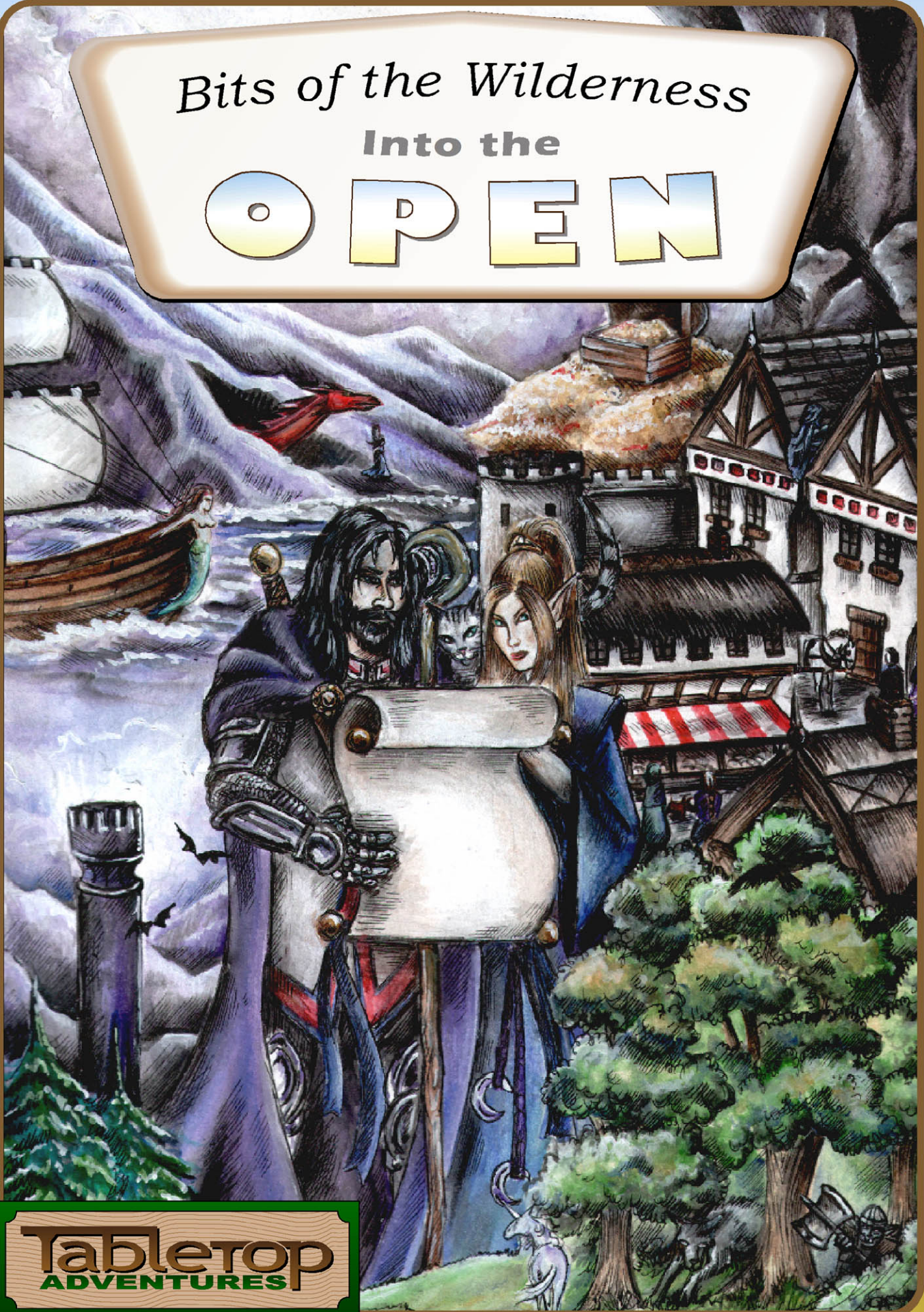


Tabletop Adventures presents

Bits of the Wilderness

Into the

O P E N



Tabletop
ADVENTURES



*Bits of the Wilderness*TM

Into the Open

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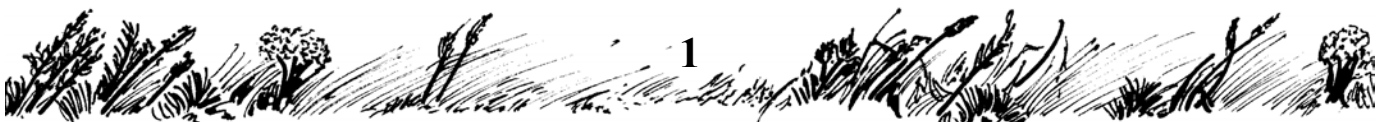
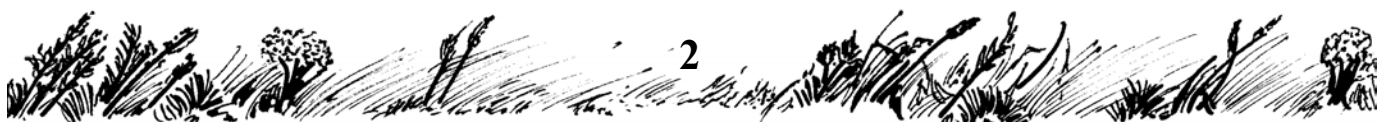




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Bits of the Plains

General

01 It is hard to have a sense of distance here. You walk a hundred steps, a thousand steps, ten thousand steps, and yet the land seems unchanged. You pass over a hill and down the slope and up the next rolling hill but the horizon is the same. There are no features and no satisfactory ways to tell your progress. The sun rises higher, reaches its zenith, and then sinks westward but your travel is still between unchanging walls of stalks and leaves. The grasses wave in the breeze all the way to the horizon, as they did first thing in the morning. The sky is a great blue and white bowl overhead, the land barely more than flat in all directions under the encompassing dome.

