

Aenos Isle North

At the heart of what outsiders call Demosthenes Swamp in south-central Artemisia, which the local Lizardfolk know as Leminish, is their capital Threshorsh (Aenos to non-natives), where Queen Shemenshra holds sway. The settlement is no more than village-sized as others perceive it, set in the angle of low cliffs in the highest, rockier, northern part of one of the larger low-lying islands scattered across the swamp. Outlanders know it as Aenos Isle. About half the island is shown on this map, whose higher, somewhat drier, land continues for roughly six miles (ten kilometres) beyond the map's southeastern corner, much of which is covered by the extensive Shamysh mangrove forest, not shown here.

As the area is around 25 degrees North latitude, the vegetation is chiefly tropical, along with the creatures living among it, and the whole region is typically hot and humid, with frequent mists and fogs, when not raining. Even the solid-seeming ground is not always reliably substantial, and it is commonly impossible to judge exactly where the many slow-flowing streams across the surface may lie. Even the banks of the great, winding River Paragaino (locally the Faroshness) are nothing like so obvious on the surface as they may seem from larger-area maps. In theory, the River is around five miles wide (eight km) just beyond the Isle's northeastern side. However, it really consists of a mixture of variable channels (in both width and course, which can change from day to day at times) spread amongst low-lying marshes, ponds and assorted quagmires.

On the map, paler areas indicate the relatively higher, drier ground, with darker green colours outside the areas with more concentrated tree markers showing progressively deeper, wetter and more treacherous swamplands. The Moat, which rings the highest part of the Isle around Threshorsh, is simply a descriptive term for a broad, shallower swamp region that effectively helps defend the capital area. Two Causeways across The Moat are really ramshackle, low bridges, made from tangled living trees, dead logs and often waterlogged planks, wide and substantial enough to allow foot traffic only, with care and difficulty. Bulky items are ferried across The Moat, and other watery places, on lashed-up temporary rafts, and a few more substantial, reliable, flat-bottomed boats. On the Threshorsh side of The Moat where the trails from the settlement meet the Causeways, the routes are clearly marked with alternating polished stones and polished ancestral Lizardfolk skulls.

South of The Moat, the Southway trail leads away off-map, mostly along a low, narrow, drier ridge, elevated somewhat above the surrounding land/swamp surface, through the extensive region marked as "Farmland & Hunting Grounds". The farms are not truly farms in the traditional sense, as although some agriculture is carried out here, for food crops, livestock, and especially building materials, such as the ubiquitous rushes, tall reeds and timber, the landscape is a mixture of often loosely-defined fields, commonly separated by ditches, streams and bushy tree-lines, interspersed with much larger, open areas (albeit the difference can be rather subtle, particularly for non-natives). Reed and timber huts and hunting lodges dot this landscape sparsely, many of which may prove barely obvious until close-by, along with small woods and shrubby thickets. There are also game- and livestock-trails over parts of this area as well, so travel can be a little easier than over the surrounding swamplands. There are still dangerous muds and quicksand patches, however. In addition, spread across some of the more open hunting lands are tall ant nests, some like small towers or chimneys, which could be mistaken for ruins by those unfamiliar.

Three more wooded, near-jungle regions are marked on the map. The Merish is the largest of these, lying along the eastern shores of the Isle. It has the greatest variety of tree types among the trio of woodlands, which include willows, aspens, stately swamp cypresses, thorn bushes, and, especially towards the River Faroshness, mangroves. This forms the primary timber, foraging and hunting resource for the folks from Threshorsh, hence the route and Causeway from the village, which peters-out deeper in the woodland, leaving only game and a few cut-timber trails beyond. On the opposite shore of the Isle are the ill-favoured Spalish Woods, which are avoided by most locals, and whose trees are mainly willows and poplars, making it a dark and gloomy place overall. The smaller Spalosh Woods, north of The Moat and Threshorsh, are in a more watery part of the Leminish swamps, where many mangroves predominate.

All the remaining labelled locations are give some description in the notes below, in alphabetical order. These were allocated to places on the map randomly, having been extracted or suggested, sometimes in reworked forms, from randomly-selected entries in the extensive lists from two of Raging Swan Press's tomes, "Dread Thingonomicon" and "Dread Laironomicon".

Labelled Places

Dagger Tree: On the southwestern edge of the higher land inside The Moat are some scattered trees, including here some stunted alders fringing the swamplier shore. In their lower branches, numerous black and red banded snakes hang, waiting for convenient prey, tongues flickering. One of the alders has a large, formerly ornate, though now rusted, dagger thrust into its trunk on the inland side. The dagger would be useless as a weapon, or as an ornament, assuming it could even be removed from the tree, given that the

tree itself, while apparently still alive, is rotting and mingling with the dagger. The tree does though form a minor landmark, as despite the rust, the dagger still catches the light sufficiently to be obvious.

