



What's in Store

Welcome to the first issue of *The Gnoll Sage*! And thank you for joining the journeys and adventures of Fleabag, said gnoll sage!

In this first issue, Fleabag will relay to you the time they went on an exploration after hearing rumors of giant ants that seemed to be animated by fungi. Intrigued by this never-before-heard-of creature, they packed up their belongings and thought this would be a great way to start their journal.

You'll read the accounts of Fleabag as not only they found the ants, but something much more interesting. And dangerous. The Mrav Covjeka, a species of ant-human hybrids.

Fleabag will detail out the ecology of such a creature, and will be kind enough to provide everything they found out about them in a monster entry. Then you'll also find a short adventure highlighting the Mrav.

Following this will be a page to lighten the mood, then new magic items in *Deal of the Day*, a couple new faces to meet as NPCs in *The Tavern*, and some extra spells for you in *The Grimoire*.

NOTE: This zine is designed for use with the *Chromatic Dungeons* game, but it's extremely easy to convert to most OSR or classic systems.

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Ecology of the Mrav Covjeka

“I have to admit,” Travis said with a bit of hesitation in his voice, as he sat down on the log next to the crackling fire. “I’ve never shared a meal with one such as you.”

Across from him was the most unusual of campfire companions: a gnoll. But this gnoll wasn’t like other gnolls the veteran warrior had met or fought before. This gnoll was dressed in appropriate, and well made, travelling clothes. A well stitched leather pack lay on the ground beside them, and they alternated between small puffs on the walnut pipe, and adjusting the round spectacles that rested on their snout.

It was this appearance and the gnoll’s calm demeanor (highly unusual for a gnoll) that stayed Travis’s sword. He was experienced enough to know that not every creature needed to be met with violence as a first resort.

“I have to admit,” replied the gnoll, in a halting gravelly voice that almost seemed like they were giggling. “Not many such as you would share a meal with one such as me. But here! Grab a bite to eat... I hope you don’t mind rabbit... and let us pass the night by sharing a story. Take it as a precautionary tale of sorts for you, if you are headed in that direction.”



“You think I need a warning?” Asked Travis, while reaching over to grab a piece of cooking rabbit off of the spit.

“Yes I do,” replied the gnoll, adjusting their ill-fitting spectacles again. “Call it a favor, or not immediately running me through with ... that.” They pointed their snout in the direction of the broad and obviously well-used sword buckled at the warrior’s side.

Travis settled back, confident that he didn’t need any warnings, but was willing to humor this unusual gnoll.

“People speaking the common tongue call me Fleabag,” said the gnoll. “Which is not really fair, because I take much care to keep my grooming up. No matter, I digress. Anyway, I have recently come back from the east, which is where you’re heading. Am I correct in assuming you’re going that way because you heard rumors of giant ants attacking travelers and caravans?”

Travis nodded in agreement, unable to speak with a mouth full of meat. His manners weren’t that bad. Certainly he wouldn’t allow a gnoll to have better manners than he.

“Ah, I *am* usually right, so I guessed correctly,” replied Fleabag a bit smugly. “Oh, I can attest that the rumors are true. There are giant rampaging ants to the east. I was also able to confirm that some sort of unusual fungus was all over their bodies, and from what I can tell, has infected the entirety of their bodies, both outside and inside.”

Fleabag took a drink of some foul smelling liquid, spilling much of it. I suppose some things about gnoll behavior remain, regardless of intelligence or demeanor. In Fleabag’s defense, drinking from a flask with a canine snout isn’t the easiest thing to do.

“As I was saying,” continued the gnoll, licking their chops like a dog does after drinking. “This fungus has completely taken over the ant, including its brain function.”¹

“Wait a second,” said Travis, leaning forward in skepticism. “Are you telling me a fungus was controlling an ant? Like a zombie?”

1 The *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* is a fungus in real life that takes over the bodies of ants and other insects, altering their behavior. The insects will leave their colonies and climb to an elevated area, clinging or biting the underside of a leaf until they eventually die. The fungus then matures, and spreads its spores into the air.

