they rose up in response.

At least, that's what most giants believed to have happened. No one really knows any longer what set off the war. But once battle began, the long-standing peace between giants and dragons crumbled everywhere. Foes tore at each others' throats in all parts of Ostoria. There were no front lines or safe havens, only endless ambushes, sieges, and atrocities committed against giants and dragons alike. Eventually, none were left alive on either side who had seen the war's beginning. Age and brutality had claimed them all, and the few giants and dragons then alive had spent their entire existence at war. The Thousand-Year War didn't truly end so much as it wasted away through attrition and exhaustion.

The realm that could still be called Ostoria survived only far in the north. A few outposts and fragment kingdoms, such as the fire giants' Helligheim and the stone giants' Nedeheim, clung to life in deep caverns and hidden valleys. In the millennia that followed, even these places fell, and what remained of Ostorian territory became barren, shrouded in ice as thick as mountains. Since that time, many lesser races have attained greatness and themselves fallen into obscurity. Few hints of the giants' once-great empire have survived the relentless accumulation of years.

OSTORIA AND OTHER WORLDS

The tale of Ostoria is drawn from the Forgotten Realms. Think of it as a good example of how giants developed on many worlds, as it captures their rise and fall from prominence in a manner that is iconic to many D&D settings. In your own world, you can replace Ostoria with another giant empire or adapt it to create your own origin story.

VONINHEIM, THE LOST CAPITAL

Voninheim ("Titan Home" in the Giant language) stood as the capital of Ostoria for millennia. It was an awe-inspiring structure of iron and stone, raised by magic as much as by mortal hands. Some attributed its construction directly to one or more of Annam's sons, arguing that even giants couldn't have erected such a monumental edifice. The palace stood firm and unshaken as glaciers that could flatten mountains assailed it and flowed around it, until only its iron spires jutted above the ice like great, gray fangs. Eventually the relentless ice buried it utterly, and Voninheim was abandoned. Many giants seek to rediscover its location: some hope to recapture the lost glory of Ostoria, but others want only to claim the mighty weapons of legend said to be entombed in its frozen halls.

But the giants remember. Their empire and their unified purpose are long gone, but a yearning for a return to the greatness that was once theirs burns in all their memories.

ANNAM'S OFFSPRING: THE GIANT PANTHEON

When Ostoria fell, Annam disowned his children, swearing never to regard the giants again until they returned Ostoria to its past prominence and reclaimed their rightful positions as rulers of the world. Giants, therefore, don't pray to Annam, who refuses to hear them. Instead, they revere his divine children, as well as a host of other hero-deities and godly villains that are minor members of the pantheon.

Chief among the giant gods are the six sons of Annam. The brothers are Stronmaus (champion and favorite of storm giants), Memnor (cloud giants), Surtur (fire giants), Thrym (frost giants), Skoraeus Stonebones (stone giants), and Grolantor (hill giants).

Although each of Annam's sons is typically worshiped by giants of a particular type, they, like Annam himself, aren't racially distinct. Stronmaus, for example, doesn't look like a storm giant, though he is often depicted as one in carvings and other art. Like Annam and each of his brothers, Stronmaus is a unique godly being with no mortal equivalent. His temperament and interests are similar to those of the storm giants, so most of his followers are of that type.

Similar statements can be made about the other five brothers. Most cloud giants revere Memnor, for example, but many reject him because of his deceitfulness and venerate Stronmaus instead. A storm giant living amid blizzards and icebergs in the far northern sea might pay homage to Thrym rather than to Stronmaus. Giants that have given up hope of rising in the ordning sometimes worship Vaprak the Destroyer, who is recognized by giants as the father of trolls and ogres.

Giants don't worship male deities exclusively, either. Annam's mate Othea, Hiatea the huntress and home warden, Iallanis the goddess of love and peace, and Diancastra, an impetuous and arrogant trickster, have substantial followings. Like humans, some giants even fall prey to demon cults, in which they pay homage to a demon lord such as Baphomet or Kostchtchie. Worshiping such entities, or any non-giant deity, is considered a great sin against the ordning. Being discovered means being cast out from family and clan.

THE GIANT TONGUE

The language that giants share is one of the few remnants from their once-grand empire. Over time it has fragmented into many dialects, and each type has its own distinctive accent, but giants of different types can generally understand one another.

Any non-giant who learns the Giant language can converse with all types of giants, but giants sometimes have a hard time hearing the tiny voices of human-sized creatures, and some vowel sounds emitted by giants are nearly impossible to reproduce for any creature that doesn't have lungs as large as beer barrels.

MAAT AND MAUG

Two words have special significance in the Giant language and the giants' worldview. Neither one of them translates directly into Common or any other language, because their definitions encompass several related concepts. **Maat** (pronounced *mott*) is the term giants use to describe ideas, behaviors, creatures, and objects that they consider good, holy, honorable, or desirable. **Maug** (pronounced *mog*) is the counterpart term, embodying what other languages call evil, unholy, dishonorable, or undesirable.

Individual giants aren't necessarily thought of as maat or maug by their kin. What matters isn't a giant's personal philosophy but its standing within the ordning, which is influenced by behavior and attitude but also by a host of other factors. Every individual commits both maat and maug acts, and rises or falls in the ordning as a consequence. A giant isn't judged by other giants on the basis of whether what it did was inherently good or evil, but on whether its actions enhanced or diminished the qualities giants admire—the "giantness," if you will—in themselves and their clans.

A storm giant, for example, might see the raiding practices of hill giants as distasteful but not maug, because brutal raiding is an inborn trait of the hill giants. If those same hill giants worshiped Yeenoghu, however, that act would represent a flagrant turning away from the traditions of the ordning. Hill giants who choose that path make themselves maug.

Non-giants are considered maug out of hand and must usually prove themselves maat to gain a giant's respect.

RUNES AND TALE CARVINGS

For much of their written communication, giants use a modified version of the runic letterforms claimed by the dwarves as their own. This alphabet is used widely today, including by many traditional enemies of the dwarves such as orcs, giants, and goblinoids. That giants were first in the world and thus the creators of the script is a fact that giants take for granted but which dwarves hotly dispute.

