



'hura (pl. *z'huran*) is the Khuzan name for *mushroom*, a staple of their diet. It has come to be used in human society as a general name for predatory fungi that feed on animal protein rather than the normal vegetable matter. There are at least a dozen varieties, some of them potentially lethal to incautious foragers.

Most z'hura feed on insects, small birds, or rodents, but this does not mean they are harmless to larger creatures. All z'hura contain fluids that produce anything from a mild itch to a painful sting on exposed flesh. On the sensitive tongue, the effect is always worse. The tempting, red-capped *Homura*, which cannot consume anything bigger than a honey bee, contains a sweet tasting fluid that becomes a deadly poison when mixed with stomach acids. The poison causes severe gas, then drowsiness, followed by coma all within 20-30 minutes. A painless death by asphyxia follows within two hours.

Z'hura thrive in damp, shady environments. Most often they are found in thick forests, or below dense undergrowth. North facing hillsides or the south side of deep ravines and riverbanks are favored locations. Like their edible cousins, several z'hura have adapted to thrive in caverns, growing in isolated patches of sand or soil, and/or developing thick, vine-like roots that can meander across rocky floors. Like all fungi, z'hura do not contain chlorophyll nor use photosynthesis to produce nutrients. Light is their nemesis. They wither and die under bright sunlight.

Size varies greatly. Some z'hura are clumps two feet in diameter. Others have roots that stretch beneath a forest floor for several *leagues*; the mushroom caps they show, in isolated patches hundreds of feet apart, are part of the same fungi. Such z'hura can be hundreds if not thousands of years old, although few but Fyvrian mages know this.

All z'hura reproduce by spores that are carried on the wind to new locations. If the spores land in a dark, moist location, they send out minute tendrils into the soil or other medium and commence vigorous growth, feeding on teeming microscopic life. None of this is apparent to the naked eye, partly because of size, but also because the growth is mostly subterranean.



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Z'HURA ENCOUNTERS

01-30	M'nogai
31-50	Langlah
51-66	Lurishi
66-80	Norishi*
81-95	Balrishi*
96-00	GM Species

* Rarely found underground. If within this environ, treat as *M'nogai*.

BALRISHI *The Dark Plague*

Balrishi is an early colonizer of burned areas, where it consumes the microbes, bark beetles, and other insects that thrive, relatively unchecked, in partially-burned trees and shrubs. Peasants know nothing of microbes, of course. They see a fungus that grows rapidly on charred wood. Worse, this fungus has a circular brown shape that resembles the dreaded *Durangash* symbol of Morgath. With the twin connections of Agrik (fire) and Morgath, the balrishi is much feared by superstitious peasantry. Some even include Naveh in that group since balrishi grow best in dark places.

Balrishi are mostly found in wilderness areas that have regular forest fires. Folks living in settlements on the edge of civilization are most aware of them, although they can also appear in any burned-out cottage or village. The innocent boots of destitute souls looting through the wreckage of a fire are common carriers of balrishi infection in civilized parts.

Discovery of a balrishi in any village is likely to produce panic. This blight of the evil gods requires immediate destruction, ironically by fire. Sometimes the panic spreads to include the irrational seizure and destruction of charcoal stored by smiths, potters, and other guildsmen, and even the huge charcoalers' stacks in the forest. Some peasants believe charcoaler stacks are balrishi hives.

Balrishi spores are not poisonous, but can cause respiratory problems in humans and livestock. This leads to shortness of breath and rapid fatigue. Symptoms are greatly aggravated by inhaling smoke from woodfires. This affliction is commonly known as Charcoaler's Cough and is not connected with the balrishi.



BALRISHI

First Aid & Prevention

Other than the respiratory effects of their spores, Balrishi pose no direct health threat to humans. Fresh sea or mountain air is the best remedy.

Because of the "known connection" to the evil dark gods, the Balrishi is rooted-out with the irrational zeal. The best way to destroy it, paradoxically, is by burning all infected wood and charcoal, preferably in a kiln or furnace to reduce flyaway cinders and ash. After burning, the ash is best stored in clay urns awaiting "Siem's Blessing". The ash is then spread on the ground and exposed to direct sunlight for at least 6 hours. It is then sprinkled on crops or dug into the ground as fertilizer.