“That is exactly what I’m telling you,” replied Fleabag. “The fungus seemed to control the ants, making them attack creatures they wouldn’t normally attack, and bringing back the carcasses to a giant ant mound. That’s unusual, certainly. But the real question to ask, is why?” Travis swore he saw another smug look come across Fleabag’s face.

“As it turns out,” Fleabag continued. “This was no naturally occurring fungus. It was magically created. By an entirely new species of creature.”

“Mmmhhmmm,” mumbled Travis, still dubious. “And what is this creature?”

“Mrav Covjeka.”

“What?”

“Mrav Covjeka,” answered Fleabag. Or at least that’s what they called themselves.”

“They called themselves that? So they talk?” asked Travis, an obvious expression of disbelief on his face.

“Well, yes, obviously,” answered Fleabag. “You see, deep within the giant ant tunnels², there were these other creatures. These ‘Mrav.’ As I said, they appear as half man, half ant.” Travis shuddered, but Fleabag seemed to take no notice as he pulled out his journal and showed a sketch he had made of the creatures.

“They are dangerous indeed, having sharp claw-like pinchers that can render through armor fairly easily. And while they talked to me, albeit in poor common, it appears they communicated via pheromones³ to each other and to the other ants. A much more efficient way of communication, if you ask me.”

“So what were they doing there?” asked Travis. “And how did they not attack you?”

2 Normal ants create elaborate and huge tunnel systems underground. Giant ants are not much different. Within these tunnel systems are chambers for food, egg hatchlings, and other purposes. Mrav tunnels also include chambers where they raise giant honeysuckle ants for food, composting chambers, and will utilize tools to build additional structures to assist in the hatchery of their young.

3 Ants communicate via leaving pheromone trails. These trails instantly communicate to other ants where there is food, or danger, or anything else that the ant wants to communicate. Mrav, while being able to speak rudimentary language, prefer to use the same system of communication.



“Who said they didn’t?” replied Fleabag. “I was part of a larger group exploring the tunnels. Most didn’t survive. But I was able to escape. They bound me with rope. I have teeth.” Fleabag tried to make a grin, but it appeared as just baring his teeth in an aggressive manner.

“These Mrav were using the fungus to control the ants to gather bodies and corpses for them.”

“For food?” guessed Travis.

“No. If only it were that simple,” replied Fleabag. “They used them for a much more nefarious purpose. But I’ll get to that.”

A sudden snapping of a twig caused Travis to instinctively draw his sword and turn around.

“Pretty good reflexes there,” said Fleabag. “But it’s only a rat. It appears you’re a bit on edge.”

“Whatever,” replied Travis sullenly. He sheathed his sword and tried to act relaxed, but the tension in his body was still apparent.

“As it turns out, these Mrav have a queen,” said Fleabag. “It’s just as horrid as you’d expect. She has a bloated sac filled with eggs, and an upper torso resembling a human and ant, like the rest of the Mrav.”

“Disgusting,” murmured Travis.



“That’s not the half of it,” agreed Fleabag. “The reason they need these bodies and corpses is for the blood. You see, in order for the eggs to hatch into living Mrav, they need to be submerged in blood⁴. My best guess is that they absorb the nutrients from it, but I suspect dark magic might be involved.”

Travis had to visibly control himself from retching. Even for an experienced warrior such as himself, the scene in his mind was almost too much to bear.

“As you see,” lectured Fleabag, “there is a much greater danger than you were probably expecting. I thought I might offer you a warning so you don’t meet the same fate as my companions, in exchange for keeping me company this evening, and keeping the monsters away.”

“Did you find out what they wanted, or how they were created?” asked Travis.

4 Mrav eggs need additional nutrients beyond what they have in their eggs themselves. As part of the dark magic used to create them initially, they need to be soaked in blood on a regular basis in order to fully develop into Mrav young. Failure to do so results in the eggs dying and never forming.

“Unfortunately I have no idea how they were created. A mad wizard, perhaps, who created the first queen and then they evolved from there?⁵ Who really knows, but that’s usually the way it goes. Or a pact with a demon lord...ahem.” Fleabag shifted their eyes uncomfortably.

