

Threshorsh

Capital of the Lizardfolk, on what outsiders call Aenos Isle in the depths of the Demosthenes Swamp (which the Lizardfolk know as Leminish; the Isle to them is called Threshorsh, after the settlement). As the map suggests, this is really quite a small place in terms of surface buildings. It is though a site of great significance, as it is here, or more accurately, in the subterranean parts of the settlement, that Lizardfolk come from across the swamplands when they reach the stage of transforming from their humanoid form to their fully adult one as Swamp Dragons. They do this by entering a passive state as a chrysalis, during which they need protecting, as unable to move or act at all until they emerge as new-fledged, small (typical adult-Human-sized) young Dragons, which then spend some time acclimating to their new forms, before heading out into the wider world. Threshorsh settlement exists to help that process occur in seclusion and relative safety.

In their humanoid form, the Lizardfolk have scales that are shades of predominantly darker greens, with paler, whitish-green to yellow belly scales, dark red to orange head, back, arm and tail crests, and green-white to yellow eyes. Their traditional weapons are sharp stone- or metal-bladed ones, usually decorated with colourful feathers, hanging from threads near the tip of spears and arrows, or bound into the hafts of hand weapons. Woven rush baskets are used in quantity for storing, carrying and moving items, and these - both empty and filled - can be found lying scattered in and near most occupied properties, as well as in areas where the Lizardfolk have been working recently.

Swamp Dragons tend to have black or dark green scales, with paler belly scales that often include a white patch between the forelegs. Stomach scales on females turn dark red when mating approaches, and only the adult Dragons are able to breed. Eggs hatch into fresh Lizardfolk, and as the Dragons nest and lay eggs at sites across the swamplands, typically the hatchlings will be adopted by the nearest settlement. As Dragons, the creatures are lithe and quite serpentine, while retaining four clawed legs, and have quite small wings, which makes them rather poor at flying, and then commonly only for fairly short distances.

The timescales for all these events and changes tend to be very variable. Despite the huge expanse of the tropical swamps hereabouts, they can only support and tolerate a relatively small population of Swamp Dragons. The fact the Dragons don't fly well prevents them from scattering further afield. Consequently, many Lizardfolk may remain in their larval humanoid forms for decades, and a large proportion will die before reaching the point of transforming into a Dragon. One such semi-permanent humanoid Lizardfolk is Queen Shemenshra, who is also the High Priest for the Temple of Transformation. She has been the community's leader and ruler of the Leminish swamplands for the past 40 years.

The area around Threshorsh lies at about 25 degrees North latitude, so the climate and vegetation is tropical in general. Threshorsh is located on the northwest-central higher ground of its Isle, set in the sharp angle at the foot of a long, quite low, cliff line. These cliffs extend more than a mile (around 1.75 kilometres) to both the west-southwest and southeast from the settlement. They are at their highest by Threshorsh, rising somewhat irregularly roughly 60 to 70 feet above the local ground surface (18 to 20 metres). Thanks to its relative elevation above the surrounding swamps, and its underlying rocky nature, the surface is notably drier around the settlement. The deep pond just southwest of the Palace, the main freshwater source for the settlement, is collected rainwater, as being tropical and swampy in this region, rainfall is commonplace.

Various aspects of the settlement and its subterranean elements were randomly selected from items in the many tables in two Raging Swan Press tomes, "Dread Thingonomicon" and "Dread Laironomicon", while the map layout was also randomly determined, this time from a trio of rolled dice from the "Adventurer" set of Dungeonmorph Dice by Inkwel Ideas. The three parts of this map, the surface village, underground Temple and Transforming Chambers are described in that order below.