Many giants are illiterate or nearly so—particularly hill, frost, and fire giants, which place little value on learning. Instead of writing stories with words, they typically tell their tales with pictograms etched in wood, ice, stone, or even earth, in the case of hill giants. These "tale carvings" relate legends or the stories of important events or meetings in the manner of highly sophisticated cave paintings. Often they employ aspects of legends

REPRESENTATIVE GIANT PHRASES

What is your tribe and rank? *Wo dun stomm rad?*

Who is your leader? *Wer dun forer?*

I give you respect. *Am du paart.*

Who goes there? *Wer fers dir?*

Where are you going? *Wie ferst du?*

My name is Red Wind of a Thousand Evils. *Rodvind Tusenmaug er meg nom.*

Attack our enemies! *Anfel su uvenir!*

Lead me to your king. *Fang meg zo dun kong.*

about the giant pantheon. For example, Memnor's face or head floating above the shoulders of another giant indicates that the giant was a liar or a deceiver; a depiction of Iallanis being stabbed in the back represents the betrayal of love. Such symbols and visual allegories are well understood by giants, but they can be indecipherable to viewers who aren't steeped in the giants' mythology. Most non-giants find a tale carving as unintelligible as giants would find poetry written in Elvish.

A GLOSSARY OF GIANT WORDS

armor—*harbunad*

arrow—*pil*

battle—*slag*

black—*sort*

bravery—*prakt*

cloud giant—*skyejotun*

cow—*kue*

chieftain—*forer*

danger—*fare*

death—*dod*

dwarf—*dverg*

enemy—*uven*

elf—*alv*

evil/unholy/dishonorable—*maug*

fire giant—*ildjotun*

fortress—*festing*

frost giant—*isejotun*

gold—*gil*

good/holy/honorable—*maat*

greetings—*helsingen (hels)*

hill giant—*haugjotun*

home—*heim*

honor—*rang*

intruder—*ubuden*

journey—*ferd*

human—*van*

king—*kong*

light—*stig*

meat—*kjott*

mother—*hild*

red—*rod*

shield—*skold*

silver—*solv*

stone giant—*steinjotun*

storm giant—*uvarjotun*

teeth—*tenner*

temple—*bapart*

tribe—*stomm*

up—*opp*

warrior—*krigga*

white—*kvit*

wind—*vind*

GIANTS AND MAGIC

Giants have a paradoxical relationship with magic. The most outwardly magical are the cloud giants, followed closely by storm giants. Both types have an innate ability to use some forms of magic related to air, weather, and gravity. Very few giants, however, study magic in the way that humans, dwarves, and elves do. Arcane scholarship by itself isn't acknowledged by the ordning; it isn't maug, but it isn't maat, either. Mastering the secrets of magic, though, demands a degree of devotion that would take giants away from pursuits that are valued by the ordning. As a consequence, it's a path rarely taken.

The exception is rune magic. Giants are drawn to the solidity and permanence of magical runes. Stone giants are great practitioners of rune carving, both because of

the artistry it demands and because their environment is perfect for its use. At least a few *skiltgravr* (“rune cutters”) can be found among any type of giants, even the slow-witted hill giants who stomp enormous marks into hillsides or gouge them into their own flesh.

Crafting this form of magic is painstakingly slow. Imagine a wizard who crafts a scroll and who eschews the convenience of parchment and ink in favor of stone and chisel, glacier and axe, or iron and forge.

Carving a magical rune into an item imbues it with power. Like any other magic item, it can be used to activate one or more magical effects. A magical rune can also be inscribed upon a surface to create effects similar to those of a *glyph of warding* or *symbol* spell. The rune itself determines what sort of magic the item or surface holds. For example, a storm rune carved into a stone might allow the stone’s possessor to control the weather. The same rune carved into door or chest might deal thunder damage to anyone who opens it.

A GIANT’S BAG

A giant on the move always has a sack slung over its shoulder. The primary purpose of a giant’s bag is to carry food. With such an enormous belly to feed (particularly in the case of hill giants), it’s unwise for a giant to travel without a supply of nourishment.

Giants also carry rocks in their bags: a few for battle, a few others for hunting, and one or two special ones for games. Beyond that, a bag might contain anything: tools, mementos, items for trade, or merely curios the giant wanted to bring along. Some possible contents are:

- A live pig
- Three bear skins
- Longsword wrapped in a blood-caked cloak (used as a knife)
- Keg of ale
- Caged halfling (for amusement)
- Chest full of broken window glass
- Human’s backpack filled with coins
- Skull of an owlbear
- Large bundle of dry wood tied up with vines
- A once-fine tapestry that’s now tattered from being used as a towel
- Four mostly intact wagon wheels
- A tombstone (for skipping across water)

CHAMPIONS OF ROCK THROWING

Giants have a well-deserved reputation as living siege engines—all of them can hurl boulders with accuracy across great distances. Rock throwing—for battle, hunting, and sport—is a tradition that goes back to the ancient times of the giants. Other races developed the sling, the spear-thrower, or the bow to artificially improve the strength and accuracy of their ranged attacks, but giants never perceived a need for mechanical assistance. Even in places where giants have adapted bows or javelins for use in combat, they’ve never neglected the straightforward strategy of picking up a rock and letting it fly. Few activities, in fact, seem to give them as much satisfaction as the simple act of tossing boulders.





Most of the games that giants play involve throwing rocks in ways that hone their skills for hunting and war. One of the most popular contests, especially among fire giants, involves nothing more than taking turns trying to knock each other down with boulders. Frost giants build targets out of snow and ice and compete to see who can knock down the most with a single toss. A popular one-on-one game begins with the challenger throwing a stone as far as it can. The giant who was challenged then goes to where the stone landed and hurls it back at the challenger. A challenger who is stronger wins, because the return throw will fall short, but a giant who took on a better thrower will stumble away, nursing its injuries, as a lesson that arrogance has a price.

In battle against puny creatures, giants use boulders that fit in one hand. When giants fight enormous foes (such as dragons) or enormous targets (such as castles), they prefer to hurl stones so large that even a giant must use both arms to lift and throw one. Giants throw just as accurately with both arms as with one, a feat most humans would find impossible. These attacks are effective only at shorter ranges, however, for obvious reasons.

When they hunt by rock throwing, giants use smaller stones, about the size of a human head, that can kill an elk or a bear without smashing it into pulp.

HOW TO LAY A GIANT LOW

A force allied with giants—or worse, a force made up of giants—is one of the most fearsome opponents on the battlefield. The giants can rain boulders onto an enemy from a distance where only skilled archers, heavy siege weapons, or spellcasters can strike back at them.

At first blush, it might seem that a potent wizard would make the best giant-killer, but few spellcasters can stand up to a giant in direct confrontation. One

might do harm to a giant, but odds are it will survive the one or two spells that can be thrown at it before a well-placed boulder or the swing of an enormous club quashes the threat.

