



CREATURES of BARSWAIVE™

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CREATURES OF BARSATIVE

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PREFACE

The following text is transcribed from the speaking of Vasdenjas, a most noble and intelligent dragon. I have written down his words almost without alteration, adding my own comments and clarifications only as appropriate. In the immense bestiary described in this volume, the dragon included certain creatures that I might have left out as inconsequential, had I been the sole author; I did not feel inclined, however, to question the judgment of so powerful a patron and so have written of every creature about which he spoke. For ease of use, I have organized the creatures into alphabetical order; Vasdenjas, however, spoke of them as he happened to think of them. I have left his words virtually untouched by the editor's pen, as I found his rambling style of speaking most entertaining.

—By the Hand of Tiabdjin the Knower, Scribe of the Great Library of Throal and First Scholar of the Khavro'am

To the small folk of Barsaive, Vasdenjas the Master of Secrets extends most cordial greetings. (For those who recognize my Name, yes, I am that Vasdenjas, the one called the Terrible. I would remind you, however, that the cattle farmers on the great Scythan plains first called me that in their anger over losing their herds to my appetite—as if a dragon has not as much right to eat as any other Name-giver! As for the name Eater of Cities, that label is completely unjustified. I have eaten but one city in all my centuries of existence.)

I have read a certain book, titled *An Explorer's Guide to Barsaive*, which claims to accurately describe the wonders and perils of Barsaive for the edification of travelers and adventurers. It is my sad duty to inform its authors that their opus is riddled with grievous errors and woeful inaccuracies, more than a few of which might cost you weaker folk to lose life or limb. (Shocking, it is, how little you know of the creatures with whom you share breathing space. But then, how much might one really expect mere dwarfs to know? I should not blame you too much for your lapses, I suppose ... after all, your small brains cannot hold much information. ... You're scowling, Tiabdjin. Is the smell of the fresh meat bothering you again? No? [Here Vasdenjas paused.] Oh, dear. I am sorry ... I did not mean to speak slightly of your people. Why, some of my dearest friends have been dwarfs. Indeed, the dwarf race does very well within its limitations ... oh, please. Don't look like that. I really am sorry. Shall we continue with the preface?)

For any adventurer who wishes to preserve a noble skin (or for any Name-giver with anything like decent curiosity), consider this volume my gift. It contains several centuries' worth of my own vast, personal knowledge of the flora and fauna of Barsaive and beyond, most ably transcribed by the excellent scholar, Tiabdjin the Knower.

I consider myself reasonably well read, and my travels have given me knowledge of many things, but upon meeting Vasdenjas in his mountain lair I felt nearer to being an unschooled child again than I have in many years. The dragon later told me that his reptilian peers consider him small and weak by comparison with them, but he remains the largest and most terrifying being I have ever laid eyes on. Were it not for my desperate desire to glimpse the famed Unwinding the Mysteries of Mana—the dragon had induced me to come by sending me a page from that long-lost magical tome—I would no doubt have run screaming for my life back down the rocky slopes of Wyrmspire. As it was, only Vasdenjas's ample store of elven brandy gave me sufficient calm to speak coherently to him rather than to simply stand before him and shake.

Master Tiabdjin has served well as my scribe for the past three years, and I feel certain that this volume will contain few (if any) inaccuracies. As a token of my benevolent feelings for you, my smaller cousins, I bequeath these writings to the Great Library of Throal with only the following stipulation: that my Name and proper title, Master of Secrets, appear on the front of the bound volume. I should like them to be at least a hand's breadth high, worked in gold leaf and outlined in copper gilt ... well embellished, too, befitting such a princely present as my accumulated wisdom. I shall trust those at the Great Library to choose the artisan ... I am digressing again, aren't I? I can tell by the look on your face, Tiabdjin. It seems I learn as swiftly as ever. My fellow dragons all know I can outthink them. Jealous, that's what they are. ... [Here Vasdenjas cleared his throat—sounding very much like a thunderstorm—and, with a somewhat abashed look, proceeded.]







This volume includes my discourses on many of the immense variety of creatures I have encountered, from the present day all the way back to the distant time when little magic existed in this world. (Skeptical Tiabdjīn—you don't believe me when I tell you that once upon a time no magic existed in the world. It is true, nonetheless.) I have observed many areas of Barsaive that to you small folk remain unexplored wilds, and so this volume contains valuable information on creatures you might expect to meet in less civilized regions. Because I wish this book to be of specific use to Barsaive's bold explorers and travelers, rather than of interest only to students of natural history, almost all of the creatures I describe are the extremely dangerous species of our land. Wise readers may learn how to avoid these hazards when they can—and how to fight them off only if they must.

I include one last reminder to the prospective traveler or the would-be adventurer in the grip of wanderlust. Even I, with my enormous strength and formidable powers, treat many of these creatures with a healthy respect. If a dragon gives these beasts a wide berth, then certainly so should you weak and fragile denizens of this land.

Most people of my acquaintance react badly to dragons—those who do not fear them dislike them because they often seem arrogant. As a counter to the unpleasant view of dragons espoused by so many of my fellow Name-givers, I relate my own experiences with Vasdenjas, whom I found most cordial and friendly (if a bit lacking in insight as to the needs of Name-givers other than himself).

As soon as I arrived in the vast cave that was his lair, he offered me fine elven brandy to put me at my ease. After I had drunk a flagon and a half (the first doozy) in as close to a single gulp as elven liquor will permit, the second sipped with greater appreciation), Vasdenjas sociably joined me in a light repast consisting of several sheep as he told me his purpose in bringing me to Wyrmspire. He was so kind as to moisten with his own breath the bits of mutton he offered me—his own portion he devoured raw, after killing the unfortunate snack with a single blow of his talons. I admit I found the bleating of the frightened sheep unnerving, but Vasdenjas no sooner noticed this than he magnanimously killed the rest of his meal at once. As most dragons prefer their meat as freshly killed as possible, it was most civil of him not to insist on slaughtering each sheep as he ate it.

He also exerted himself to provide me with accommodations to my liking, shaping a dwarf-sized bed from a pile of gold coins. It is true that cold metal is not the most comfortable substance on which to sleep, particularly when strewn with precious gemstones (which the dragon had intended as a special nicety), but my host meant so well by his efforts that I had not the heart to correct him. He did notice, after several hours of our discourse, that I was turning blue with cold, and inquired delicately as to how he might ease my discomfort. When I suggested a blanket, he took up an uneaten sheep carcass, stripped it of its skin with a single stroke, and most politely blew hot breath on it to cure it before handing it to me. It stank dreadfully, but Vasdenjas was so clearly delighted with his contribution to my comfort that I accepted his offering with as little distaste as I could manage.

Within the limits of his understanding—surely similar to our own—Vasdenjas behaved in a manner hospitable enough to be worthy of a dwarf.