“As far as what they want, they want what every intelligent living creature wants: a place to live, a way to defend themselves, and to be left alone. Too bad about the whole ‘needing the blood of creatures to raise their young’ thing, because I suspect that will make them a target of many intrepid adventurers as yourself.”

“Well, I think I better get some help before heading further east. For exploration purposes you understand, not that I’m afraid,” replied Travis a bit too hastily.

“Oh, I understand,” replied Fleabag, winking. “It’s getting late, perhaps we should get some rest before we head back?”

“You go ahead,” said Travis. “I’m not really tired. I think I will pull watch for a while.”



5 The first Mrav queen was indeed created by an insane wizard who used both science and biological experimentation in conjunction with a demonic pact to get the final results. He originally wanted to create the mrav species as the perfect servant species. After all, what better slaves to have than those who work with the efficiency and tirelessness of an insect colony. Unfortunately for him, the demon he made a pact with came calling much sooner than he expected.

Mrav Covjeka

Medium monstrosity (20 XP value)

Armor Class 14

Hit Dice: 2* (9 HP)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14	15	12	8	8	6

Senses blindsense 30ft

Languages antish (pheromone), rudimentary common

No. Appearing: 2d6 (5d10)

Special Attacks: N/A

Special Defenses: N/A

Magic Resistance: N/A

ACTIONS

Mrav Covjeka make one melee bite attack or two melee claw attacks.

Melee Attack—Bite: +3 to hit (reach 5 ft., 1 creature). Hit 7 (1d12) slashing damage.

Melee Attack—Claw: +2 to hit (reach 5 ft., 1 creature). Hit 5 (1d8) slashing damage.

ECOLOGY

Mrav Covjeka are not a naturally occurring species. They are the result of a mad wizard's experiment to create a hybrid between a human and a giant ant, hoping to create a controllable intelligent creature with an unwavering work ethic.

Mrav are somewhat intelligent, and will build hierarchies within groups of themselves--a trait from their human side. All of the mrav will follow the queen mrav covjeka's instructions without question, however.

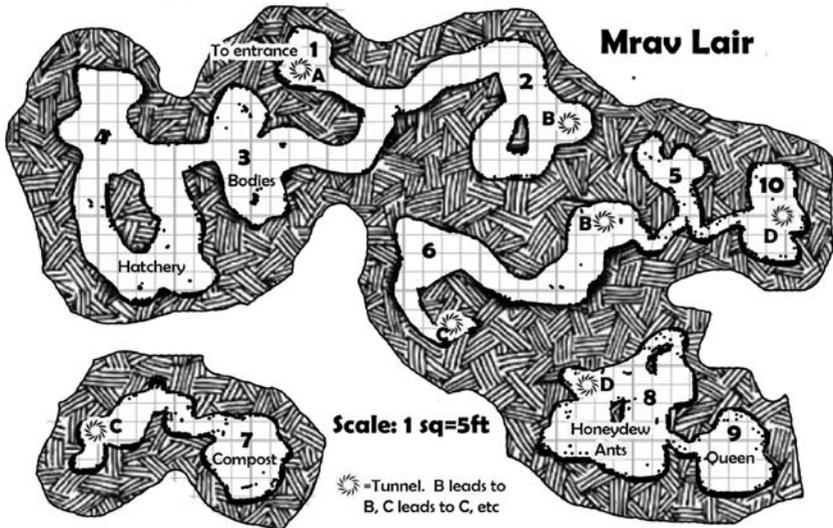
A mrav covjeka stands roughly five feet in height on four insect-like legs, but upright like a human. They have two additional insect appendages that end in hooked claws that are used much the same as a person might use arms. An ant-like head has two long antennae, and a set of powerful jaws are used to rip things apart.

Mrav lairs are ruled by a queen (30hp), but she does not fight and is largely immobile.



Infestation!

An adventure for level 1-3 characters



Placement: Use any village or town anywhere, in any setting.

