

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS LANKHMAR

THE LAND OF THE EIGHT CITIES

#8: A SOURCEBOOK AND
LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY MICHAEL CURTIS

AUTHORIZED BY THE
ESTATE OF FRITZ LEIBER



William M. Ainsland
2018 [WM]

MYSTERIES OF THE GREAT FOREST

The Land of the Eight Cities Sourcebook

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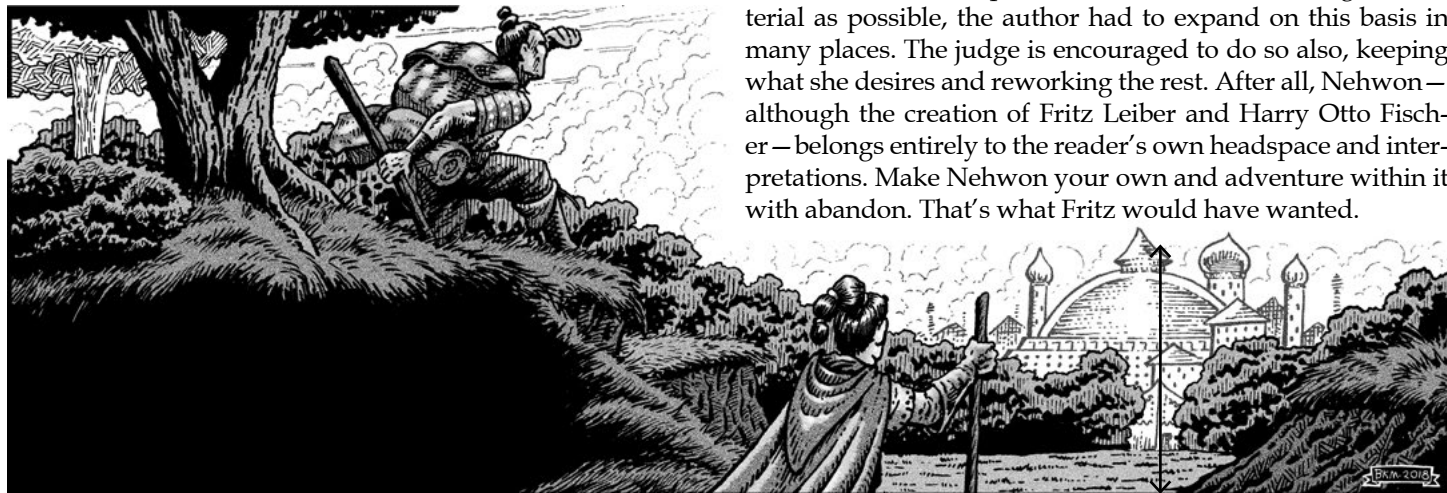
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INTRODUCTION