02 A spray of colorful flowers interrupts the otherwise monotonous greenish-brown of the tall prairie grasses. The rippling petals range from a deep blood red to an almost glowing orange. A gentle intermittent buzzing sound alerts you to the presence of bees flitting around the stand of wildflowers. [If the PCs get close enough to smell the flowers:] **The flowers have an intense, tangy aroma, a smell that somehow evokes the taste of a strong fruit juice.** [The bees probably signal the presence of a nearby hive where the PCs could find honey. At the GM's option, the flowers could be poisonous, or useful in some way to herbalists.]

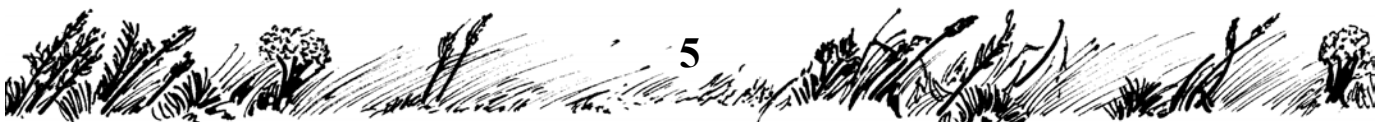
03 Single file is the only form of travel that makes any sense in the unbroken grassland. The first person forces the grass apart and begins the process of making a path. The farther back you are in the line the easier the going because the grass is more trampled when you get to it. The one in the lead finds it hard work in the relentless sun. There is little air movement where you stand surrounded by the tall grass, even though the wind makes the plant tops dip and dance, and you drip with perspiration. You have to watch your water because there are few streams. Behind

you the path you took lies as a conspicuous line across the plain.

04 A dome of royal blue sky stretches overhead, as if a gigantic bowl has been set upon the rim of the earth. White and blue clouds rim the



horizon, alive with light and shadow; there will be no storms today. The grass carpet before you is emerald green with a relief of knee high grasses interrupting the smooth expanse. The patches of knee high grasses are a mixture of green and rust colored plants. A small band of wild horses grazes upon the low-growing emerald green patches, avoiding the rust colored plants for more succulent morsels. The breeze is fresh and clean on your face. [The wild horses will be almost impossible to catch unless the adventurers have a very skilled animal handler among them.]





05 You can see a low hill ahead of you with a strange shape on the top, a badly misshapen tree, possibly. As you near it, you see that your first impression was correct; it is a tree that has gone through some terrible accident. The tree is split down the middle; each half now hangs out from the base of the trunk as if the tree was struck with a giant axe. As you draw closer, you can see obvious charring along the bark and the interior wood. The smell of burnt wood is evident, but has faded into a faint tinge in the air. The lightning that destroyed this tree did so months ago.

06 Partially covered by the grass in front of you, a wagon lies on the ground. Its wooden struts have been mostly eroded by the wind and the rain yet the shape of the cart remains intact. A cart like this might have brought a family of migrants to a new and better life somewhere, yet there is no sign of any population in this vicinity. [The wood is too old to be of any use and the remainder of the wagon has long since rotted away.]

07 Without feeling like you have climbed a hill, you find yourselves descending into a broad, shallow valley. The soft swish of wind through



the long grass is quieter here, and as you walk [ride] into the valley, the small sounds of the open plain disappear behind you. The horizon disappears as well, replaced by the gentle curve of the hills around you. Tall grass stands out atop the hills, silhouetted against the clear blue sky. There is a bit of shade on the hillsides, and tiny purple flowers can be seen amongst the grass. As you pass through the valley, their sweet smell surrounds you whenever the wind picks up.




08 Lying beside the road is a set of leather armor. A full torso of tiny leather plates sewn together lies on the grass, still in a round shape with the straps closed, so it gives the eerie impression of still being worn, even though the wearer cannot be seen. The owner must have been a middle-sized man, quite broad-shouldered. You do not initially see the leg armor, but it is there, scattered in the grass, dispelling the illusion that anyone is in the body armor. No helm, weapons pack or shoes can be found, only leather armor. The armor is still supple and soft, although in some places grass is growing up through it. Grass grows fast and leather weathers quickly, so this cannot have been here long.

09 As you come out of a stretch of rolling hills, the grass goes from knee-high [for humans] to being much taller, three or four feet high in some places. It brushes against your clothes and skin as you continue walking [riding], and it is impossible to take a step without pushing sheaves of it aside as you go. The smells of the prairie—the faint sweetness of the different grasses, the occasional blush of flowers, and the dry smell of plants baking in the sun—are much stronger here, and the sound of grass brushing against grass is ceaseless. The wind blows paths through the high grass, sometimes making it look as though unseen animals are moving among the blades around you.

