



DARK SUN[®]

Windriders of the Jagged Cliffs

Credits

Designer: Mike Cook

Editor: Doug Stewart

Creative Director: Dori Hein

Cover Art: Stephen A. Daniele

Interior Art: Jim Crabtree, John Dollar, & Sue Billings

Graphic Design: Paul Hanchette & Don Danowski

Cartography: Diesel & David C. Sutherland III

Art Director: Stephen A. Daniele

Typography: Tracey L. Isler

Special Thanks: Sue Weinlein, Bill Slavicsek

TSR, Inc.
201 Sheridan Springs Road
Lake Geneva
WI 53147
USA

TSR Ltd.
120 Church End
Cherry Hinton
Cambridge CB1 3LB
United Kingdom

2439XXX1901

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Wanderer's Journal

My journey to the jagged Cliffs was arduous and harrowing but that sojourn is not the tale I wish to tell. My story is of life—life on cliffs that cleave the surface of Athas like a jagged scar. As I approached those unimaginable precipices, I encountered a sight both wondrous and bizarre. A thing appeared, a creature I suppose, it seemed more bubble than beast, drifting out of the curtains of mist that rose before the cliffs.

Attached to its belly was a sort of carriage. Inside this fixture was a lone figure.

As the beast and its cargo (I knew not at that point if the figure was the creature's master or captive) approached, I could see that the rider was a halfling. This fellow showed no signs of the wild nature common to his people. He stood proud and tall, his long hair streaming; I took him for a halfling noble. He coaxed the floating creature to land and approached me, obviously as curious as I—perhaps more.

He spoke a version of an ancient tongue that I had heard before, one not completely dissimilar to the common tongue spoken in the Tablelands. He named himself Gen-onath of the rhul-thaun. Gen-onath seemed as unfamiliar with my race and appearance as I was with his. Nor did he recognize the term "halfling," with which I hailed him. I braced myself for a confrontation.



INTRODUCTION

Masters and Servants

"The fundamental forces of life, being what they are, have left us with no other option. We had to either master them or be mastered ourselves. Despite this, we have never treated our creations as anything less than they truly are: living extensions of the energies that permeate our world. As such, we use them only insofar as the needs of the world require. We are both the masters of the world and its humble servants. Let that forever be our creed."

—The Dal-erat

So it is written and recorded in the Dal-erat, the word of the people. This ancient device dates back thousands of years and remains the most cherished artifact of my folk. We are the people of the cliffs, and we have placed its words deep in our hearts.


I am Loi Far-oneth, a keeper of the secrets of life. It is my duty to preserve the memory of the elder ways. The mastery of life and its shaping are mine to maintain. Long ago my people learned how to harness the energies and the stuff of life itself, creating that which we needed to make our will a reality. We call this ability life-shaping. Much is now forgotten, but we cling to what we can, performing the rituals and creating the tools. We hold fast to the knowledge of our ancestors as tightly as we hold to the sides of the Jagged Cliffs where we make our homes.

Here on the cliffs we watch the hated kreen and their vile practices. We guard against their presence, while gazing down into the horrors of the dismal swamp. And we wait. We wait for High Lord Rhan Thes-one's return.

In ages long past, the greatest of us, Rhan Thes-one, left his home on the cliffs in search of what lies beyond, promising that he would return with a true purpose for us, our place in relation to all things. Though Lord Rhan has not yet returned, many of us still believe that he will, in one form or another. As both the masters and the servants of the world, we must discover our legacy as heirs of our ancestors within the grand design.

Yet, to my sorrow, there are those who itch to wander. Many of our young long to see what lies beyond our home here on the nurturing cliffs. And if they satisfy that longing, I know it will bring disaster upon us all.

—From the Journal of Loi Far-oneth



Windriders of the Jagged Cliffs is the first accessory supporting the expanded DARK SUN™ campaign setting. All that is needed to use this product is that box and the AD&D® rule books. Please note that references in this accessory have been abbreviated: DMG is the *Dungeon Master® Guide* and PHB stands for the *Player's Handbook*.

This accessory describes the Jagged Cliffs, the enormous rocky mountains to the west of the Tyr Region. The cliffs separate the highlands from the endless savanna plain inhabited by the thri-kreen and their indomitable empire. More importantly, however, *Windriders of the Jagged Cliffs* details the rhul-thaun, a society of halflings that has endured from the ancient days of Athas. These people cleave to the cliffs on ledge-villages, using an arcane art called life-shaping to survive in this strange environment. The art of life-shaping is a carryover from the days when water was plentiful and all forms of life thrived before existence on Athas became ruthless. It enables the halflings to form organic tools, weapons, armor, and even buildings. It also allows them to create the living, flying craft they use to ride the wind from ledge to ledge along the cliffs.

Please note that while “halfling” and “rhul-thaun” are used interchangeably in this product, the halflings of the Jagged Cliffs are different from normal Athasian halflings, who are usually characterized by savagery and a feral, ravenous nature. Indeed, the halflings of the Jagged Cliffs are unlike any of their cousins to be found in other AD&D world. In many ways, the rhul-thaun are a more sophisticated and detail-oriented people. They are caretakers of an ancient lore. They use their nimble fingers in the arts of life manipulation and scaling the enormously high cliffs. Quick eyes and impressive senses guard them against the terrifying and peculiar monsters that make their lairs on these ledges.

Accustomed to a harsh, survival-based lifestyle, they are as alien to their counterparts in other settings as the elves, dwarves, and thri-kreen races of Athas. However, inhabitants of the immediate campaign setting, the Tyr Region, will find these halflings very different from any they have ever encountered. The Jagged Cliffs are not the dry, lifeless deserts with which DARK SUN players have been familiar. The humid mists that blanket the region carry their own challenges and dangers, however, and are just as deadly as the water-starved desert.