Druid's Cypress: Hard to access, as in the deepening swamplands towards the theoretical southwest bank of the River Faroshness, is an especially massive, ancient, swamp cypress. Clouds of stinging, biting insects frequent the area from the riverside, adding to the difficulties in reaching the tree, especially as some carry a disease that causes blindness. In the midst of the tree is a treehouse which is partly built, partly grown there. A rope ladder hangs down from its doorway, whose lower part has rotted away, so the ladder now starts only about 15 feet (4.5 metres) from the surface. The treehouse is sound, for all it creaks and cracks in any movement due to the wind, or from people inside it. Within are an assortment of odds and ends from its former inhabitant, including some rotting furniture. Also here are the skeletal remains of that former inhabitant, a Human druid, on whom is a slender silver sickle, and a magical, waterproof pouch that contains six still-living mistletoe sprigs.

Four Sisters: Near the southwestern outer edge of The Moat, in the shallower swamplands almost opposite the Dagger Tree, is a group of four sickly-looking willow trees with yellowish bark and leaves, known by this name. Three sluggish streams flow out of the swamp further to the southwest alongside the group into The Moat. The region around the Sisters is plagued by flies and gnats that cause irritating bites and rashes.

Gaswater: Southwest of the Four Sisters, not far from the northern tip of Spalish Woods is a substantial section of the shallower swamplands where there are numerous shallow pools. From these in various places continually bubble and burst sickening sulphurous fumes that fill the air, and make it unbreathably awful at times. Under the water, amid the muck and weeds, can be seen sometimes old, low, ruined stone wall remnants, on which are roughly-cut murals and short, ancient texts.

Hissing Water: In the deepening swamp waters off the northwestern shore of the Isle, beyond the ill-defined Moat, and west of Spalosh Woods, is this region, which is plagued by what seem to be hissing animal sounds issuing from apparently unseen, or perhaps invisible, creatures lurking in the water. These occur with disconcerting frequency, from variable distances and directions. As these creatures - if they are - are never seen, it is difficult to be sure what the sources may be, making this a particularly unnerving location, which even the local Lizardfolk tend to avoid. Notably, such sounds seem to originate from pools that are especially deep, dark and oddly shadowy. Still more distracting are the small, brightly-coloured, poisonous frogs and snakes that congregate here, often hidden among the water plants and sparse swamp trees, or swimming in the waters.

Knife Rock: Towards the northern end of Spalish Woods, by the western shores of the Isle, is an area dominated by willows in and around the shallower swampy waters here. A low rise supports this artificially-flattened rock outcrop, giving it the form of a low altar, an impression heightened by the well-oiled, ornamental, sacrificial dagger that lies atop its centre. Local legend holds that it would be deathly unlucky to remove the dagger from Knife Rock. The state of the rock altar suggests someone or something continues to use it for secret ritual practices occasionally, for all no locals will admit to knowing of, or participating in, such.

Misty Ruins: On the northern edge of the higher, drier part of the Isle, northeast of Threshorsh, and close to the Moat's inner edge where the land slopes gently back into the swamp, the ground is usually covered by a very persistent, thin, swirling, low mist, that hides the surface, and swirls around the ankles in disturbingly tentacular forms. Along with possibly causing problems crossing the area, it gives the whole place an ethereal quality. The land surface below the mist is uneven, creating further potential difficulties, largely because there are regions of collapsed rubble and fallen carved stone blocks, all half-buried in weeds, low plants and swampy mud. Their extent suggests either a large ruined building, or several smaller ones, were once here. A few of these remains extend in the general direction of Threshorsh, on the rising slope away from The Moat and the mist. One larger, conical rubble pile close to the mist's inland edge conceals a set of slimy steps descending into the rocky interior of this part of the Isle.

Palace of the Silver Princess: In the southeastern heart of The Merish woods is a small area where creepers have been deliberately twined around several willow trees, marking the opening to a narrow, drier valley, in which is this shunned Palace. The Palace itself is an overgrown, vine-choked ruin, yet one whose jagged, partly fallen, twin towers still form a landmark, especially from the River Faroshness to the east. Tales are told on the Isle of the exquisite, solid silver statue of the Princess here, that guards the site. At night, the statue comes to life, to hunt and kill interloping treasure-seekers among the ruins. The statue has the form of

a powerful Lizardfolk warrior. Less well-known is that the area is also home to a Shambling Mound, a living creature of swamp vegetation that is also virtually unkillable, and which will equally defend the site by day or night against intruders.