Among those with experience fighting giants, dwarves have developed the most effective tactics. To defeat a giant, dwarves rely on prolonged, accurate, massed archery (favoring heavy crossbows for such work), fast-moving cavalry that can force the giant into a disadvantageous position, or fanatical troops armed with pole arms, ropes, and grappling hooks. If a giant can be tripped or pulled down—preferably onto its belly so it's less able to defend itself—then it can be entangled in nets and cables and disabled by concentrated attacks on its head and neck.

On the other side of the field, giants understand that smaller foes will try to target their legs and lower bodies. Thus, when they head into a fight against human-sized opponents, they don thick boots, greaves, armored codpieces, and wide, heavy hide or metal belts to protect their bellies. Even savage hill giants peel thick bark from trees and strap it around their legs and dangle logs or stones from their belts to make the going more perilous for an enemy that tries to get underfoot.

LIVING THE GIANT LIFE

Giants are exceptionally long-lived compared to humans, but none are immortal. A peaceful death from old age is a common occurrence among cloud giants and storm giants and isn't unusual among stone giants and fire giants. It's the exception among hill giants and frost giants, most of which die violently in battle against humans, dragons, other monsters, or their own kind.

Giants live at a slower pace than humans do. In the space of four heartbeats for a man, a stone giant's great heart beats just once. Giant mothers stay with their child for longer than human mothers do, and giant children grow to adulthood more slowly. Giants' families are small, because a couple seldom has more than a few children, and many have none at all.

The life spans of the various types of giants are generally in keeping with their place in the ordning; the lowliest giants have the shortest life spans, and the noblest giants are the longest-lived. Stone giants are the exception. Because of their long life spans, despite their low position in the ordning, other giants consider stone giants to be the wisest of all giant types, just as Skoraerus Stonebones is often seen as the wisest of all the giant gods.

GIANT LIFE SPANS

Giant Type	Life Span
Hill	200 years
Frost	250 years
Fire	350 years
Cloud	400 years
Storm	600 years
Stone	800 years

ROLEPLAYING A GIANT

Giving a giant a personality trait, an ideal, a bond, and a flaw helps to create a more vibrant NPC. You can also give a character background to a giant. The noble background, for example, could apply to a cloud giant.

GIANT PERSONALITY TRAITS

d8 Personality Trait

- 1 The brutality of my peers is a relic of a bygone era that should be stamped out. I seek a more enlightened path.
- 2 As the most powerful beings in creation, we have a duty to use our strength for the benefit of all.
- 3 I take what I want. I don't care who gets hurt.
- 4 A giant lives for a few centuries, but giantkind is eternal. Everything I do is to glorify my ancestors and make my descendants proud.
- 5 Dragons are my mortal enemies. Everything I do is to ensure their destruction.
- 6 I measure a creature's worth by its size. The small folk are beneath my concern.
- 7 The small folk are vermin. I enjoy torturing and killing them.
- 8 Good or bad, Annam's sons represent the ideals that we, as giants, must strive to uphold.

GIANT IDEALS

d6 Ideal

- 1 **The Ordning.** Annam created the ordning for the good of all giants, and it's our duty to uphold his vision. (Lawful)
- 2 **Skill.** What sets my clan apart is its mastery of our traditional crafts. (Good)
- 3 **Strength.** No other race can match the strength of giants, and none should dare to try. (Evil)
- 4 **Lordship.** Giants are the rightful rulers of the world. All will be well when our empire is restored. (Neutral)
- 5 **Tribute.** The lesser races owe giants not just respect but payment of tribute, and what they don't pay willingly, we will take by force. (Chaotic)
- 6 **Religion.** Of Annam's many sons, none is greater than my patron deity. (Any)

CLOUD GIANTS

Cloud giants are aptly named, or at least were at one time. Few of them live literally on clouds anymore, but most do reside atop high mountains, inside or even above a near-perpetual cloud layer. A select few—those at the apex of the clan's ordning—claim the last of the ancient cloud castles that still drift across the sky.

No one can build those majestic structures any longer. The methods of their construction were lost (along with much other knowledge) when Ostoria fell. Some cloud giants believe the information might yet be buried in some long-forgotten, ruined library. Rumors of

SAVE IN BATTLE, GIANTS TEND TO BE SLOW. "SOON" TO A GIANT MAY BE THREE OR FOUR YEARS TO A HUMAN.

—ELMINSTER

GIANT BONDS

d6 Bond

- 1 My clan is the most important influence on my life; our collective place in the ordning depends on our devotion to one another.
- 2 My clan mates who serve in our deity's temples are the closest companions I'll ever know.
- 3 My place in the ordning is ordained by our patron deity, and it would be blasphemous to aspire to anything higher or lower.
- 4 Though I can never rise above my clan's position in the ordning, I can be a leader among my clan.
- 5 My own kind have turned their backs on me, so I make my way among the lesser creatures of the world.
- 6 Humans have proven their worth in the world and earned a measure of respect from giantkind.

GIANT FLAWS

d6 Flaw

- 1 The ordning is too restrictive for the likes of me.
- 2 The lesser creatures of the world have no souls; they exist only to be fodder for the ambitions and appetites of giants.
- 3 Unity among giants is a myth; anyone not of my clan is a fair target for my weapons.
- 4 I care nothing for what others expect, to the point where I cannot help but contradict what others ask of me.
- 5 I am terrified of arcane magic and can be cowed by overt displays of it.
- 6 Ancient dragons fill me with dread. My knees grow weak in their presence.

its existence crop up from time to time, stirring debate and dreams of resurgent glory among the cloud giants, but definite information has proven impossible to obtain. Many cloud giants think that someday, a hero will unearth this ancient secret. Until then, they must be satisfied with watching clouds drift past their mountaintop homes instead of living atop those clouds as in days of yore.

FAMILY FIRST

Most types of giants live communally in large groups of clan mates, but the central unit of cloud giant life is the family—a mated pair, their offspring (if any), and



perhaps a couple of close relatives. Cloud giants prefer not to congregate in great numbers in any one place, to avoid drawing too much attention. It's not that they fear attack from humanoids or monsters, because few creatures other than dragons can challenge them. But if more than a few lived in the same place, the size of their combined treasure hoard would attract an incessant stream of adventurers and other would-be thieves—a nuisance on the order of rats in the larder.

Despite the distances that separate the homes of families, cloud giants aren't isolated. Every family or individual knows where its nearest neighbors are, even if the location is hundreds of miles away, and those neighbors know where their nearest neighbors are, and so on across the world. In a crisis, word is spread from family to family, so that a mighty squad of cloud giants could be assembled, in time, if need arises.

Most cloud giant homes include one or more pets. Wyverns, griffons, giant eagles and owls, and other beasts of the sky are popular choices. Pets aren't limited to flying creatures, though. Any sort of creature might be found in a cloud giant menagerie, with rare specimens treated more as status symbol than as companions.