Background: A village is reporting that their livestock has been disappearing. At first they thought it was from wild animals, but the frequency points to something more sinister. Now Markus has disappeared. Markus, while a transient and often drunk, was not looked upon unkindly by the village folk. His disappearance worries the residents, and they have managed to gather up 25gp as a reward to anyone who can solve the mystery.

Plot Hooks: As the PCs are resting in an inn/tavern, they hear these rumors and are asked to help. The villagers will point towards tracks leading north into the hills. It will take two days travel following the tracks to reach the giant ant hill (random encounters may apply).

Mrav Lair: A strong pungent smell of compost comes from the ant hill. There is no light source, and the dirt to the entrance is very loose and soft. Any creature climbing down ant hill entrance will need to make a Dexterity check or fall the 20ft to the ground below (see room#1). Due to the soft earth, only 1d6 damage would be inflicted.

The giant ants here are afraid of fire, and have a 50% chance of avoiding anyone with a torch or other fire source, instead fleeing into a different chamber.

1: Entrance. The area marked "A" on the map is where the entrance to the ant lair drops down into the lair itself. Tracks in the dirt lead down the tunnel all over the entire lair.

2: Staging Area. In this chamber is a tunnel in the floor that leads 20ft down to area "B". There are two giant ants here that will attack any intruder on sight. (AC:15, HP:4, 7, AT:1, Dmg:1d6, XP:10)

3: Markus. In the center of this chamber are three giant ants in the process of dismembering the body of a human man. The body has tattered and old clothes. Searching reveals a pouch with 8cp and a note wishing good luck by someone named Alexi written to Markus, who is presumably the dead man. The three ants: (AC:15, HP:4, 5, 6, AT:1, Dmg:1d6, XP:10)

4: Hatchery. This large chamber has a row of large eggs on the south wall that sit in a large shallow pool. A dark reddish liquid is in this pool--blood of various creatures. Tending the eggs are two giant ants and one mrav covjeka. The ants: (AC:15, HP:3,6, AT:1, Dmg:1d6, XP:10) and the mrav: (AC:14, HP:9, AT:2 or 1, Dmg:1d8/1d8 or 1d12, XP:20).

5: Gems. The ants have tunneled into this area revealing a gemstone lode. For every ten minutes spent mining, one rough gemstone worth 5gp can be found. If polished, it can be worth 10gp. Up to 2d12 gems can be found here before running out.

6: Mrav Patrol. Three mrav are here at the moment, but they will often be patrolling throughout the lair. If the PCs make a lot of noise, they may leave

this are to investigate. The mrav: (AC:14, HP: 8, 10, 11, AT:2 or 1, Dmg: 1d8/1d8 or 1d12, XP:10).

7: Compost. The sickly musty smell is nearly overwhelming in this area. PCs will need to make a Constitution check or suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws while in this area of the lair.

The eastern chamber is full of piles of organic material in various stages of compost, with a greenish-gray fungus growing on it. This compost includes not only plant material, but the drained bodies of any creature that has been brought down into this lair. The fungus is harmless to humanoids, but is fatal to any insect, essentially turning it into a zombie under the control of the mrav.

Mixed in with the compost are some of the possessions by previous victims. These include a dagger, mace, 13gp, and 9 sp.

8: Honeydew Ants. Hanging from the southern ceiling from this room are a dozen giant honeydew ants, each more than three feet long. The nectar of these ants is highly nutritious, and will heal 1d6 points of damage if eaten. Each ant can produce one vial per day. No more than one vial per day can be taken and have an effect, and it will go bad after 1 week of storage. The ants do not move or fight. Tending them are 2 mrav: (AC:14, HP:10,13, AT:2 or 1, Dmg:1d8/1d8 or 1d12, XP:20).

9: Mrav Queen. In this chamber is the mrav queen. She does not fight, and if threatened will communicate with the party to spare her and her children, and in return she will promise to not attack the village any longer. With her are three mrav guards, who will not leave her even if they hear battle from the next chamber. The mrav guards: (AC:14, HP:9,10,13, AT:2 or 1, Dmg:1d8/1d8 or 1d12, XP:20).