Surface Village Notes

While the more significant, and better-organised, part of the surface settlement lies closest to the angle in the cliffs, as the map indicates, properties also straggle further out as well, and off-map, notably nearer the main Southway track that ultimately leaves the swamp, and the lesser Merish Road, which continues only as far as The Merish woodlands, which begin around four miles away (6 km). All the properties are constructed from local timber, rushes, mud and reeds, for which the vegetation is deliberately cultivated nearby for such purposes. Some, though not all, have stone foundations, largely thanks to the convenient presence of the rocky cliffs, with the larger, taller buildings normally having at least their lowest level also built with stone walls. A few are even built up to, and incorporating, the outer face of the cliffs for additional stability. Two places on the map also show that new buildings, and repairs, are frequent occurrences, with building materials lying around the stone foundations for a couple of fresh properties. Some of the cruder-looking structures are used as stores for more such materials.

Of the labelled places, the **Palace** is by far the largest and most imposing, with a stone-built ground floor, a timber upper level, and a further level under the roof thatching. An additional wooden tower extends above the central roofline, sometimes used as an extra watchtower, although its main function is to house the

great bronze bell, whose ringing calls the folk to meetings and Temple ceremonies. It is home to the Queen, her assistants, advisors and other staff, forming the central government offices for administering the great swamplands beyond Threshorsh. As noted above, the settlement's main freshwater source is directly southwest of the Palace.

The two **Priests** buildings are of similar size and height, with that by the Temple's South Entrance (B) built into the cliffs, whose roofline stands a little above the clifftop there. Both properties have stone-built lower levels, with two further timber levels above that, the top one especially tall and open-sided, used for training and instruction. The Priests themselves administer both the Temple and the settlement's day-to-day organisation, and if required also its defence, along with helping to maintain the Cavern and its inhabitants below the Temple when required.

Beside the Entrances (1) to the Transforming Chambers complex, the larger of the two marked **Guardians** properties is similarly-sized and built to both the "Priests" ones, except it is used by those who maintain the Chambers and their inhabitants. They also have especial responsibility for much that happens in the Cavern beneath the Temple. The smaller building is similarly constructed to the larger, although only its lower floor is actually built into the cliff line, for all it is just as tall. It is mostly used as sleeping quarters in its upper floors, the lower being reserved for those on-duty in the Chambers. Most of the stores for the staff here are kept in the larger structure, where the administration for the Chambers and Cavern is also carried out.

Tallest of all the settlement's buildings, with four higher-than-normal levels, is the **Watchtower**, again partly built into the cliffs near the South Entrance to the Temple (B). A permanent lookout is maintained in its uppermost, open-sided level, which stands fully higher than the clifftops.

Aside from the ubiquitous baskets scattered hither and yon, non-Lizardfolk visitors are liable to be discomfited by the common presence of constrictor snakes throughout the settlement. These serve the purpose of cats and dogs elsewhere, and many are family pets, allowed to roam freely. One former favourite has its skeleton wound around and fixed to the tall, hat-like crown the Queen sometimes wears for official occasions, and serpentine decorations form common motifs in the buildings, on clothing, tools and weapons here.

Temple of Transformation

Larger of the two upper subterranean parts of Threshorsh, this is the place where regular ceremonies take place, chiefly revolving around the stages of transformation for the Lizardfolk, and other significant events in the life of the swampland realm. The Temple complex, like the Transformation Chambers, is cut directly into the rocky cliffs at the ordinary surface level for the settlement. It takes advantage of two natural fissures in the cliffs that now form natural arches above both the **North & South Entrances (A & B)**. The small caves that once lay within these fissures no longer exist, having been expanded considerably by hand in ages past. Both Entrances are closed-off inside by stone doors that allow access into the Temple proper. Inside the natural archways, the passage ceilings at both Entrances are about 10 ft high (3 m).

A similar ceiling height persists into the **Stores (C)**, including through the short connecting passage from the North Entrance. Dried foods and liquids that do not spoil are kept here as community assets, controlled by the Temple Priests. These may be used during ceremonies at the Temple, or at celebrations out in the settlement, as well as being available for emergency use.