BENEVOLENT OVERLORDS

Cloud giants are famous (or infamous) for demanding tribute from the humanoids that live beneath them. Such tribute is only proper from their perspective, for two reasons. First, their presence in an area benefits everyone by driving away many evils, especially flying predators such as manticores and wyverns. Second, the giants believe they deserve to be rewarded for their

forbearance; no one could stop them from simply taking what they want, but instead of doing that they allow their tribute to be freely given. (The logic of that position is clearer to the giants than it is to those on the other end of the arrangement.)

Much of the tribute that cloud giants accept is in the form of livestock and crops, but this isn't their only source of food. Cloud giants are avid gardeners. Almost all cloud giant strongholds devote space to a garden that produces enormous yields: beans as big as turnips, turnips as big as pumpkins, and pumpkins as big as carriages.

The garden of a cloud giant family is seldom affected by drought, frost, or locusts. When such a calamity strikes nearby farms, families have been known to share their bounty to ease the humanoids' food shortage. Such events are at the root of tales about magic beans and others about a human family living in a cottage carved from a single, enormous gourd. Beyond that, the cloud giants' generosity in times of want helps to cement their reputation as friends of humankind—a reputation that serves them well, even though it's not entirely deserved.

ORDNING OF EXTRAVAGANCE

A cloud giant's position within the ordning doesn't depend on talent or skill. It depends on wealth. The more treasure a cloud giant possesses, the higher its standing. It's as simple as that. Almost.

Ownership is one thing, but wealth that's kept locked away means little. To fully contribute to one's status, wealth must be displayed, and the more ostentatious the display, the better. In a cloud giant family's home, extravagance is omnipresent. One might boast windows

framed in gold leaf, rare perfume stored in vials of crystal with silver lids, or a scene in the sky depicted in a tapestry composed entirely of pearls.

Another way for a family to demonstrate its wealth is by bestowing lavish gifts on other families. (A gift from one family member to another doesn't prove anything about the family's largesse.) No cloud giant truly believes that it's better to give than to receive; a family does so only with an eye toward how the giving can elevate its status. Memnor and his trickery play a role in this "game." The very best gift (from the giver's perspective) is one that everyone believes to be far more valuable than it truly is. Only the giver and the receiver will ever know a gift's true value, and neither of them would ever reveal that a gift is worth less than it appears to be, because to do so would reduce the status of both.

Wealth also changes hands between cloud giants when they indulge their obsession for gambling and wagering. Cloud giants don't engage in betting for enjoyment; it is less a form of entertainment than a type of bloodless feud. No cloud giant is a good loser, and one would be aghast to hear someone else say, "I lost 40 pounds of gold, but I had a good time." Betting wars between families can go on for generations, with fortunes and estates (and the position in the ordning that goes with them) passing back and forth repeatedly. What a parent loses, a child hopes someday to win back, plus more; what the child wins back, a grandchild probably will eventually lose again. The tales that cloud giants tell of their ancestors are seldom about wars or magic or battles against dragons—they're about brilliant wagers won through boldness or deceit, and rival families brought to disgrace and ruin by the same.

MASKS OF NOBILITY

Ancient depictions of Memnor often showed him wearing a two-faced mask. Because of this, cloud giant nobles seldom show their faces, but instead wear exquisite masks made of precious materials adorned with gemstones. Each noble has a collection of these masks that it wears to conceal its face but still reflect its current mood; an individual might change masks many times during the day as its emotions shift.

A mask is prized both for its material value and for its accuracy in expressing the mood it represents. Only the

TWO FACES OF MEMNOR

The chief deity of cloud giants is Memnor, the cleverest of Annam's offspring. But Memnor isn't only clever, he's sly and deceitful. Tales of his exploits emphasize his charisma, his smooth manner, and his ability to manipulate and mislead his siblings and other legendary figures into doing exactly what he wants, usually to their great detriment.

Thus, cloud giants have two distinct aspects of Memnor to admire and emulate. Those of a benign disposition revere him for his charm, intelligence, and persuasiveness, while those of a more malign bent take Memnor's self-interest to heart and imitate his trickery. Cloud giants that take a particular interest in trickery, known as "smiling ones," wear two-faced masks as they practice their deceptions and prey on those who are susceptible to their charms. Statistics for cloud giant smiling ones appear in chapter 3 of this book.

Every thief has a story about the treasure that was too rich to haul away. You think you've seen magnificence? The halls of the pashas in Calimshan, maybe, or some patriarch's estate in Baldur's Gate? Let me tell you, you've seen nothing. Those places are hovels compared to the palaces of the skyejotuns.

—Volo

richest of cloud giants can afford the dozens of masks necessary to show all the subtle differences in emotion possible among their kind. Artisans who can sculpt and craft masks that meet the cloud giants' exacting standards in such matters are richly rewarded for their skill.

FIRE GIANTS

The fire giants were the officers, engineers, and crafters of ancient Ostoria. Their position and unparalleled skill, along with their domineering outlook, make them haughty and arrogant.

ORDNING OF CRAFTWORK

Fire giants are the greatest smiths, architects, and technicians among giantkind. The iron-lined halls of a fire giant stronghold, deep inside a mountain or a volcano, support the unimaginable weight of the stone above them and enable the giants to harness the heat of rivers of magma to power their forges.

A fire giant's prowess in the occupations of crafting determines its place in the ordning. Although fire giants put stock in combat skill, they recognize that success in battle or on the hunt derives mainly from the quality of one's weapons and armor, and those that can fashion the finest gear enjoy the highest status in the clan. Master artisans, architects, and engineers select the best disciples to pass their knowledge on to, along with their standing. Often pupils are children or siblings of their teachers, but that's not always so. Leaders are chosen by general recognition from among the best crafters in the clan.

One group of fire giants, known as the dreadnoughts, owe their place in the ordning not to their crafting ability but to their extraordinary physical prowess. They take on a lot of the work of guarding the forges and keeping them stoked—effort without which the crafters couldn't succeed. (See chapter 3 of this book for more information on fire giant dreadnoughts.)

Fire giants don't spend a lot of time crafting works of art, although they would maintain that all of their feats of metalworking and engineering are themselves forms of artistic expression. Beyond such accomplishments, true artwork is scarce among fire giants, and most of what exists is jewelry, made from gems and ore that they mine and then refine. A unique form of art that some fire giants produce involves manipulating magma as it cools, forming it into fantastical, one-of-a-kind shapes. The most striking of these works are collected and displayed inside the stronghold, not unlike how other cultures create topiary gardens.