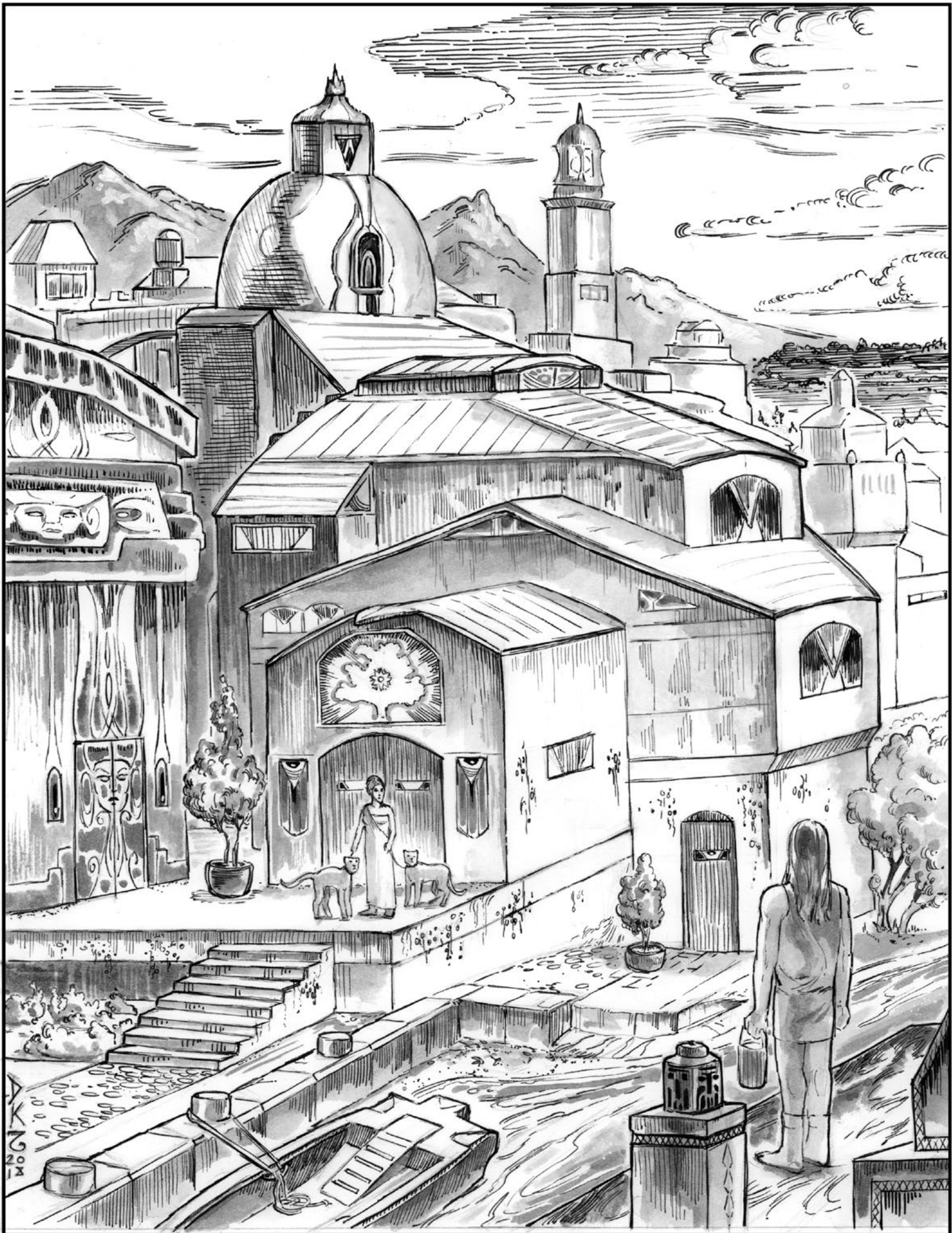
North of the Inner Sea, opposite the grand city of Lankhmar, stands its neighbor and rival, the Land of the Eight Cities. A relative newcomer when compared to other nations of Nehwon, the Land of the Eight Cities nevertheless occupies an old and resource-rich region, one with a history as varied as the cities that now stand upon it. This DCC Lankhmar supplement is the first to take a detailed look beyond the crenellated walls of the City of the Black Toga at other locales for further exciting adventures.

The Land of the Eight Cities appears in several of the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser stories, yet seldom plays an important role. This is both a blessing and a curse to the judge. On the one hand, canonical information about this region is scant, but on the other, this gives the game master vast latitude for populating the nation the way she and her players envision it.

The main themes and details found in this work are based on Leiber's own writings, some of which are difficult to find in print. The central premises and history of the Land of the Eight Cities are inspired by an unpublished draft produced by Leiber during the early evolution of the characters of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. The author discovered this draft while undergoing research at the University of Houston, perusing the Fritz Leiber Papers Collection housed at the University library.

The unfinished draft is an early attempt to write a Fafhrd and Gray Mouser novel. It ends after 80 pages, but contains many of the ideas that Leiber would ultimately develop into the *The Swords of Lankhmar*. However, there are a number of elements that never saw use in other Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser tales and have remained overlooked for decades. Upon reading this rough draft, the idea of writing a Land of the Eight Cities supplement sprang instantly to mind, utilizing material never before seen in the role-playing hobby.

While this book incorporates as much as Leiber's original material as possible, the author had to expand on this basis in many places. The judge is encouraged to do so also, keeping what she desires and reworking the rest. After all, Nehwon—although the creation of Fritz Leiber and Harry Otto Fischer—belongs entirely to the reader's own headspace and interpretations. Make Nehwon your own and adventure within it with abandon. That's what Fritz would have wanted.



SECTION ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE FOREST LAND



he Land of the Eight Cities, also known as the Forest Land, is a nation on the northern shore of the Inner Sea. A young realm by the reckoning of hoary Quarmall and ancient Lankhmar, it possess a wildness that is long absent from the decaying and staid countries south and east of the Inner Sea. In other words, an excellent place for adventure to be sought and riches to be won...and lives to be lost. This section provides an overview of the nation and peoples of the Land of the Eight Cities to better help the judge incorporate this realm and its features into her DCC Lankhmar campaign.