10. Tunnel Down. This chamber is empty.

Finale: If the PCs are successful in ending the menace (either by killing the mrav, or coming to an agreement), they will each be awarded 100xp.



What do you mean you've gone Vegan?!



**DURN FLYING
MOUNTS!**



Does that Bag of Useful Items have BORAX?

Deal of the Day!



Girdle of Desert Winds

(Rare, 1000gp value, 500xp value)

When worn, this magical girdle bestows upon the wearer an immunity from any vision impairing effect, such as a dust storm, *blindness* spell, or *fog cloud* spell. It also grants a +2 bonus to any saving throw or ability check to resist fire attacks, and allows the wearer to only require half the normal water consumption.



Horseman's Bow

(Uncommon, 250gp value, 100xp value)

This bow has been crafted to have the grip of the bow positioned further down on the lower limb to allow it to be easily wielded while mounted. When fired from a mounted position, the bow grants a +1 bonus to hit and damage, as well as granting a +5 movement rate to your mount.





Book of the Dead

(Rare, 1000gp value, 500gp value)

While carried, this book will impart to the owner part of its necromantic power. The caster will have five additional spell levels of slots they can prepare and memorize per day as long as those five slots are from the school of necromancy.

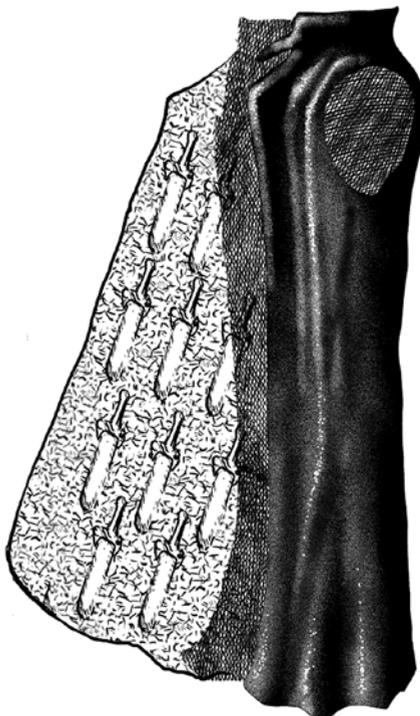
Dagger Vest

(Very Rare, 5000gp value, 2000 XP Value)

This vest imparts several powers. First is that if a dagger (or other light rated thrown weapon the wearer chooses) is removed from the vest, a new one will magically appear in its place. Up to 10 daggers per day can be created in this manner.

Secondly, each of these thrown weapons will be considered +2 in regards to hit and damage rolls.

Finally, if the only action the wearer is taking is to throw these daggers, they will gain one additional attack per round.



THE TAVERN



A PLACE TO MEET NEW PEOPLE

Gi Si Yeung (she/her)

Fighter 2

HP: 13

AC: 16

Human

S:15 I:13 W:10 D:11 C:12 CH:13



Personality Traits: Outspoken, thoughtful, extroverted

Ideals: Sense of justice and protecting the weak from the bullies. Might makes right.

Background: Si Yeung grew up the daughter of a wealthy businessman, but as a young girl her father was killed in a bad business deal. Her mother and her were unofficially driven into exile where she had to take on any job to help make ends meet. This experience toughened her up both physically and emotionally, and instilled upon her a sense of protecting those who couldn't protect themselves.

Equipment: chain mail, shield, long sword, long bow, adventurer's kit

Galidar (he/him)

Thief 3

HP: 12 AC: 15

Elf

S:11 I:10 W:8 D:16 C:10 CH:15

CW:4 FT:3 HN:2 OL:4 Per:1

PP:4 RL:0 RT:2 S:3

Personality Traits: Quiet, introverted, hates crowds, artistic

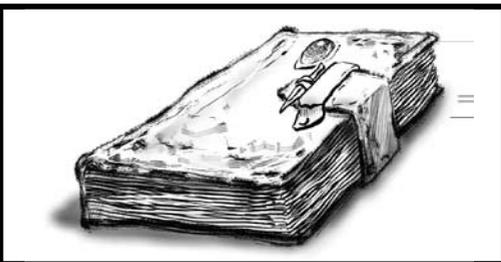
Ideals: Fight the authority. Everyone should live free and to love free and to have the right to persue personal happiness. Those with much should give to those who have little.