If you want forge work fit for a king, you have two options: dwarves and fire giants. If you don't want to be forced to slave in the mines until you're tossed in the coals, you have really only one option.

—Volo

MIGHTY FIGHTERS, POOR PLANNERS

When fire giants aren't honing their crafting skills, they're drilling with weapons or exercising to keep themselves fit for battle. The typical fire giant has a mastery of combat tactics that few other warriors can match, but the giants' understanding of strategy is rudimentary.

This deficiency isn't born from a lack of ability, but has its roots in tradition. In ages past, when the giants worked together to dominate the world, strategy was determined by the cloud giants and the storm giants. Ever since the clans went their separate ways after Ostoria's wars against the dragons, the fire giants have not mounted a grand, strategic effort to extend their sway, but they have fought countless skirmishes and other tactical engagements, mainly to solidify their hold on territory they have already claimed. If an ambitious fire giant ever became a master of strategic planning (or captured and enslaved a cooperative general), little could stop a tribe of fire giants that enjoyed this additional advantage over their neighbors.

Fire giants raise and train hell hounds as war dogs, and they sometimes persuade human wizards (free or enslaved) to harness fire elementals as guardians for their strongholds. Some allow trolls to roam free in rarely used parts of their fortresses, serving as perimeter guards of a sort. Trolls require little maintenance, able to survive on the fire giants' scraps and on dead or diseased slaves; they're tough enough to deter most in-

SURTUR'S CLEANSING FIRE

Surtur, the chief deity of fire giants, is believed to have been born alongside Thrym. Each twin then tried to be the first to cry out, the first to walk, and the first to talk, and they have competed with one another ever since. Often in legends these contests are bloody battles, but some tales have the brothers acting side by side on grand adventures. Surtur is seen as the more clever of the two, and fire giants emulate his unsurpassed skill at creating and building things.

In the fire giants' world, fire is strength. It burns away impurities and leaves behind only what is strong enough to withstand the heat, such as the best steel from the forge. When fire is controlled, it is the giants' most powerful tool; when it rages unchecked, it can bring down forests and lay waste to cities.

Because of the destructive power of fire, the worship of Surtur is tinged with an apocalyptic air. Some observers suspect that priests of Surtur maintain clandestine workshops and armories where they manufacture and stockpile battle gear in preparation for a final, all-encompassing battle that will decide the fate of the world. If the suspicions are true, these sites are expertly hidden and kept secret even from most fire giants.

truders; and their susceptibility to fire makes them little threat to a fire giant.

SLAVES: LABOR-SAVING DEVICES

It takes a lot of work to build and maintain a fire giant stronghold. Most of that effort comes not from the giants themselves, but from the slaves that they keep. Fire giants enslave other creatures to accomplish unskilled labor, so the giants can concentrate on the more vital aspects of foundry operation and crafting that only they are capable of. They aren't overly cruel masters, but neither are they particularly kind—they are uncaring about their slaves, because slaves aren't giants, and there are always more to be had if the supply runs low.

Most creatures that fire giants capture are put to work in the giants' mines or on surface farms the giants claim as part of their domain. Even master crafters of other races are consigned to unskilled labor, because so few of them have talents the fire giants consider "skilled." Only creatures that have skills the fire giants need but don't practice (because they aren't valued in the ordning), such as accounting, brewing, and medicine, are allowed to continue plying their trades.

Skilled slaves receive better treatment, at least in the sense that an owner uses less force with a delicate tool, but as a rule fire giants view humans in much the same way that humans view horses: they have utility if properly directed, and some might be prized for rare qualities, but even the smartest, best trained horse isn't a person. That said, it's not unheard of for a fire giant to "consult with" a slave physician when it falls ill, or with a slave engineer right before beginning a difficult stage of tunnel excavation. (Such a consultation would only be to ensure that the right tools and materials are on hand for the excavation, not to solicit a second opinion on the giant's personal assessment of the structure's integrity.)

Giants that stand low in the ordning are assigned to manage slaves and mining operations. Excavating mine shafts and digging out ore is important work, but smelting and metalwork are valued more highly than effort spent keeping a tunnel from collapsing on slaves.

PAYING THE PRICE

Fire giants on many occasions have ransomed captives back to their families or communities, once the giants determined that a slave had no particular talent they needed and others were willing to pay for its return. Affluent prisoners such as merchants and aristocrats are the most likely to win this sort of reprieve, for obvious reasons. The ransom demanded rarely involves baubles such as gold or gems: fire giants prefer payment in mithral, adamantine, or different slaves (ones with more useful talents or stronger backs).

FROST GIANTS

Frost giants dwell in the remote, frozen places of the world. Anything warmer than the flesh of a recently killed elk is as flame to them. As a sailor fears the howl of the wind heralding a storm, the denizens of ice-capped mountains and northern steppes shudder at the war horns that presage the arrival of Thrym's blue-skinned, icy children.



ORDNING OF MIGHT

Position within the frost giant ordning is determined by sheer, brute strength. Frost giants know that those that use cunning, agility, and magic are dangerous foes and can sometimes overcome pure strength, but never in a straightforward, fair manner; enemies that act that way are maug, and strength alone is maat.

Doubt or disagreement between frost giants over which is strongest is settled by a trial of strength. Such a contest typically involves wrestling but can also be a rock-throwing competition, a hunt, or one-on-one combat.

To show proof of their superiority, frost giants keep and display trophies of their victims. Mammoth tusks, griffon beaks, and manticores tails adorn the walls of frost giant lairs. Formidable humanoid enemies are memorialized in trophies, too, but only rarely do giants put the heads or bodies on display. A human hero's greatsword or a wizard's staff is a more appropriate trophy in such cases.

A frost giant's armor and weapons are as much a record of its battle honors as its trophy collection is, for those who know how to read the signs. Notches carved into the haft of a weapon show the number and type of foes it has brought down. Horns, feathers, claws, and tusks affixed to helmets and armor serve as decorations commemorating the giant's greatest feats of strength.

The ordning is determined by strength and strength alone, and there is no difference in physical prowess between the genders of frost giants. (Most child-rearing

duties are handled by the elderly of both sexes, not solely by females.) It is considered highly maug to attack or challenge a pregnant female, even to improve one's standing, just as it would be to attack a frost giant as it slept.

A frost giant that is innately weaker than its kin has a low rank in the ordning and practically no chance of rising any higher. At times, when a giant becomes intensely frustrated with that situation, it turns to clandestine worship of Vaprak, the deity of trolls and ogres. An individual touched by Vaprak's favor is transformed into an everlasting one—a giant with enough strength to rival the leaders of the clan, but destined to be cast out or destroyed if its secret allegiance becomes known.