The passageways inside the South Entrance are taller, nearer 15 ft (4.5 m), connecting with areas D, E & F. **Area D, for Captives**, who may include local and non-Lizardfolk troublemakers, or others identified as suitable sacrificial victims, has again a 10 ft ceiling (3 m), as well as a wall of stout iron bars separating it from the rest of the Temple. A small, iron, gridded door is set into these bars for access, with fixtures for chains and manacles inside the area to hold prisoners. Sacrificial ceremonies are generally uncommon, so this place is not always in use. The small, unlabelled, room adjacent to the Captives area has the key for the gridwork door, and the chests in it contain the chains and manacles when not in use.

Off the long northeast passage inside the South Entrance are four openings into 10 ft high chambers. On the floor of these are piles of fresh rushes and straw, as these chambers are used to house **Transformers (E)**, those beginning or ending their transformation process, which events form a distinct focus for Temple ceremonies. Those beginning their chrysalis phase will be left here after the ceremony until their casing is sufficiently hardened to be safely carried to the Transforming Chambers complex. Equally, those emerging from their chrysalis can take many hours, or even days, to do so from the initial cracking of the casing, and may be stored here until the ceremony requires them to be taken into the Temple.

Area F, the High Altar, is an enlargement of the passageway between the South Entrance and the stone doors to areas H, K & L. Two stone staircases descend beside the Altar to the Temple floor. That on the southeast side is used by both Priests and ordinary Lizardfolk, while only the Priests use that on the northwest side. Behind the Altar to the southwest is a broad, semicircular apse, which contains a huge gilded-stone

Lizardfolk idol that has a Swamp Dragon's head. The area in front of the Altar opens directly into the Temple, overlooking a 12 ft drop (3.5 m) to the Temple's floor, with no railing, so all that happens around the High Altar can be seen by those in the Temple during a ceremony. Always on top of the Altar is a large, heavy, solid gold bowl containing many precious gemstones, offerings from those coming here to undergo their transformation. The bowl is filled with a clear liquid that completely covers the gems. It is a strong acid.

Well-concealed until reaching the steps down by the High Altar, is the heart of the complex, the **Great Temple (G)**. This has a 30 ft (9 m), gently barrel-arched ceiling, with pillar lines set where the curving ceiling begins. Walls, ceiling and pillars are decorated with serpentine draconic designs and motifs. The floor is plain. It is a vast, echoing space that even when in use with torch- and lamp-bearers, seems often barely illuminated. Draconic growls, roars and cries sometimes emanate from the roughly-cut, rounded hole in the floor, which forms a chute directly down through the ceiling of the underlying Thalagos Cavern, above the Upper Lake and its bridge there (the Cavern is detailed by a separate Atlas map). There is no safe route down this way. The chute is about 5 ft long (1.5 m), leaving a 20 ft or so (6 m) drop to the solid stone surface of the bridge beneath. The chute is used to cast sacrificial victims down into the Cavern, who, perhaps fortunately, rarely survive the drop. More steps rise towards both side walls on the Temple's far, northeastern, wall, up to a small, square, raised platform each, places that are used by singers and musicians during ceremonies here.

The wall facing these steps at the back of the northwest raised platform has a very well-concealed secret door into the **Grand Treasury (M)**, that only the highest-ranked Priests are aware of. The Treasury contains vast amounts of wealth extracted from various sources over very many years, including captives, tithes and offerings from the Leminish communities. Small parts of this are presented to new Swamp Dragons after their emergence here, in the Cavern below, because this helps to calm them, as allowing them to begin their own hoards. Even so, the quantity of treasure here suggests that even in their larval Lizardfolk form, such creatures cannot quite bear to be parted from their collected wealth. Ceilings here are unusually low, at just 8 ft (2.5 m).