Sheenye: Beyond the outer northeast edge of The Moat, opposite Tower Hill, in the deepening swamps towards the bank of the River Faroshness, is a region that always seems to have a cold wind nearby, and low clouds loom over it, as if threatening a storm. Walking can be especially dangerous nearby, and the mires and ponds are deep enough to drown any smaller folk who fall into one, trapped below the surface by the weeds. Plants around the centre of this area seem to be straining away from it, as it is the haunt of a Banshee, known hereabouts as Sheenye. She appears as a translucent figure of a skeletally thin, lank-black-haired Elf, who hovers just above the surface without touching it. She bears an expression of utter hatred. Right in the middle of the area, on the bony finger of a rotting Human skeleton is an ornate, possibly magical, golden ring, set with a curious violet gemstone. Fragments of a shattered glass vial glint all around this body.

Skull-Pile Hollow: Deep in the central-eastern Spalish Woods, where the poplars cluster notably dark and grim, a pile of skulls, weathered and crumbling, stands in a vine-shrouded pyramid about 6 ft (1.8 m) tall. An old, still partly-cleared trail that seems to start and end nowhere, passes close by this Skull-Pile, and several of the more intact skulls higher up on the pyramid, seem to watch grinningly those who pass along it. Perhaps it is, or was, a warning or boundary marker. There is a distinct sense of dismal foreboding over this part of the Woods, which is further marked by sickly-looking plants, except for the poplars. Alongside the trail may be seen skeletal mannequins hanging from the branches nearest it in places, some with clothing rags still partly dressing them, as this Hollow was once the lair of a Green Hag, and the rags were taken from the clothes of some of her victims. A few old tales still hint at such a creature having once been here, for all she has been dead a long time. According to the tales...

Stingbat Shore: By the southwestern side of Spalish Woods, on the shore of the Isle where the swamp begins to deepen, willows and poplars show the more-solid land's edge, among which is a notably huge, ancient, sprawling willow, in whose branches has been built a now-abandoned wooden cottage. A large roost of Stingbats (the Shadowdark RPG's more-or-less equivalent of D&D's Stirges) is inside. These small, blood-sucking fliers can be seen twisting and turning over the water nearby, waiting for creatures to surface. A dense network of gurgling, narrower streams lines the shore here too, and in several trees can be seen Stingbat skeletons, each transfixed into the tree trunks with arrows.

Threshorsh or Aenos: Set in the strangely-sharp angle of a notable, though quite low, cliff-line on the highest part of the Isle, is a village-sized settlement that is by far the largest in this small, mapped area, and which is also the capital for the Lizardfolk that live in their realm of the surrounding Leminish swamps. Despite its seemingly small size, the settlement is of central importance to all the Lizardfolk hereabouts, as explained in the separate pair of Atlas maps that examine it in more detail.

Tower Hill: On the inner side of the boggy Moat, northeast of Threshorsh and southeast of Misty Ruins, is this low Hill, on which are the long-fallen ruins of a stone Tower. Animal skulls strung on long, tangled cords, festoon the bushes around it on the Hill's inland side. A Shambling Mound lurks close-by, a powerful, walking, intelligent, vegetable-matter creature, which for some reason has adopted this Hill as its own, and will defend the ruins against any who try to visit or stay there. The skull-cords are an old local warning.

Wispy Sinkhole: West of the northern end of the isle and its swampy Moat, in the shallower swamplands, is this small, rocky islet, in whose centre is a well-like, rock sinkhole. Oily water fills it to within about five feet (1.5 m) of the top of the sharp rocks surrounding its upper rim. Caught on the rocks some distance below the water's surface, a skeleton may be seen sometimes, when the water is clearer. It still wears a shimmering, silvery, breastplate in an intact, fully usable, state and made from a remarkably lightweight, yet very strong, metal. However, the Sinkhole is also home to an inimical Will O'Wisp that has a lurid violet coloration. It often hovers motionless over the hole, and is unusually powerful for such a creature.

Wrecked Lodge: In the south-central part of the Farmlands and Hunting Grounds, are the remains of this crude, timber, former Hunting Lodge on a low rise, indistinguishable from others more intact that are scattered over this extensive zone, until nearby. One of the numerous small streams in the area flows very slowly south past the Lodge, flanked by reeds and rushes. The Lodge appears to have been wrecked by a large, clawed creature quite some time ago, with signs in the mud around it as if a large bush had been dragged through it as well, although there are no definable footprints.