Because strength is their only standard of measurement, frost giants are more likely than other giants to welcome a non-giant into their group. The might of a human who hunts polar bears bare-handed as frost giants do, or who wrestles a frost giant into submission, can't be denied. Such a human could never become the chieftain of a tribe but could earn a place of honor as one blessed by Thrym.

RUTHLESS RAIDERS

Frost giant society has no industry to speak of. It takes what it needs from others, and if it can't take something, it has no need for it. Frost giants do make leather, clothes, and bone tools and adornments from the animals they hunt, but those activities account for almost all of their craftwork.



When frost giants plan a raid on a nearby settlement or outpost, they time it to take place under the cover of a blizzard, believing the storm to be a sign from Thrym that the weak-boned humanoid are ready to be plundered, in the same way that a farmer might look at a rainstorm as a blessing from the harvest god.

Frost giants recognize two kinds of loot: *rod* and *kvit*. Rod (“red”) plunder consists of living creatures, either livestock or slaves. Kvit refers to material goods, the most prized being objects of steel, alcohol, and large gems. Frost giants like to grab gems for adorning their clothing, but ordinary currency is usually left behind after a raid. Tiny, round coins simply have no worth to a frost giant.

Because frost giants can’t stand the heat of a forge, they don’t mine their own metal or craft their own weapons and armor. The fire-forged items of steel and iron that they wield and wear are prized as though they were made of gold. The giants are always on the lookout for such booty on their raids, but they don’t often come across gear that is large enough for them to wear. Many of the giants in a tribe boast arms and armor handed down from their ancestors; others make do with items cobbled together from smaller parts. Shields sized for a human, for example, can be lashed together into a crude suit of scale armor; an anvil riveted onto a log serves as a warhammer.

MASTERS OF BEASTS

Frost giants dominate wild creatures both as evidence of their strength and to use them as hunting companions. They don’t, however, have much grasp of animal

husbandry, so their “pets” are bullied and beaten into submission more than they’re trained. When a frost giant commands a beast to attack, it’s less a command than an acknowledgment to the creature that the giant won’t beat it for satisfying its hunger. A creature that proves willful or that resists “training” is fated to end up on the giant’s dinner table.

The roster of creatures in a frost giant lair can include polar bears, winter wolves, and mammoths, but the giants’ most prized living possessions are remorhazes. Adult remorhazes are untrainable by anything short of powerful magical compulsion, but one taken as an egg can be trained as it is raised. In fact, remorhaz hatchlings are surprisingly pliant to the frost giants’ manner of teaching by bullying.

THRYM’S FRIGID MIGHT

Thrym has long rivaled his twin brother Surtur for Annam’s affection and pride. Frost giants pride themselves on Thrym’s victories over Surtur and other legendary threats when he proved to have more strength or a steadier heart. Yet, Annam was swayed more by Surtur’s well-crafted gifts than by the trophy heads Thrym laid at his feet. For this reason, frost giants bear more ill will toward Annam than most other giants do.

Unlike his brothers, Thrym is seldom depicted alone. He is usually accompanied by up to ten shield-brothers and shield-sisters, heroic frost giants that won such great glory during the war between giants and dragons that Thrym granted them the honor of fighting forever at his side.

HILL GIANTS

Hill giants live to eat. Anyone who understands this one fact about them knows everything there is to know.

ORDNING OF GLUTTONY

Hill giants are the weakest of the true giants. They have the shortest stature, the smallest brains, and the least ambition. The only area in which they excel is girth.

Since eating is the only thing hill giants care about, a tribe is always led by its fattest, heaviest member—the most successful and thus the most admired one in the group. The qualities that other creatures expect or demand of their leaders—such as intellect, decision-making ability, and personal magnetism—have no importance to hill giants. They are neither recognized nor rewarded, except to the extent that a hill giant with slightly above average smarts might use trickery or intimidation to grab more food than its neighbors.

DENS OF SQUALOR AND STENCH

Hill giants stuff the most repulsive, rotting things into their mouths without hesitation, suggesting that either they have no sense of taste or their hunger is so all-consuming that flavor isn't a consideration. Whatever the reason, the upshot is that hill giant dens are filthy, reeking places. Decaying carcasses and cracked bones are strewn about. The ground is saturated with blood and with the giants' own filth.

Not every hill giant's digestive system is so indiscriminate; from time to time a giant does get sick, but most of them recover and don't learn anything from the experience. The rare exceptions are called mouths of Grolantor—giants that are confined and starved to the point of emaciation before being unleashed during a battle or a raid.

The stench that exudes from a hill giant den might attract monstrous scavengers such as oozes, ropers, carrion crawlers, or otyughs. Hill giants don't domesticate or tend these creatures but do tolerate their presence. A visit from a gelatinous cube or a carrion crawler probably is the only "housekeeping" a hill giant's den ever sees.

Ghouls are known to lurk around the edges of hill giant encampments, but they're less welcome than other kinds of scavengers. With their greater craftiness—especially if they're led by a ghost—ghouls can use simple trickery to steal the giants' meals. A hill giant wouldn't mind if a roper dragged away a few scraps, but it would be angry if a trio of ghouls stole an entire carcass.

STUFF-STUFF

Hill giants sometimes amuse themselves with inane games that typically involve food or eating. One such game is called stuff-stuff, in which hill giants see how many halflings, gnomes, or goblins they can fit into their mouths at once without swallowing.

STONE GIANTS

Stone giants—reclusive, reflective, and inscrutable—take pains to remain apart from the world of sunlight and sky. Only when they're surrounded by stone do they con-



GROLANTOR: ALWAYS HUNGRY, NEVER FULL

The deity most revered by hill giants is Grolantor, the least of Annam's six sons, the black sheep of the family who was scorned by his siblings and his parents. Most of Grolantor's problems, however, were of his own doing.

Proud of his great strength (his only redeeming quality), Grolantor refused to recognize the superiority of his older, smarter, stronger siblings, and insisted on being treated as their equal. He complained constantly of his endless hunger, but rather than hunt for himself, he snatched food from the plates of his siblings and his parents.

This behavior caused many fights between Grolantor and his siblings, most of which Grolantor lost. Tales about Grolantor invariably end with his gaining yet another scar on his back, received as he escaped the wrath of a family member who had been pushed too far by Grolantor's insulting boasts and selfishness.

sider themselves to be in reality. A world of all-encompassing stone is a realm of permanence and solidity, one where a lifetime of laborious carving can last through countless eons. The surface world, with its shifting light, endless sky, changing climate, and eroding wind, represents a dream state, an unreality where nothing lasts and therefore nothing has significance.