The life-shaping arts of the rhul-thaun and their fragmentary knowledge of the past will be completely new to existing DARK SUN characters. The rhul-thaun can also provide adventurers with a great deal of valuable information regarding the thri-kreen threat beyond the Jagged Cliffs. If treated properly, these halflings could prove to be invaluable allies to those explorers outbound from the city-states of the sorcerer-kings.

To understand the rhul-thaun, however, one must examine their strange, ritualistic society, their links to the dim past, and the effects of living a vertical life on the cliffs that have shaped their culture. Each clan of these halflings possesses unique attributes for living in the Jagged Cliffs.


Since all of the accessories of life are produced by their ancient arts, even the tools and weapons used by the halflings are different, unique, and strange. This accessory describes the arcane practice of life-shaping and the organic creations formed through its implementation—aspects of an Athasian society never before encountered. The following passage from the journal of the life-shaper Loi Far-oneth describes the geographic area of the Jagged Cliffs, the strange climactic patterns there, and many of its unique features in detail.

The Jagged Cliffs

The cliffs on which we live mark the division of the highlands of the east and the low savanna of the west. Even in the days of old, when water dominated the world, the barbs of these cliffs rose above the waves—creating the island chain upon which we once lived.

The Jagged Cliffs stretch upward from the base almost two miles in most places. If an ascent were to be made from the base to the very top, most of the journey would be up sheer, vertical cliff faces. Only occasionally would a ledge be found, and most are narrow, short, and unstable, ready to collapse if too much weight is placed upon them.

Many of these rocky shelves, however, are large—large enough, in fact, to hold entire villages of my people. Some jut outward from hollows within the cliff wall, while others are the result of openings of large caves cleaving the sides of the cliffs. Such cliffs can be hundreds of feet wide and up to a mile long.



Occasionally, the cliffs are buffeted by winds blowing along their rocky faces, generally from north to south. The treacherous winds can be dangerous to climbers, but most of our villages are built in sheltered areas, safe from the deadly gales.

Like the cliffs, the Misty Border also serves to separate the lowland savanna from the much higher tablelands to the east. The mist is generated by the large, mysterious swamp that lies at the base of the cliffs and seems to defy many of nature's true laws. We know that the swamp is the site of ancient and uncontrolled energies whose effects still shape and distort the way of things. We call these energies *Rajaat's Curse*, for reasons lost to antiquity—a curse they truly are, nevertheless. The effects are to be avoided at all costs, for many a cliff climber caught within the magic of the mists has been lost forever.

Rising high into the atmosphere, the wall of mist is an effective barrier separating the two areas visually. It has also successfully discouraged most travel through it from either direction, although the Jagged Cliffs themselves are an even greater deterrent in that regard. Visibility within the mist ranges from 10 to 60 feet, and changes literally from minute to minute. Many of our villages are always within its bounds and those who live there have learned special methods of adapting.

The mist consists of a thick, warm vapor that leaves a slippery residue on everything it touches as it rises into the air. When the wind blows, it is never enough to completely dissipate the Misty Border, although it causes turbulent swirls and storms within its envelope. The mist from the swamp clearly is not a true part of our region's weather, but something outside of the normal climactic conditions that only occasionally interacts with the real forces of nature.

The swamp at the base of the Jagged Cliffs is immense, seemingly endless, and swallows anything that enters. Its fetid stench often accompanies the mist as it rises unnaturally from the stagnant pools within the bog. Those more learned than me regarding these matters have suggested that the swamp does not contain nearly enough water to account for the wall of continual mist, but that only repeats what we already know—this marsh is an aberrant place of twisted nature.

The swamp runs virtually the entire length of the Jagged Cliffs, stretching out 20 to 30 miles from the base. It is comprised primarily of shallow pools and streams running through soggy marshlands of heavy vegetation. Hidden dangers, including quicksand and underwater drop-offs, are woefully frequent when journeying into the swamp.

Although many of my people who dared to enter the swamp never returned, there are always brave adventurers seeking to learn its secrets. Explorers report that ruins can be found within the marsh, deep within the thick growths and permeated with the terrors of *Rajaat's Curse*. Horrible creatures of singular natures, born from a soup of fetid water, unwholesome soil, decaying plant life, and unknown energies make their homes in the swamp. Worse, these beasts sometimes leave their lairs to make their way up the cliff walls to get a taste of *rhul-thaun* flesh.

Because of the high amount of moisture from the mist rising from the swamp, many plants find purchase amid the rocky crevices and ledges. The clusters of plant life growing on the cliffs' faces form thick, verdant, vertical forests. We send trained climbers to harvest these forests of fruit, roots, and other edible, usable plants. At one time we life-shapers were able to create enough food for all our people without having to gather plants or hunt animals, but those days, unfortunately, have long since passed.

The vertical forests are also home to many animals and other creatures. Birds nest within the foliage, and climbing creatures use the shelter of the vegetation to make their hidden lairs. Many and varied are the beasts that call the cliffs home and some of them are quite dangerous. Sloths, air drakes, rocs, *zhackals*, and other creatures are found here. Those that don't live in the forests make their homes in the crevices and caves that dot the surface of the cliffs. None of these is as terrifying as those that rise from the swamp below to menace our villages. The dangers for my people are great, but there is nothing that can keep us from carrying on our beliefs and preserving the ways of our ancestors. Nothing.

—From the Journal of *Loi Far-oneth*