



*Bits of the Wilderness*TM

Into the Open

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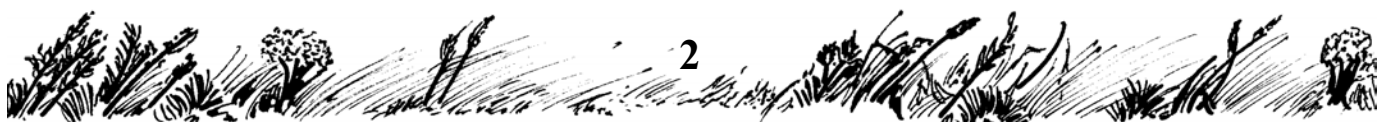
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Bits of the Plains

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.]

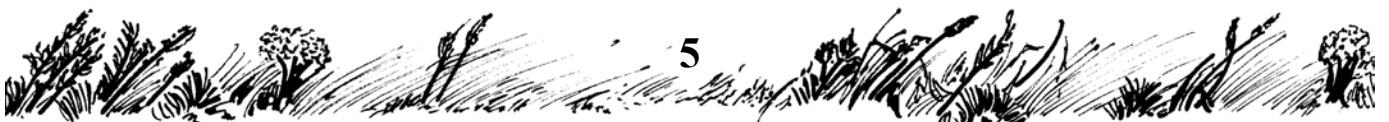
03 Single file is the only form of travel that makes any sense in the unbroken grassland. The first person forces the grass apart and begins the process of making a path. The farther back you are in the line the easier the going because the grass is more trampled when you get to it. The one in the lead 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.]



33 *Creatures of the Night*

As the sun sets, fast-flying birds [swallows] swoop back and forth across the grassland, picking off insects. Their agility draws your eyes to watch the show: they drop suddenly, rise sharply, and fly on apparent collision-courses, only to avoid each other at the last second. As the darkness deepens, they become less numerous and soon are gone, only to be replaced by bats. A lone bird whistles from a distance. The breeze makes the grasses



whisper softly. Crickets call out rattling chirps in the grass. A howl from the far horizon begins, is joined by two others and answered by a chorus on the other side of your camp [wolves or coyotes]. A great bird's flight across the sky high above blocks the stars for a few seconds and is gone in absolute silence [owl?].

34 *Starry Night*

The night sky is so bright and clear here in the grasslands. The stars themselves twinkle like diamonds in the void. Shooting stars race through the night, first white and then darkening to orange. It looks as if they will fall to earth here and perhaps bring luck and fortune with them, but they always just disappear before they come to earth. [It is possible to come across a meteor that has landed. They were much prized for the quality of steel that could be made from meteoric iron.]

35 *Springtime Prairie*

The rolling plain stretches on and on into the pale distance ahead until you can see no

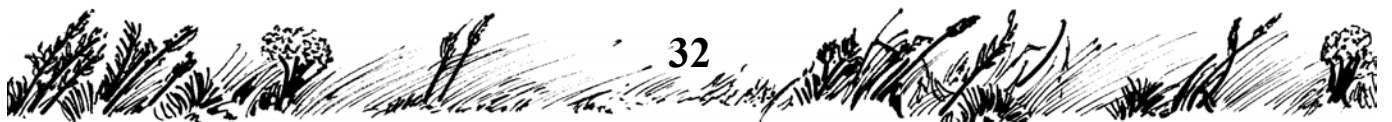
farther. The grasses are knee-high, green leaves of the new season pushing up above the brown blades of last year, making a mottled, shaggy look. Much of it is bright green, appearing smooth and silky. Amid that are areas of varied hues: deep green, reddish, and bluish greens. The great carpet of grass is interrupted in places by groups of bright yellow flowers or by the cream-colored heads of plants in bud. Here and there are spikes of strong pink and blue. Closer to you, you can see large coarse leaves on some of the plants, which the wind turns so that they move in your view alternately light and dark green. A small bird with a white belly sings a chirping song from its perch on an old stick, the sound seeming very loud for such a small bird.

36 *Fields of Summer*

The road runs straight, passing between cultivated fields. At this time [early summer] some of the fields have dense green plants covered with beans or peas. The wheat and oats are ripening their grains. Other fields are being planted with fall or winter vegetables. Still other plots lie fallow, unplowed and unplanted, with only a tangle of weeds growing on them. Villagers work the fields. You see two or three men, plowing with big tawny oxen. One leads the animal and the others follow behind, manipulating the plow and burying seeds carried in a cloth shoulder bag. Elsewhere, chopping out weeds and picking off bugs, you see women with their heads wrapped in patterned scarves, carrying woven baskets on their backs and flanked by children. They rarely seem to notice you, but



when they do, they quickly drop their eyes and go back to work.



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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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02

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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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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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