ORDNING OF ARTISTRY

Among stone giants, mastery of an art ranks as the greatest virtue, and among all the arts, stone carving is held in highest regard. Most stone giants spend their lives in unending pursuit of the perfect artistic creation. Young stone giants practice tirelessly, hoping to prove themselves worthy of assisting the tribe's best carvers. A stone giant master carver might devote years to finding the best stone before beginning a great work. The best carvers are honored as the leaders and shamans of the tribe, and their hands are seen as holy—literally becoming the hands of Skoraeus Stonebones as they work.

WE ALL KNOW OF DWARVES WHO FELL SO DEEP IN LOVE WITH THEIR CRAFT, OR THE SEEKING OF TREASURE OR ALE, THAT THEY FORGOT HOW TO LIVE IN ANY OTHER WAY BUT IN PURSUIT OF IT. THAT'S WHAT STONE GIANTS DO.

—ELMINSTER

Of course, not all stone giants have the hands of a god. Those who show little skill in carving are considered pathetic and viewed with a combination of pity and contempt. To determine the ordning beneath the highest levels of artistry, stone giants compete in games of boulder hurling and catching. Their rock-throwing skills suit stone giants well when they have cause to defend their homes or attack enemies. But even where boulder tossing is concerned, artistry is fundamental to the effort. A stone giant hurling a boulder isn't only performing a feat of strength but is also striving to display consummate athleticism and grace.

Those who can't infuse artistry into every aspect of their lives fall to the lowest rungs of the ordning and are often pushed literally to the perimeter of stone giant society, to serve as guards on the tribe's most distant borders or as hunters that wander beyond those borders. As such, the stone giants that are first encountered by outsiders are almost always the least successful members of stone giant society and the poorest examples of the ideals stone giants aspire to. They are the brutes and boors cast out by a society of artists and philosophers.

SKORAEUS Stonebones, THE GREAT CREATOR

Stone giants worship Skoraeus Stonebones as the Great Creator, second in skill to Annam, but master of the other deities in his father's absence. He appears in stone giant art in two ways: as a pair of hands, one holding a chisel and the other a hammer, and as the largest statue or relief carving of a stone giant in a tribe's caves. Typically, Skoraeus is depicted twice as tall as any other stone giant.

In the legends of the giants, Skoraeus often sits on the sidelines during the schemes and battles of his siblings. He acts as an observer, a confidant to the other gods, and a keeper of secrets that he must be forced or tricked into divulging.

In a classic tale, Memnor came to Skoraeus and whispered something in his ear. When Surtur demanded to know what Memnor had said, Skoraeus told his brother exactly what he had heard. Surtur brooded on that message, which was misleading when taken out of context, and eventually reacted rashly, but the consequences of his acts were seen as no fault of Skoraeus. If Surtur had instead asked Skoraeus for advice about Memnor's words, the legend would have ended differently.

Skoraeus is considered the most knowledgeable of the giant gods about magic, wards, banes, hidden treasures, and the secrets of the earth. Skoraeus gave the secret of smelting to Surtur. Skoraeus showed Thrym how to carve runes on his old weapons to imbue them with magic when Surtur refused to forge new ones for him. Skoraeus crafted spears for Hiatea so she could complete her ten tasks of valor. Skoraeus tapped with his hammer on the stone under the sea, so that Stronmaus could find the chain-tunnels that allowed him to pull the tarasque down to the bed of the ocean where at last it would drown.

For a people that spend their lives mostly in darkness, stone giants have a nuanced appreciation of the effects of shadow and light. They design carvings to produce shadows in specific ways when a light source is placed in the proper location. Without both the light and the shadow, the carving is incomplete and can't be viewed in its true form. For example, a tale carving made with these special techniques tells one story when it's viewed in flat, dim light, but it reveals a second, much deeper tale with the addition of proper illumination.

SPEAKING STONES

Although they are unsurpassed masters of tale carving, stone giants also employ mundane writing in their stone tableaux. Names, dates, and descriptions appear in their tales, often as part of an image (a character's arms or armor might incorporate runic letterforms, for example).

Stone giants also make extensive use of the carved word through "speaking stones." A speaking stone is an upright stone cylinder into which writing is carved in a descending spiral. When the cylinder is turned in one's hands (a feat impossible for any creature of human size and strength) or when it's rotated with its base placed in a cradle designed to balance it upright, the writing can be read as the cylinder goes around. The message wraps around the pillar like the threads of a screw, but in two alternating spirals. The first is read from top to bottom as the cylinder rotates; then the cylinder must be flipped over to reveal the second line of script, also read from top to bottom.

Speaking stones are sized to match the length of the message they carry, so there is no blank space on a stone. A cylinder that turns out to be too long or too thick, so that the message ends before the entire surface of the stone is used, is considered poor artistry. Tradition and honor demand that it be crushed into gravel and a new speaking stone begun.

GENTLE GIANTS?

Newcomers who know only about the stone giants' focus on artistry might think them to be a peaceful and reasonable people. Among their own kind, they tend to be so. But outsiders, particularly non-giants of any sort, are unwelcome in the stone giants' caverns, and trespassers aren't treated politely.

A creature's first sign that it has intruded into stone giant territory might be a boulder, thrown seemingly from nowhere and exploding into shards against a nearby rock. Those who know anything about stone giants understand that this wasn't a miss; it was a measured warning, and the next stone won't land so harmlessly.

It's possible for travelers to negotiate with stone giants for safe passage through their territory, if someone in the group speaks Giant and the giants are offered a tribute. Beautiful and large furs, exotic food, or art objects are suitable tributes; money is a weak inducement for all but the lowest of stone giants. If offered such enticements, one or two giants might come forward to negotiate while others remain at rock-throwing range.

To unfamiliar eyes, stone giants encountered on the fringes of their territory look and behave like primitives. First, personal adornment has little value in the ordning

of stone giants, so their clothing tends to be simple and practical. Second, these giants are the least accomplished members of the clan. They are good at ambushing and throwing rocks, but they aren't leaders or even typical examples of their kind.

Even if the giants accept the offered tribute as permission to enter their territory, they might demand a higher price to pass through it. Usually this "gift" is a service of some kind—a task the giants would rather not do or that they're unable to perform, such as chasing kobolds out of a narrow cave or retrieving something from deep within a lake. (Stone giants are poor swimmers; they dislike entering water at all unless they can easily walk across the bottom.)