10 Amidst the clumps of grass, low hillocks, and long stretches of bare earth, you begin to see wildflowers appearing in little clusters. A bit further along, the clusters become more and more frequent, with many different kinds of flowers—tiny purple blooms, delicate stalks with bright yellow flowers along their lengths, and others. The wind has settled down, and as you walk [ride] the many smells of these flowers become stronger, until you find yourselves in an endless field of wildflowers. It quickly becomes impossible to walk [ride through] without crushing flowers underfoot, which only intensifies the smell.





11 Rolling hills rife with thin golden grasses lay at your feet. Yellow goldenrod is scattered here and there among the grasses. Every so often, you find a bunch of purple echinacea [or similar flower]. Overhead, flat-bottomed fluffy white clouds follow on, one after another, like a herd of wayward sheep. The clouds cast their shadows across the fields below, as they progress over the valley in a slow parade. The faint rivulets and tendrils of creek beds all are greener where the grasses have found some source of underground waters, yet there is no drinkable water to be found in any of these dry streams. A hawk [falcon, eagle] soars overhead, looking for today's meal.

12 Nestled in the tall grass you discover a broken-down wagon. The peeling paint on the wind-blasted sideboards reads 'McLellan's Traveling Mystical Emporium.' The rear axle is broken, causing the wagon to sag drunkenly to the left. The leather harnesses are rotting away, still connected to the shaft. The tattered canvas cover has been destroyed leaving the metal frame highlighted against the sky like the ribs of some great beast. The wheels have sunken into the prairie ground several inches. It would seem that the wagon was abandoned long ago. [If the adventurers search the wagon they find nothing of value.]

13 As you make your way across the plains you trip over something hidden beneath the dense growth. [If the adventurers investigate:] You find the rusted remains of what appears to have been a poorly made sword. It breaks in half as you pull it out of the grass that has grown over it during the years it has lain in this spot. Apparently it was cast aside, or dropped by someone in their haste. [The adventurers continue on:] After walking fifty paces, you stumble upon the skeleton of a man, lying facedown in the open field. The rotted remnant of an arrow shaft juts out of his ribcage. [If the heroes investigate they will find nothing of value. Any adventurer who can read will be able to make out the glyph for 'Vengeance' carved into the head of the arrow.

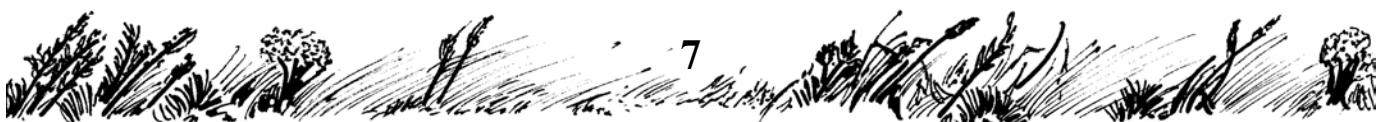
The dead man was a bandit whose crimes finally caught up to him.]

14 As you crest a small rise, you see ahead a large dark area of ground. The grass has been trampled and the soil churned to roughness. From a distance you see sticks protruding from the ground at crazy angles and twigs lying about. As you approach, you can see that what you thought were sticks are actually sturdy hafts of wood and that the twigs are instead bones. Drawing nearer you can see spears sticking into the ground, and the bones that are lying about are gnawed and cracked. Some sort of battle or attack was obviously carried out here, but the scavengers have disturbed things so much that you may never know what happened.

15 As you lift your head, you can smell dampness on the breeze. It has that heady mix of earth and moisture that comes before the rain. New grass is emerging green through the tan grasses of years past. At each rise, you see several rounded grassy peaks in the distance. There are ten of them when you stop to count,



but it would be several hard days travel before you would be within reach of those distant hills. The song of a meadowlark [thrush, warbler, finch] pierces the air. Several narrow [walking, deer] paths meander here and there, the pounded earth trails blatant to the naked eye.





Shards of the Plains

General

1 *A Blighted Area*

With no transition at all, the grass around you goes from fresh, green and vital to blighted, dry and dead. Looking ahead, you can see that this swath of unwholesome grass is at least a hundred feet in diameter. In places, the blades are covered with brown and black spots – but are still standing – while in other areas, clumps of grass are withered and flattened out on the dry earth. Where you can usually hear the chirps and buzzes of insects, and smell the prairie's grasses and flowers, this area is silent and you smell nothing at all.

2 *A Pile of Death*

As you cross the open plain, you suddenly catch a whiff of a heavy, fetid odor that is instantly recognizable: rotting flesh. Coming over the top of a low, broad hill, you see its source up ahead of you—a pile of carcasses at least ten feet high and perhaps twice that large around. The smell intensifies the closer you get, becoming almost unbearable at about twenty feet away. At that distance, it is clear that the corpses are all humanoid, though they have become bloated almost beyond recognition in the unrelenting heat of the sun. Their eyeballs have burst and rotted away, and the many animals of the plains have eaten much of what remains of the bodies themselves. As you pass by the heap, the drone of flies, which had been covered by the steady wind, fills your ears and it stays with you as you leave the mound of bodies behind.