Background: Galidar spent most of his life in the slums of a human city, where he was abandoned as a young child. He never knew his parents, only that they were killed by a band of giants, and a human had discovered him alive in the ruins of his elven village, and then brought back to the city.

Growing up as an orphan, especially an elven one in a human city, was exceptionally tough. Thankfully he had his best friend Andriz to keep him company. As they grew up together, their bond became unbreakable, and they have become partners in every sense of the way. The bond is so strong, each can almost feel what the other feels even if they are not near each other.

Equipment: leather armor, short bow, 4ea daggers, short sword, infiltrator's kit, *warmth spike*





Displacing Image

Illusion

Level: Wizard 1/Sorcerer 1
 Range: Caster
 Duration: See below
 Area of Effect: Caster
 Components: V, S, M
 Casting Time: 1 action
 Saving Throw: N/A

When the wizard casts this spell, they will enshroud themselves in a magical aura that gives them the appearance that they are shimmering slightly. For a duration lasting until their next 8 hour rest or until triggered, the spell will protect the caster from any ranged or melee attack. The next attack that would have successfully struck the caster will instead miss as the caster shimmers and shifts their location just enough to avoid the strike.

Lightning Fan

Evocation

Level: Wizard 2/Sorcerer 2
 Range: See below
 Duration: Instant
 Area of Effect: 15ft cone
 Components: V, S, M
 Casting Time: 1 action
 Saving Throw: Half



Upon completion of this spell, the caster will create a fan of lightning to emit from their fingertips in a 45 degree angle out to a range of 15ft. Any

creature within this area of effect will need to make a saving throw vs. spells or suffer 1d6 points of damage for every caster level, up to a maximum 10d6. A successful save results in half damage.

Protection from Disease

Abjuration

Level: Cleric 1
 Range: Touch
 Duration: 1 turn +1 turn per level
 Area of Effect: One creature
 Components: V, S
 Casting Time: 1 action
 Saving Throw: None

This spell will protect the target creature (who may be the caster themselves) from contracting any disease, either mundane or from magical means (such as a mummy's rot).

Skulls of Fear

Necromancy

Level: Wizard 1/Sorcerer 1
 Range: 60ft + 10ft per level
 Duration: 3 rounds + 1 round per level
 Area of Effect: Target creatures
 Components: V, S
 Casting Time: 1 action
 Saving Throw: Negates

When cast, this spell creates one floating skull enshrouded in bluish or greenish light. The caster then targets one creature within range and the skull flies out to that target, at which point they must make a saving throw vs. spells or will become frightened, suffering a -2 penalty to all attack, saving throw, and ability check rolls for the duration.

The caster can create one additional skull for every odd level after first, and direct them at different targets within range. Thus, a 5th level wizard can create three skulls and choose three targets with this spell.

State of the Business

First of all, thank you so much for your time and interest in reading the very first issue of *The Gnoll Sage*! I hope you've found value and some useful information within.

As you have seen, the format for this zine is to focus on one central theme, have an *Ecology Of* section, any stat blocks relevant to that theme, a small adventure, then some new spells, magic items, and NPCs that you might find useful to your campaign. Along with a dash of humor. This will be the format going forward in future zines.

Speaking of future zines, the next few themes have already been determined. These will be:

- * Animist Class
- * Mushropod Ecology
- * Psionicist Class

If you're reading this zine, then the most recent news at the time of this publication is that Izegrim Creations just released the *Chromatic Dungeons* OSR game. So that is a huge success! Especially after months of work and coordination. Going forward, efforts will be on creating monthly zines such as this one, with other larger projects being worked on at the same time. I don't want to spoil anything yet, but stay tuned!

As always, check out www.izegrimcreations.com for most recent updates!

Thank you again!

R Waibel



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