THE HISTORY OF THE LAND OF THE EIGHT CITIES



ons ago, the northern hemisphere of Nehwon was covered in ice. Great, mile-high glaciers extended south from what is now the Cold Waste to past where Lankhmar currently stands. Life was brutal and short for the savage tribes that eked out an existence in this frigid world. But at length, whether by the will of the gods in tropical Godsland, or by a lucky shift of the world bubble, Nehwon warmed and the glaciers retreated, carving out vast gouges in the ground as they receded. The largest of these scars in Nehwon's surface filled with melting ice water and formed the Inner Sea. In time, the Outer Sea's waves ate away at the thin barrier of land separating the two, creating the immense ocean known today. Ningauble of the Seven Eyes says—at length—that the Sinking Lands also formed during this time of geological upheaval.

When the glaciers returned to their icy homes, life crept north in their wake. The mighty ice had pushed vast deposits of soil south, and trees and plants sprouted in the rich earth. The entire northern shore of the Inner Sea, from the beaches to the Trollstep and Barrier Mountains, became a mighty forest that drew countless animal species to shelter within its dark interior.

Wildlife was not the only inhabitant of the forest lands, though. Tribes of men followed the herds north and settled here as well. These peoples were a simple folk, dwelling in the sylvan glades in huts of mud and hide, fearful of the darkness that crowded their cookfires at night. Working no stone or metal, they left no mark upon the land except perhaps the rare burial mound and the faded spirits that haunt them in the darkest glades of the Great Forest. These nameless tribes vanished in time, and the woodlands remained unoccupied by man.

Where these first peoples went or what became of them remains a mystery. Some sages say that the forest tribes were driven out by calamity or sickness, and headed into the Cold Waste to become the progenitors of the northern barbarians.

It has been noted, however, by Srith of the Scrolls, that certain ageless and strange structures have been sighted in the

oldest parts of the Forest Land, buildings that resemble the crypt-like Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar. Perhaps that unknown race which raised the ancient black fanes upon the banks of the River Hlal, those ebon temples that served as the foundation of the City of the Black Toga, also ventured across the Inner Sea for their own inexplicable purposes and found the forest tribes in their way, but this is only speculation. Incautious scholars might find more insight within those overgrown buildings in the dark and old woods north of the Inner Sea.

If the builders of the Black Temples did indeed drive out the forest tribes, they too vanished in turn, leaving only their structures as relics. For long millennia, the Forest Land remained unoccupied by men, visited rarely by wanderers from the Cold Waste or the servants of the Invisibles of Stardock.

For many long ages, the northern forests remained desolate of men. In those intervening centuries, the realm of Lankhmar arose in the south. From humble village to thriving town to growing metropolis, Lankhmar City swelled in size on the shore of the Inner Sea. And with its growth came a great hunger for resources. Six hundred years ago, Lankhmar first looked across the waves, seeking to feed its further growth. Their earliest ships, crafted from the scant woods and forests along the River Hlal, discovered the arboreal paradise of the Great Forest. Small settlements, initially intended as lumber camps to harvest the timber stands of the woodlands, were built along the coast. The greatest of these was Hwarshmar, now known as Kvarch Nar.

The woodmen quickly discovered gold, silver, and gems in the myriads streams and rivers flowing through the forests and a new lust sprung up. The Lankhmarts' hunger for precious metals and gemstones swiftly outstripped their desire for timber. The lumber camps transformed into boom towns filled with prospectors and those who preyed upon them. These settlements ultimately became the foundations for most of the Eight Cities, built where precious metals and gems were close at hand and conditions for transport most efficient.

The discovery of gold, silver, emeralds, and sapphires enriched the already prosperous nation of Lankhmar, funding great civic works in Lankhmar City and drawing more Lankhmarts to the new colony cities of the Forest Land. There was no shortage of nobles from Lankhmar seeking to establish villas and estates in the cool forest climes to escape the heat and growing congestion of the City of the Black Toga. The remains of these country villas still stand in the Land of the Eight Cities, now repurposed by the nation's newest inhabitants.

For three hundred years, the Great Forest was under the dominion of Lankhmar. But the Lankhmarts were not the only people who looked upon the northern forests with hungry eyes.

APPENDIX A: THE FRITZ LEIBER PAPERS COLLECTION

by Michael Curtis



In January of 2018, I traveled to the University of Houston to visit their Special Collections department. The trip was funded as one of the final stretch goals for the DCC Lankhmar Kickstarter campaign. Thanks to the generous backing of all involved, I had the opportunity to conduct research in the Fritz Leiber Papers Collection, housed at the university library.

The purpose of this research trip was to search for some overlooked piece of Lankhmar-related material that could serve as the inspiration for a DCC Lankhmar supplement or adventure. The book you now hold in your hands is the end result of that trip, the product of an unpublished manuscript penned by Leiber sometime in the late 1930s and which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been published.