3 *A Circle in the Grass*

The grass is short here and the plants occur in tufts and hillocks. Bright flowers are scattered randomly across the plain. Rocks of various sizes and colors stick up here and there. The randomness of the plants and rocks makes the circle before you that much more dramatic. A circle of dense grass grows, perfectly green and evenly shaped, out in the


middle of the prairie, several dozen paces from the trail. It appears about three paces in diameter and is quite symmetrical. Along its outer edge there is a ring of white flowers and around them a band of shorter yellow flowers; No rocks can be seen within the ring of yellow flowers, there either are none or the grass in the center completely covers them. No paths lead up to it. [This may be an obscure garden, the result of a very large circular influx of fertilizer, or a more mystical phenomenon.]

4 *A Walk in the Tall Grass*

The long, supple grass leaves are taller than dwarves. In the unbroken grassland, the only form of travel that makes any sense is going single file. The first person forces the grass apart and begins the process of knocking it down to make a path. The farther back you are in the line, the easier the going, because the grass is more trampled when you walk over it. The one in the lead works hard in the relentless sun. Every step requires forcing a way through long, soft but resilient grass blades. There is little air movement when you are surrounded by the tall grass, even though the wind makes the plant tops dip and dance. You drip with perspiration. The sky has few clouds and the sun beats on you. You have to conserve your water because there are few streams. Behind you the path you made lies as a conspicuous line across the plain.

5 *Hills of Yellow*

The continual yellow brown of the rolling hills goes on ahead of you to the horizon. There are no trees. The monotony is broken only by areas of dark green in the low spots between the low hills. Fresh water is scarce; you cross many dry streambeds but only rarely is there even a murky puddle to be seen. The shrubs have thick leaves with a rich complex smell; their spines and the branches are dense and very stiff. Generally you see the shrubs at a distance because the trail climbs to near the crest of the chain of hills and stays high,



avoiding going up or down if possible. When it does dip you note another advantage to the hilltop: finding the maximum breeze in the hot dry sunny days. Side paths sometimes head off toward the clusters of shrubs. Many side paths are well worn and clearly frequently traveled.

6 *Green Bees*

A small, bright green bee lands on you. It scrapes with its mouth [mandibles] across your shirt, clearly seeking something. On your skin it slows down, searching or feeding more slowly. Its six little feet barely tickle. A second bee lands, then a third. They walk slowly up and down your arms and legs, gathering in large numbers [on the sweaty sides of the horses]. There is no problem until you accidentally pinch one in your elbow or neck when you move. Then the bees sting! It is a small sharp pain that hardly raises a welt, but it hurts. You cannot avoid stings with a hundred or so little bees walking all over you. The middle of the day is an ordeal of non-aggressive little green bees. [The horses swish them off with their tails and apparently the sting does not reach through horsehide]. In mid-afternoon the bees gradually disappear [to reappear midmorning for two more days].



7 *Swimming in Grass*

The prairie stretches out before you. The grass is nearly five feet high, forming a solid wall of green as far as the eye can see. The blades are individually weak, but the sheer number of them makes a barrier so that passing through it is like swimming or making a path in deep snow. Pushing open a gap with the hands helps, yet beyond that is more grass and with the next step, yet more. The second person in line has an easier time because they can walk in the break in the grass.

Your passage leaves an obvious path behind you, but only someone on a high spot could see it from any distance. After a few yards, you are surrounded by grass and can see nothing except grass tops and the blue bowl of the sky above. To look for landmarks, you would have to be six feet up or higher. Not that there are landmarks to see; just unbroken, waving grass. The ground is not level but rises and falls over long gentle slopes. From the highest spots, there is a panoramic view of tall green grass dotted with spikes of yellow or blue flowers. Most of the time, however, one can see nothing but the grass on all sides.

8 *A Dry Grassland*

The land rises slowly. As you ride through the day, the dry grassland gets even drier. The grasses are knee-high with nodding pale heads. Often those heads have long threads that tangle in your laces and straps, or drive cruelly into your skin through buttonholes and seams. Amid the grasses are bright flowers: purple spikes, yellow tubes, and white umbels. They form bright patches in the vast pale-green grassland. There are no trees, even along the streams. As the land rises, there are more large rocks, which are pleasant to sit on during breaks. The plants are not tall enough to completely cover them, so you can see that they are abundant. Later in the day, the rocks have not gotten larger but the grasses and wildflowers are shorter: they fill the spaces between the rocks but rarely reach across them.



49 *After the Rain*

The rain has finally abated and for a minute, everything is quiet. The water soaks completely into the ground, leaving damp patches and the smell of wet earth. As if on cue, the hum of insects surrounds you suddenly, with hundreds of locusts starting their monotonous drone. The clouds break up slowly and the pale sun peers through as it burns off the remaining cover. Surprisingly, the ground is almost dry already as the thirsty soil absorbs the rain. A gentle breeze blows through the prairie, misting you with the water dripping off the blades of grass.

50 *The Smell of Rain*

What starts with a few drops, fat and heavy, quickly becomes a steady patter as a gentle rain begins to fall. As the pace picks up, the grass around you begins to bow down, and fat raindrops slide off the larger blades of grass. The air is instantly cooler, and the smell of grass and heat is replaced by the damp, pleasant smell of the rain itself. The sky is still fairly clear, with only patches of deep-gray clouds, but the haze of rain covers the plains as far as you can see. The wind has died down, and in its place is the steady beat of rain on the grass, scrub and bare earth.