Stone giants rarely keep pets. They sometimes cultivate colonies of giant bats at the edges of their territory, both for a food source and as a warning system against intruders. They also don't mind sharing their caves or warrens with cave bears, fire beetles, and other beasts that mean them no harm. They keep their other subterranean neighbors at arm's length. Purple worms are their greatest bane, because a hungry worm chews through everything it encounters, including the giants' finest carvings and sculptures. Xorns are among the few creatures that are appreciated by stone giants; their passage through the earth causes no damage, and their alien modes of thought make them interesting to talk with.

LIFE IN THE DARK

Stone giants see well in darkness, and the caves and grottoes where they live are kept dark most of the time. They don't prefer to use illumination for any purpose that's not related to creating or displaying art.

Most of a giant's waking hours are taken up with meeting its responsibilities, whether that is a low-ranking pursuit or an artistic one. A tribe's chieftain or another leader such as a shaman determines when the tribe's guards and hunters are on or off duty. Other giants align their sleeping and waking schedules with stone giants higher in the ordning from whom they seek to learn.

Masters of the arts can ask much of lower-ranking students, including waking early to be sure the master has food upon rising, or staying awake while the master sleeps to create something the master will need (or will judge) upon waking. For one reason or another, about three quarters of a tribe's members are awake at any given time.

When outside their settlements, stone giants travel almost exclusively in darkness or—when they dare to visit the surface world—at night, the better to avoid the glaring dreams and visions that would assail them during daylight. A stone giant that visits the surface for too long or is forced out from underground risks becoming lost in the realm of dreams, living ever after as a twisted version of its former self that the giants call a dreamwalker (see chapter 3 for more information on this creature).

THE LINJENSTEIN

When a stone giant reaches the end of its tremendously long life, it joins the *Linjenstein* ("ancestors of stone").

The term refers both to the giants' forebears and to the chamber inside each stone giant settlement where they "reside."

A dead (or sometimes merely dying) stone giant is carried into the ancestors' chamber and leaned upright against the end of one of the rows of dead already there. The body gradually calcifies over many decades, until it becomes indistinguishable from an enormous stalagmite.

Family members visit this tomb-chamber often to pay respects to their ancestors. Some of these visits, especially by elderly giants who know they will soon take their place there, last for weeks or even months.

STORM GIANTS

Storm giants, the most powerful and majestic of giant-kind, are also the most aloof and the least understood. *Uvarjotens* aren't just forces of nature; they are bound to nature, and are extensions of it, in mystical ways that humans find hard to comprehend.

ORDNING OF OMENS

Each storm giant knows its status in the ordning by the signals the universe sends them. Omens might be seen in the wheeling flight of a flock of birds, the patterns in sand left by a receding tide, the shapes of clouds, or any number of other natural phenomena. Storm giants that receive the greatest number of such messages generally rank highest, but the significance of individual signs can also affect one's status. On the rare occasions when storm giants meet, omens and signs accompany each individual, making it plain to all present who ranks where. Arguments about ranking within the ordning are rare, but all the giants in the group studiously examine every sign for evidence that one among them might be the greatest yet, since the revelation of that fact would herald Annam's return.

Ever since Ostoria fell and Annam abandoned his children, no sole king or emperor has ruled over giant-kind. According to legend, the arrival of such a leader will be presaged by signs and omens in all the elements of the world: the sky (air), the sea (water), the continents (earth), and the underworld (fire). All of these are

MOODS OF STRONMAUS

Storm giants pay homage to Stronmaus, the eldest of Annam's children, who is also the most joyful and the most prone to laughter and enjoying fellowship with his siblings. That image of Stronmaus is in sharp contrast to how storm giants are perceived in the world: aloof and dour. Nonetheless, it is an accurate one.

In the giants' legends, Stronmaus is subject to gray moods and deep brooding that are just as intense as his moments of good humor. It is also true that storm giants aren't as humorless as popular notions paint them to be. They're quiet and reserved when they're by themselves, which is how they spend most of their time. But when they get together with others of their kind, they enjoy mirth, song, and drink as much as Stronmaus does. For the sake of their privacy and for the safety of smaller beings in the vicinity, these rare gatherings occur far from the presence of other creatures, thus perpetuating the giants' reputation for always being gloomy and grim.



realms of the storm giants, which maintain a constant watch for the all-important signs. In ages past, when giant dynasties reigned, the signs that accompanied the leader of them all were clear and unmistakable. In the crawl of centuries since the empire's collapse, the few signs manifested have been muddied, conflicting, and contentious.

For an obvious reason, every storm giant has a strong personal interest in how soon Annam's return comes to pass—they all want to live to see it. Some individuals gain a measure of immortality for themselves by merging with elemental forces. These storm giant quintessents are the most reclusive of their kind, lairing in remote and inhospitable sites surrounded by brutal winds and murderous weather (see chapter 3 for more information on these creatures).

Without an emperor to serve as their political and spiritual head, the storm giants are adrift on an uncertain sea. Every possibility encapsulated in every sign is exhaustively examined. Debates over the meaning and validity of this or that omen are conducted across human kingdoms and spanning human lifetimes.

Explorers and adventurers can find opportunity in this situation, since the giants sometimes hire agents that they dispatch to investigate portents and to retrieve items the giants need for their oracles. It's dangerous work, for two reasons. The obvious one is that the task involves delving into Ostorian ruins that have been sealed for millennia. The less obvious one is that certain portents, if confirmed to be true, would indeed bring about the return of Annam, upending the giants' social order and initiating a new age. Some would welcome

such a change; others would oppose it bitterly and do all they could to stop it, possibly resorting to all-out war.

OUT FOR THEMSELVES

In the absence of both Annam and a worldly emperor, storm giants recognize no higher authority. Human, elf, and dwarf kings, liches, grand sorcerers and wizards—all might amass what they consider great power, but they have no influence over the storm giants. Any who try extending their reach in that direction are guaranteed to come to grief.

But as long as the world leaves the storm giants alone, the giants will leave the world alone. They wish neither good nor ill on the realms of humanity; they simply don't give much thought to the matter, except on the rare occasions when humans crop up in a prophecy or are hinted at by an omen.

When storm giants do interact with non-giants, those on the receiving end of their attention might question the notion that storm giants are "good" creatures. They respect the principle of the sanctity of life, but even the calmest of storm giants has a tremendous temper. When one is roused to anger, principle gives way to fury, and an offense committed by one person against a giant can bring furious retribution down on an entire community.

A storm giant that destroys a town and kills innocents in a fit of rage is likely to regret it afterward and might offer payment to make amends, though a sack of gold is likely little comfort to those who lost loved ones, homes, and livelihoods. It's always wise to tread softly, speak deferentially, and act respectfully in the presence of a giant, but this is especially true of storm giants.