

# MANDIBLE HILL

## GIANT ANT NEST

### Setting description

Striping across the middle of the Old Kingdom, the Buzzard Hills are a range of low, rounded hills, bordered to the north by the sweep of the River Tayth. Bleak and resource-poor, they have always been sparsely populated, even in the days before the nearby country was abandoned. As such, their quiet wildness proved the ideal location for a nest of giant ants. Sited on Mandible Hill, the nest plunges deep beneath the grassy surface. Ant workers and soldiers range far and wide, scouring the hills for anything (or anyone) edible before dragging it back to their tunnels.

### Three 'Ants' Nest' tasks that could be listed on the Adventurers' Guild Job Board

- 1 *Please – urgent rescue required.* During a hiking trip in the Buzzards with my cousin Efferyn, I became uncharacteristically annoyed by his faux bird calls (which he makes incessantly with plucked blades of grass) and was uncharacteristically moved to anger. In a moment of madness, I pushed him into a hole. I believe this hole to be one made by giant ants and I ran away in fear. I am terrified that I shall be accused of his murder and am now in hiding. I beg that someone travels to the Hills to search for Efferyn, who I hope still lives, and clears my name by returning him safely to Kingsalter.
- 2 *In-Greedy-Ants Required!* I hope my tasty pun will catch the eye of a band of courageous adventurers. I require you to travel to the giant ant nest that infests the Buzzard Hills and harvest for me a barrel of the sweet, sugary liquid that is stored in the abdomen of the colony's honeypot ants – living larders! I require large amounts of this liquid for undisclosed reasons. I shall pay well for success! Malcome the Alchemist
- 3 *Join our party.* Me and my friend Daron are going to go to the ant nest that's on Mandible Hill. We know there is treasure hidden in there – stuff that the ants think is worthless – and it's ours for the claiming. We need some more party members – people handy with swords and also map reading and camping. If you want to get rich, then join us! Contact Chayn or Daron.

### Items in the Ants' midden

- 1 A battered iron full helmet bearing a stylised bronze eagle. The owner's head is still inside.
- 2 A pair of sturdy leather boots, almost brand new. The soles have studs that provide considerable grip.
- 3 A bloodstained leather scroll case. The contents are untouched – a detailed map of Baroncliffe Castle.
- 4 A staff made from cedarwood and capped with a fist-sized piece of opal. It contains four charges of the spell 'Summon Elemental'.
- 5 A cotton bandolier containing 5 small vials of liquid. Two are potions of invisibility. The others are unknown.
- 6 A silver gauntlet inscribed with elven lettering. Fitting on the left hand, it improves the dexterity of any weapon held there, effectively making it a finesse weapon.
- 7 A leather satchel, containing a deck of tarot cards and a red satin cloak. The cloak allows the wearer to commune with spirits once a week.
- 8 A haversack containing climbing equipment, including pitons, a pair of climbing picks and 60ft of hempen rope.

### The four levels of the Ants' Nest

- 1 **Surface:** The landscape here is dotted with low mounds of loose earth and pitted with tunnel entrance holes. Rubble and stones are scattered away from the holes, deposited haphazardly by worker ants excavating below. The nest is a busy place and many ants roam the vicinity of the nest or work just below the surface.
- 2 **Larder:** This level is the colony's food store. Some chambers are used as larders for organic matter that has been collected by the foraging ants, some hold honeypot ants (who are fed and store sugar), whilst others are full of a pale fungus, growing on piles of rotting material. The ants also use some chambers as a midden to store waste before taking it to the surface.
- 3 **Nursery:** Most of the chambers on this level contain either eggs, larvae or pupae, and the ants dedicated to their care. Nurse ants monitor the young, moving them between chambers or bringing liquid food to the larvae.
- 4 **The Queen's Chamber:** At the deepest point in the nest sits the Queen. The tunnels on this level all lead to her central chamber, the largest of the nest. Surrounded by soldiers and workers, she fills half the chamber, producing clusters of eggs to grow the colony. Her guards will give their lives to defend her.