The draft was a version of "The Tale of the Grain Ships," a precursor to the story that eventually became *The Swords of Lankhmar*. In this version, however, much was different from the final product. It begins with Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser returning from No-Ombrulsk after an unsuccessful robbery of the Temple of No-Ombrulsk, the whale god. The two are ambushed by one of the last priests pursuing them,

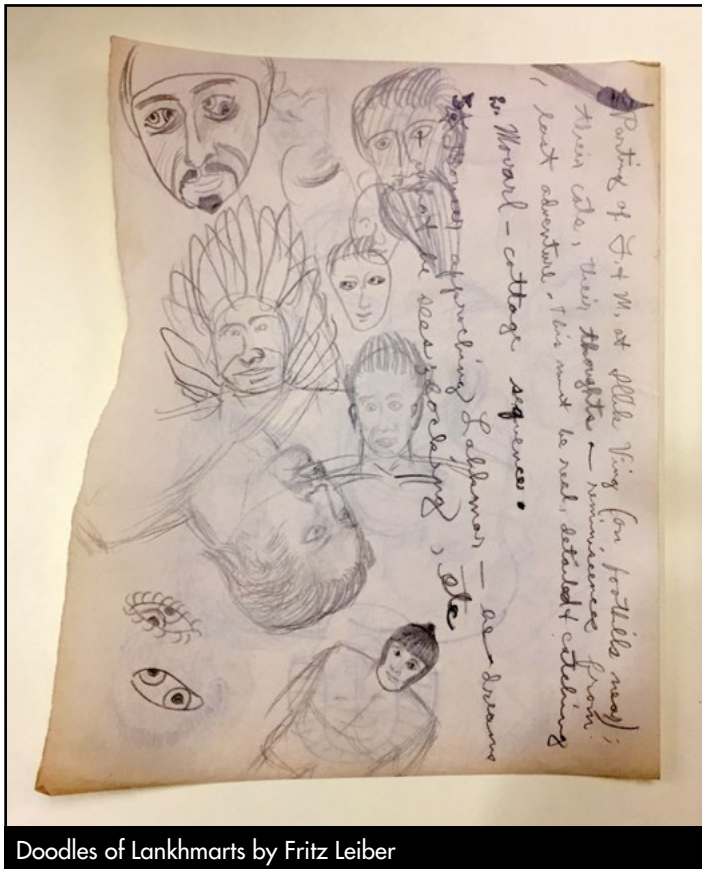
springing from a frosty ledge high in the Trollstep Mountains. If this sounds familiar, the title of this opening chapter, "The Black Priest," may explain why. This very premise, although unpublished in the draft manuscript, was later reworked into the Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser story, "The Seven Black Priests."

From the Trollstep Mountains, the pair reach the Land of the Eight Cities and part ways. Fafhrd heads back to the Cold Waste to inquire about his blood brother, a young man named Visf. Visf's existence comes as much of a shock to the Gray Mouser as it does to the faithful reader of the Lankhmar stories. In time, we'll learn that Visf was rescued from death by Fafhrd as a youth and left in the care of Northern mystics, where he demonstrated nigh-supernatural power. The Mouser continues onto the Land of the Eight Cities, planning to meet Fafhrd at a favorite inn.

The subsequent chapters give us a look at the politics of the Land of the Eight Cities, as the Overlord Morval and his Lords of Council deal with the mysterious delay of the grain shipment from Lankhmar. While the circumstances of the grain ships' fate are similar to those portrayed in the *The Swords of Lankhmar*, we witness events from the Forest Land's perspective, gaining great insights into the history, people, culture, and government of the Eight Cities, all of which has never been revealed in published works. It was clear that this unreleased background material was rich fodder for an RPG supplement—information never before appearing in the canonical knowledge and history of Nehwon.

As Fafhrd continues to seek his blood-brother, the Gray Mouser is hired by Morval to track down the source of the grain fleet's difficulties, and is sent to "Lahkmar" to investigate. One can date the story draft based on this spelling of "Lankhmar," the earliest used by Leiber and Fischer in their correspondence. Once in the city, the Mouser soon comes into conflict with the Overlord Glipkerio's court, including the grain merchant, Hisvin. Much as in *The Swords of Lankhmar*, Hisvin has fell schemes in mind for Lahkmar, and finds an ally in his daughter, named Ivlis in this version of the story.

The plot culminates in a manner similar to that of the published novel, with Glipkerio deposed and the rats running amok in Lahkmar. Hisvin has usurped the throne and Fafhrd and Mouser rush to Sheelba of the Eyeless Face to acquire a whistle capable of calling the War Cats. They blow the whistle in the desert and lead the great battle felines back to Lahkmar. As they arrive, Visf, who in earlier chapters was described as having power over beasts, appears in the city and begins piping, leading the rats onto ships and sailing



Doodles of Lankhmarts by Fritz Leiber