51 *Storm on the Horizon*

Overhead sweeping rows of tiny clouds, are marching most of the way to the horizon, but as you travel they are replaced by tall, dark rain clouds. There is a storm on the horizon, a wide gray and black band that stretches as far as you can see in either direction. Bright flashes spark within the clouds, and occasionally wide arcing bolts of lightning reach out of the clouds and touch down somewhere over the

horizon. You cannot hear or smell the storm, but you can feel its presence: massive, heavy and brooding.

48 *Thunderstorm*

A gigantic flash of lightning is followed immediately by a deafening clap of thunder and with a rush, the rain is upon you. The water pelts you mercilessly, instantly soaking you. The rain drips under armor and through clothing, chilling you. Gusts of wind whip through the grass, swirling it wildly. For a few moments, the rain comes down so hard you cannot see, then, as you get used to the sheeting water, your eyes adjust and are able to make out the dim shapes of your comrades. Overhead, the sky has grown completely black with thick clouds, and each flash of lightning illuminates the boiling mass of thunderheads above. Lightning and thunder are now virtually simultaneous, and each boom shakes the ground under your feet. The torrent continues for what feels like hours,



then quickly dies off with a few final stinging drops. The rain passes, though the clouds overhead promise to deliver more. Flashes of lightning still burst in the sky, but the thunder sounds farther away.



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Color Supplement

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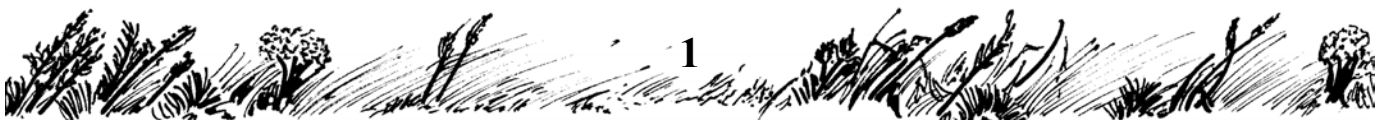
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The Many Faces of the Plains

Into the Open

Where is “the open?” Usually, where the adventurers are taller than the plants. That eliminates almost all forests. Ecologists recognize several non-forested land ecosystems; grasslands, tundra, and desert are the primary examples of this type of ecosystem. This book was written mainly about grasslands. The central United States; southern South America; eastern Russia; western Asia; large sections of Africa; and much of Australia were grasslands before settlement. Much of it still is because corn, rice, wheat, and sorghum are all cultivated grasses. These regions are characterized by a community of plants that are herbs (that is, not woody, neither trees nor shrubs) and that die back to the ground each winter. In particular, the dominant plants are grasses. Tundra and desert are open areas too; some of these descriptions will apply to tundra in midsummer and some to desert, especially after the brief rainy season, but mostly we were imagining grasslands when we wrote these descriptions.

About Grasses

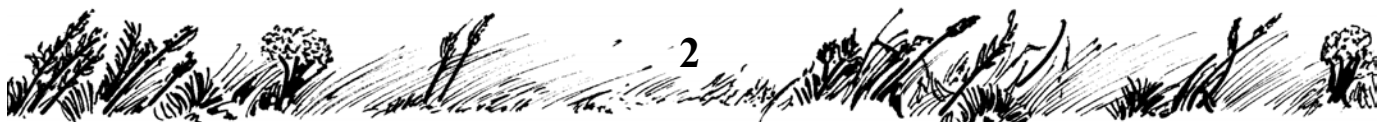
Grasslands are open because they lack trees. Many grassland regions are too dry for trees to


survive, but other historic grasslands have plenty of rain for trees; they become treeless because of wild fires. Grasslands share periods of drought (not necessarily long ones) in which everything dries out and wildfires sweep across the land. Grasses usually have leaves that begin at or under the ground (which is why mowing a lawn has to be done so often!); while trees, shrubs and most herbs grow from growing points (meristems) in the air. Consequently, if a fire burns a shrub or tree, the plant is set back substantially. The grass blade’s growing point is rarely burned and so continues to grow. Therefore if a prairie burns during the growing season, in a week it looks like a well-tended golf course.



Grass fires run before the wind, consuming the grass blades quickly. A big prairie fire will dry out the grass with its heat, so green grass burns almost as well as dead grass, although it is much smokier. Most historic grassland areas are flat or have rolling hills, so a fire burns for miles, sometimes hundreds of miles. Rivers in flat, relatively dry areas are often small and low, posing no barrier to a wind-driven fire. Only really big rivers, such as the Mississippi in North America, are broad enough that a prairie fire cannot jump over them.

Grasslands, then, occur where it is either too dry for trees or where fire keeps trees out. They





may also occur where for some reason the soil is too shallow to support trees. This is the usual explanation of meadows within forested regions.

While they do have things in common, not all grasslands are the same. Wet ones burn frequently (every three to five years in what is



now the Corn Belt) while dry ones rarely have enough fuel to carry a fire. Some grasslands are host to many large, bright-colored wildflowers, some are almost entirely of grass. (Grasses have flowers but they are inconspicuous. Many spring grassland flowers are from bulbs, which are technically members of the grass family.) In



areas of lower rainfall or shorter growing seasons (for example, higher elevations) the height of the grassland plants gets shorter and shorter and distance between plants greater and greater, until it is a desert. In the driest grasslands, the plants

are never taller than a well-maintained lawn. The non-grasses in dry grasslands are often well protected from grazing animals by thorns or spines (cacti make a good American example).