Northwest of the Great Altar, the rooms are all for the use of priestly staff when preparing for ceremonies in the Temple and other important community events outside. Cupboards in the two **Preparation Rooms (H)** hold the robes and items the leading pair of Priests use when officiating at specific ceremonies. The **High Priest's room (K)** is a more elaborately-appointed version of the Preparation Rooms, with rather more specialised items, notably a number of texts relating to activities to be carried out within the Temple and Transformation Chambers complex. Among these is a parchment map showing the whole of the Leminish swamplands in exquisite detail, which is kept tightly rolled in a watertight metal scroll tube. In the cupboard here, along with assorted robes and paraphernalia, is a pair of green snakeskin-leather bracers, decorated with draconic sigils in silver wire, that the Queen wears when officiating at ceremonies as High Priest. These are beautifully-made, and are some of the oldest and most significant items in the complex. Finally in this group of chambers is the **Study (L)**, in which debates are held, decisions taken, and preparations made for the celebrations and ceremonies the Temple's staff are involved with. Important items relating to such matters not stored elsewhere are kept here. The four chambers all have 10 ft (3 m) ceilings.

Transforming Chambers

Access to this part of the complex (which has 10 ft high (3 m) ceilings throughout) is strictly controlled by the Guardians, to protect the transforming Lizardfolk kept in the two Cell areas (5). Natural cliffside fissures have been reused and reworked to form the two **Entrances (1)**, whose stone doors are kept locked most of the time, with the keys held in the smaller of the two external buildings. Both lead into the **Straw Hall (2)**, where a large pile of fresh straw and rushes are kept for use in the Cells (and also the Transformers cells, E, in the Temple) to cushion the transforming chrysalises. A large cupboard filling the alcove at the northwest end contains tools and brushes for cleaning the Cells, maintaining and moving the straw, and similar domestic activities. A cleared, broad lane is carefully preserved all along the northeastern wall, for access to the rest of the complex in that direction.

A stone door at the southeast end of the Straw Hall opens outwards from the **Guardian's Room (3)**, used as a rest area for the on-duty Guardian active in this part of the complex. Directly opposite this door down the Hall's long axis, a further stone door leads northwest into the sloping **Cavern Access passageway (4)** down to Thalagos Cavern (which is detailed by a separate Atlas map).

Off the northeastern wall, two more stone doors lead into the twin, large, **Transforming Cell rooms (5)**, each of which contains ten separate Cell areas. Most are empty, while those marked with straw piles on the map (a total of 8 Cells) currently hold a single Lizardfolk chrysalis each. Darker straw colours show which have been here longer, and are thus likely to be nearer the end of their transformation. A third stone door on this wall opens into a long passageway ending in the **Stores (6)**, in which are supplies of dried food and drink, available for use by the Guardians and any young Swamp Dragons that emerge from their chrysalis

unexpectedly early. Not all such emergences happen neatly-timed for the Temple ceremonies, or to the expectations of priestly planning. In any case, full emergence can take several days sometimes, until the young Dragon can move unaided (although as usual, such things can be extremely variable). Partly-emerged and very young creatures may be brought back here after a Temple ceremony to complete the emergence process. Once they are able to move unaided, they are guided through the Cavern Access passageway to Thalagos Cavern.

Concealed just as well as the Grand Treasury (M) in the Temple complex, a **Secret Treasury (7)** lies beyond the northeastern side wall of the last left-hand Transforming Cell area in the southeastern Cells room. The amount of treasure here is far less than in area M, for all it is still quite substantial. It derives from the same sources as the Grand Treasury, and may be put to the same uses. Only the Guardian leaders know of the area's existence and how to access it.

It is obvious that the underground parts of Threshorsh are of a quality far superior to the building standards of the surface settlement, and are also much older. Those familiar are likely to recognise them as being of Dwarven or Gnomish work, perhaps as a commission, given that the serpentine carvings in the Great Temple are of comparable quality and precision. The chute cut through the floor to the Cavern below is of a far cruder nature, and seems to have been a notably later addition, by contrast.