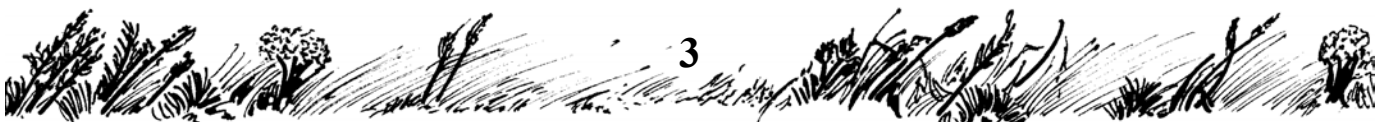
Animals of the Open

With leaves readily accessible near the ground, grasslands have abundant food for herbivores in the growing season. Vast herds form and big predators follow them. Whether cheetahs, wolves, lions, dragons, or rocs, the big herds provide lots of prey. The open conditions allow big winged animals to take off and land safely, and to pursue their prey until they catch it.

Animals in open areas are exposed. Their enemies can see them from far away. Conversely, they can see their enemies. Animals of open communities have good eyesight. They are also fleet of foot, with excellent stamina. Grasslands are good places for running from danger, but you may have to go miles before you are out of sight. Animals of the open tend to travel in groups: many eyes watching are much more effective than just two.



Animals of open lands that do not run well must have some other form of protection from their predators. One simple defense is to be big and tough, like buffalo and musk oxen. For animals that are smaller, such as hares, camouflage and the ability to dart under the grass may work. Anything larger needs additional defenses: they must fly or hide in burrows in the ground or be inedible because they are spiny or poisonous.





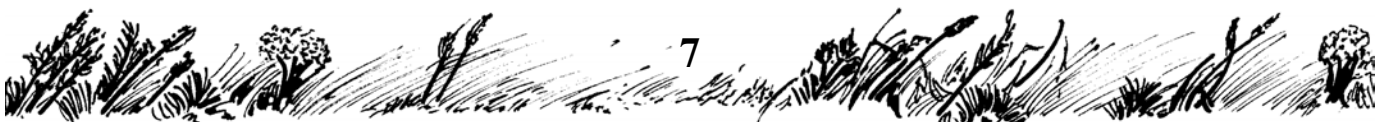
Open Kits

Mixed Prairie

In this region the grass never gets more than about three feet tall and there are open spaces where you can see the ground between plants. The plants are mostly grasses with some wildflowers of many colors scattered among them. In places you find desert plants like yucca and cacti. Trees are rare, found mainly along the few permanent rivers. The wild fires occur frequently but often burn out after a few miles for lack of fuel. It is windy. It is dry in summer. The rain storms are infrequent but often violent with hail, lightning and tornados. Summers are hot (to 102°F, 40°C), and winters are cold (to -30°F, -34°C). This is good country for finding big herds of grazers, such as buffalo. Other mammals likely to be seen in moderate to large herds are elk, pronghorns, and mule deer. The predators are wolves, grizzly bears, coyotes, foxes, mountain lions, weasels, and badgers. Common smaller animals are hares, rats including packrats, and various mice. Prairie dog towns extend for miles. They have associated species like burrowing owls and black-footed ferrets which are rarely encountered except in prairie dog towns. Birds of this region include eagles, hawks, vultures, grouse and wild chickens, crows and ravens, many sparrows, swallows, and larks. Ducks, geese, cranes, sandpipers, and plovers live in wet areas, their numbers augmented by great migratory flocks in spring and fall. The reptiles and amphibians found here are small lizards, snakes, turtles/tortoises, frogs/toads, and salamanders and some dry-land species such as horned lizards and desert snakes. Fish in the streams are tiny since the streams often dry out. This dry region has no really big rivers—most rivers are shallow with braided channels among sandbars, going nearly dry by late summer. Insects are few and inoffensive most of the time, but any group can have a particularly good year and reach high densities. There may be settlements along the riverbeds but the region is generally empty with the few resident people migrating as hunters following the herds.

Settled Land

Close to the castle — which typically sits on a relative high spot — are numerous, carefully tended orchards of apple, peach, plum, and pear trees. Walnut and almond trees are grown there, too. Beyond them is a large area of well-trimmed grape vines growing along arbors. Small villages nestle within an hour's walk of the castle in all directions. Around them are cultivated fields. The fields are usually fenced by stone walls made from irregularly shaped stones, but sometimes with rough wood fences. The fields are long and narrow and planted with peas, beans, onions, turnips, beets, parsnips, or carrots. The largest and best fields are growing grains—oats and wheat especially, but also barley and rye. People plow behind an ox or a horse. They scatter and cover the seeds and hoe the weeds by hand. These fields surround the party for many miles as one village's lands are replaced by another's. As you get farther from the castle, there is more and more uncultivated land. On some of it, cattle, sheep, goats, or geese graze, in small herds watched over by boys, or in slightly larger herds guarded by herdsmen with dogs. Out beyond the last village, the open lands are grazed short by livestock in roving herds protected by herdsmen. Finally, several days walk out beyond the castle, the land seems wild and barely touched by the livestock or people from the villages.





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Wild Horses – Bit 4

Insects:

Bees – Bit 2; Shards 6, 27
Butterflies – Bit 56; Shard 13
Gnats, Flies, Fireflies, Mosquitoes – Bits 66, 72, 91; Shards 2, 30, 59

Miscellaneous:

Bones – Bits 14, 36, 38, 40, 41, 60;
Fire – Bits 43, 94, 95; Shards 22, 66-78
Hard Work – Bit 3; Shards 4
Perspiration – Bits 3, 72; Shard 4

Plants:

Cactus – Shards 9, 31, 65
Flowers – Bits 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 35, 56; Shards 3, 8, 15, 25, 29, 35, 62
Sharp Grass – Bits: 91, 92, 93
Tall Grass – Bits 3, 7, 9, 25, 38, 44, 50, 64, 65, 80, 91; Shards 4, 7, 17, 18, 74, 76

Tree – Bits 5, 24, 26, 35, 47, 52, 60, 62, 68, 85, 91; Shards 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 79

Tumbleweeds – Bit 100

Signs of Civilization:

Armor or weapons – Bits 8, 13, 14; Shard 15
Cairn – Bit 38
Dwelling – Bit 16; Shard 14
Head Stones – Bit 32
Horn Call – Bit 17
Human or Humanoid Remains – Bits 13, 24; Shard 2
Obelisk – Bits 34, 37; Shard 20
Old campfire – 39, 40, 41; Shard 79
People – Bits 20, 21, 22, 23, 26; Shards 10, 36
People on Horseback – Bits 18, 20, 28; Shards 11, 12
Piles of Dung – Bit 90
Posts – Bits 35, 36
Shrine – Bit 35
Stone Walls – Bits 21, 31; Shards 10, 13, 19
Tent – Bit 28
Vent – Bit 19
Village – Bit 21; Shard 13
Wagon – Bits 6, 12; Shard 12
Wheat Fields – Bit 21; Shards 10, 13

Terrain:

Horizon – Bits 1, 25, 36, 37, 65; Shards 10, 21, 40, 46, 74
Intersection of Roads – Bits 29, 33
Mud – Bits 20, 91; Shards 13, 63
Paths, Trails – Bits 4, 15, 20, 25, 27, 29, 42, 43, 47, 64, 87; Shards 5, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 26, 79
Road – Bits 27, 29, 30; Shards 13, 36



Rocks – Bit 44; Shards 3, 8
Rolling Hills – Bits 11, 15, 25, 28, 35;
Shards 5, 26, 30, 37, 82-84
Trampled – Bits 14, 39, 41; Shard 17
Valley – Bits 7, 11, 35, 89, 92; Shards 10,
25, 43, 65

Waterways:

Creek Bed – Bits 16, 20; Shard 60
Dry Streambed – Bits 11, 89; Shard 5
Pond, Pool – Bit 88; Shard 45
Stream, River – Bits 16, 26, 35, 47, 55, 60,
86, 87; Shards 13, 26, 43, 44, 58, 59,
60, 61, 79-81

Weather:

Blue Sky – Bits 1, 4, 7, 19, 21, 42, 81, 91,
93; Shards 7, 28, 37, 38, 40, 45, 49, 66
Breeze – Bits 4, 21, 43, 68, 70, 78; Shards
22, 26, 27, 33, 37, 49, 79
Clouds – Bits 4, 11, 21, 77, 82, 83, 84, 85;
Shards 22, 26, 28, 38, 47, 48, 50, 51,
53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 65

Dirt Clouds – Bits 96, 97:
Flash Flooding – Bits 28, 89; Shards 65
Fog, Mist – Bit 26; Shards 25, 39
Hail – Shards 48, 55
Rain – Bits 71, 75, 82; Shards 24, 29, 47,
48, 50, 52, 53, 55, 56
Rainbow – Bit 71; Shard 24
Snow – Shards 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45,
46
Sun – Bits 1, 3, 21, 42, 72, 78, 84, 96;
Shards 4, 13, 26, 40, 70
Humid - Bits 72
Tornado – Shards 56, 57
Wind – Bits 9, 10, 72, 73, 76, 77, 78, 79,
80, 81, 83, 95; Shards 28, 41, 42, 48, 56,
67, 75



Into the Open

01

It is hard to have a sense of space here. You walk a hundred steps, a thousand steps, ten thousand steps, and yet the land seems unchanged. You pass over a hill and down the slope and up the next rolling hill but the horizon is the same. There are no features and no satisfactory ways to tell your progress. The sun rises higher, reaches its zenith, and then sinks westward but your progress is still between unchanging walls of stalks and leaves. The grasses wave in the breeze all the way to the horizon, as they did first thing in the morning. The sky is a great blue and white bowl overhead, the land barely more than flat in all directions under the encompassing dome.

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Into the Open

03

Single file is the only form of travel that makes any sense in the unbroken grassland. The first person forces the grass apart and begins the process of making a path. The farther back you are in the line the easier the going because the grass is more trampled when you get to it. The one in the lead finds it hard work in the relentless sun. There is little air movement where you stand surrounded by the tall grass, even though the wind makes the plant tops dip and dance, and you drip with perspiration. You have to watch your water because there are few streams. Behind you the path you took lies as a conspicuous line across the plain.

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Into the Open

05

You can see a low hill ahead of you with a strange shape on the top, a badly misshapen tree, possibly. As you near it, you see that your first impression was correct; it is a tree that has gone through some terrible accident. The tree is split down the middle; each half now hangs out from the base of the trunk as if the tree was struck with a giant axe. As you draw closer, you can see obvious charring along the bark and the interior wood. The smell of burnt wood is evident, but has faded into a faint tinge in the air. The lightning that destroyed this tree did so months ago.

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Into the Open

02

A spray of colorful flowers interrupts the otherwise monotonous greenish-brown of the tall prairie grasses. The rippling petals range from a deep blood red to an almost glowing orange. A gentle intermittent buzzing sound alerts you to the presence of bees flitting around the stand of wildflowers. [If the PCs get close enough to smell the flowers:] The flowers have an intense, tangy aroma, a smell that somehow evokes the taste of a strong fruit juice. [The bees probably signal the presence of a nearby hive where the PCs could find honey. At the your option, the flowers could be poisonous, or useful in some way to herbalists.]

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04

A dome of royal blue sky stretches overhead, as if a gigantic bowl has been set upon the rim of the earth. White and blue clouds rim the horizon, alive with light and shadow. There will be no storms today. The grass carpet before you is emerald green with a relief of knee high grasses interrupting the smooth expanse. The patches of knee high grasses are a mixture of green and rust colored plants. A small band of wild horses grazes upon the low-growing emerald green patches, avoiding the rust colored plants for more succulent morsels. The breeze is fresh and clean on your face. [The wild horses will be difficult to catch unless the adventurers have a skilled animal handler among them.]

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Into the Open

06

Partially covered by the grass in front of you, a wagon lies on the ground. Its wooden struts have been mostly eroded by the wind and the rain yet the shape of the cart remains intact. A cart like this might have brought a family of migrants to a new and better life somewhere, yet there is no sign of any population in this vicinity. [The wood is too old to be of any use and the remainder of the wagon has long since rotted away.]

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Into the Open

07

Without feeling like you have climbed a hill, you find yourselves descending into a broad, shallow valley. The soft swish of wind through the long grass is quieter here, and as you walk [ride] into the valley, the small sounds of the open plain disappear behind you. The horizon disappears as well, replaced by the gentle curve of the hills around you. Tall grass stands out atop the hills, silhouetted against the clear blue sky. There is a bit of shade on the hillsides, and tiny purple flowers can be seen amongst the grass. As you pass through the valley, their sweet smell surrounds you whenever the wind picks up.

Into the Open

08

Lying beside the road is a set of leather armor. A full torso of tiny leather plates sewn together lies on the grass, still in a round shape with the straps closed, so it gives the eerie impression of still being worn, even though the wearer cannot be seen. The owner must have been a middle-sized man, quite broad-shouldered. You do not initially see the leg armor, but it is there, scattered in the grass, dispelling the illusion that anyone is in the body armor. No helm, weapons pack or shoes can be found, only leather armor. The armor is still supple and soft, although in some places grass is growing up through it. Grass grows fast and leather weathers quickly, so this cannot have been here long.

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Into the Open

09

As you come out of a stretch of rolling hills, the grass goes from knee-high [for humans] to being much taller, three or four feet high in some places. It brushes against your clothes and skin as you continue walking [riding], and it is impossible to take a step without pushing sheaves of it aside as you go. The smells of the prairie—the faint sweetness of the different grasses, the occasional blush of flowers, and the dry smell of plants baking in the sun—are much stronger here, and the sound of grass brushing against grass is ceaseless. The wind blows paths through the high grass, sometimes making it look as though unseen animals are moving among the blades around you.

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Into the Open

10

Amidst the clumps of grass, low hillocks, and long stretches of bare earth, you begin to see wildflowers appearing in little clusters. A bit further along, the clusters become more and more frequent, with many different kinds of flowers—tiny purple blooms, delicate stalks with bright yellow flowers along their lengths, and others. The wind has settled down, and as you walk [ride] the many smells of these flowers become stronger, until you find yourselves in an endless field of wildflowers. It quickly becomes impossible to walk [ride through] without crushing flowers underfoot, which only intensifies the smell.

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Into the Open

11

Rolling hills rife with thin golden grasses lay at your feet. Yellow goldenrod is scattered here and there among the grasses. Every so often, you find a bunch of purple echinacea [or similar flower]. Overhead, flat-bottomed fluffy white clouds follow on, one after another, like a herd of wayward sheep. The clouds cast their shadows across the fields below, as they progress over the valley in a slow parade. The faint rivulets and tendrils of creek beds all are greener where the grasses have found some source of underground waters, yet there is no drinkable water to be found in any of these dry streams. A hawk [falcon, eagle] soars overhead, looking for today's meal.

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Into the Open

12

Nestled in the tall grass you discover a broken-down wagon. The peeling paint on the wind-blasted sideboards reads 'McLellan's Traveling Mystical Emporium.' The rear axle is broken, causing the wagon to sag drunkenly to the left. The leather harnesses are rotting away, still connected to the shaft. The tattered canvas cover has been destroyed leaving the metal frame highlighted against the sky like the ribs of some great beast. The wheels have sunken into the prairie ground several inches. It would seem that the wagon was abandoned long ago. [If the adventurers search the wagon they find nothing of value.]

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