Frostbitten & Mutilated
Zak Smith
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Dedication

On page 27 of the first D&D book's first volume there appears an illustration of two creatures—"Beautiful Witch" (left) and "Amazon" (right)—drawn by one Cookie Corey. They are, true to that volume's subtitle ("Men & Magic"), not described anywhere in the text. The image therefore represents not only the first work done by a woman in RPGs and the first female characters published in an RPG but also the first hack of an RPG. So: this one is for Cookie Corey.

Zak Smith, 2017
Note on the appropriation of traditional Nordic cultures

This book woefully misrepresents Norse culture. I mean—probably it does, it has monsters I made up in it—I don’t know I’m Jewish. Anyway, enjoy.
"Outside in the cold night the wind moaned and died down, like an idiot in an icy black pit."
-Richard Wright, Native Son
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THE GODS FROZE SOUNDS—making words—and set the creatures working, to cut languages from the ice. A troll was set to grinding and was resentful, despising all improvement. The grinding troll worked, but poisoned twenty-one words in every tongue—so they would work a mischief in the mouths of men and bring them to ruin.

The She-Goat knew what the gods did not, and sought to thwart the grinding-troll. She went to the Place of the Ears of Women and whispered into one in each one hundred thousand right ears, saying “Twenty-one words are poison, but I know not which. Take no sense from the tongues of men. Go now uncorrupted.”

When women were assembled, one in one hundred thousand were given these ears and this mark—that they would be made weary by the speech of men, and avoid it. They dwell now alone in the long cold crawling—heeding no-one.
How to use this book

This book basically has three parts:
† tools and toys to help you make adventures featuring extremely metal things like warrior women, frost giants, and apocalyptic monsters
† a specific setting (The Devoured Land) with specific places in it and maps and specific people and monsters that want specific stuff that you can use if you want
† a calendar of events that begins when the party arrives in The Devoured Land and which will move forward if the party doesn’t do anything about them

...you should be able to use all-, most-, or some of these parts without anything bad happening. However, I don’t recommend using none of them—I mean I don’t know your situation personally but probably if you do that your game will suck and you’ll die weeping on a pile of rags, universally despised.
Some advice for the Referee

Get the right music. Then, before you run the game, create the quietest, darkest situation you can.

Sit without moving, with your finger resting lightly on the music button—whichever it is: play, enter, the click, the rightward arrow.

Think of an empty landscape—only the drag of a flatlining horizon separates white sky from white earth. There is one thing: a lone thin black tree, bare, reaching like a python. It is a distant but clear shape.

Imagine it. Imagine it and hear your own breath. In and then out again. Touch the button.

There’s a second silhouette that emerges beneath and it is the silhouette of the worst person you know. Imagine, summon and indulge real emotion—a person for whom you feel (not believe you should feel—but feel) total enmity, total opposition—and if you subscribe to a philosophy whereby these emotions are to be suppressed, put away that philosophy now. It is given to you to know that for this foe there is no hope of reform and no other life where punishment will be administered. They stand, seeing you as you see them.

In the sound and the dark, totally experience your hatred of them, the heat of it, the hatred of their face, their many ways, their words. Give it some time there. Know that you are human, that to despise is human and what is common to your kind is natural. It is of nature. Knowing this hate, knowing this unity, know this too: this is how the landscape feels about your players’ characters. This is how it views their trespass, the formlessness of the way they slather themselves across itself. Their steps set the entire cold world to seething. It needs, and seeks, their downfall. By force and by calculation. By means known and as yet unknown. It will devise methods. This is nature: it will innovate to extend the reach of its hate.

Turn the light back on, your players are coming—but look at your hand and make a claw, then from the claw make a fist. Hold what you have learned there in that fist. Keep it away—these are, after all, your friends. It is important to have allies in this life and you owe them all you can spare—you owe them all the warmth in the world. Give them snacks—give them whatever will please them most, tell them jokes. Fortify them against less merciful futures.

But when you are at play and must play the cold world described in this book and its manifestations, you now know its heart. You hold it quietly in one hand, and may consult it.
Recommended

Read these:
The Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur 1916 translation of the *Gylfaginning* in Snorri Sturlson's *Younger Edda* is a good place to start—that's where you can read about how they made the sky out of a rime-giant's skull and whatnot. The rest of the *Eddas* are recommended by anyone who writes an RPG book with viking stuff in it.

Fritz Leiber's *The Snow Women* is the best Fafhrd and Grey Mouser short story and one of the best short stories period and one of the best things period. So read it even if you don't ever play a game again.

Walt Simonson's *Thor* issues 337-367 and 380, the all-full-page-art issue where Thor fights the Midgard Serpent.

Mallory Ortberg's *Early Signs of Pregnancy*.

Maybe this:
I have very dim memories of being read Steven Bauer's novel *Saturday* as a child and it probably influenced my treatment of animals here. I almost gave the moon stats.

Listen to this:
For true Norwegian Black Metal, *Immortal* is my favorite, and "All Shall Fall" is the maximum dose. For the Amazons themselves the soundtrack is *Thorr's Hammer*, *Jex Thoth*, *Kylesa*, and *13* (the 13 that did "Whore" "Hollow" and "Writhe"). *Svartsinn* is good to have on in dungeons and *Wolves in the Throne Room* is good everywhere else.
Adventures in the Devoured Land

Sometimes the snow will not stop. Under its particled screen like layers of veil that would make of the world a bride to an unknown, vast and unseen groom all civilization is wondering from its hearths and stone corners: What is to be done about the women? They spit and rage, they drown the taxmen, they hack the bellies of snakes and eat what they find, they abort babies and squeeze their milk into the bellies of troll-cats, they dwell apart among the wide white peaks, raiding, scheming, speaking to animals, willful and without trade or diplomatic discourse—the witch-women and amazons. They dominate and divide the Devoured Land. Who can see this ending well?

Why might you travel to the Devoured Land—a death-place where mountains, ice-crowned, claw at the sky and nothing is ordinary?

Gold

Something plunders those caravans that never come back. Some say there are greedy frost giants with great hoards, but some say this is a lie told by cowards to disguise having fled frightened from armed women.

Anarchy

The lawless Devoured Land is a place for a party to hide if they are fugitives and a place for them to scour if they are in pursuit of one.

Wisdom

It may be the oldest place in the world. Some claim the Darkthrone of Ovv, the first king, lies somewhere deep in the mountains’ belly. Some say the worst three witches live in the Devoured Land, and that they will incite the end of all things. There is magic here not seen since night first divided from day.

Embryoctony

Midwives in every city whisper that the Amazons know the secrets to safely unseat a child before it can escape a womb to inhale and swallow a soul, and that the herbs of Mount Hellebor make the procedure painless. Desperate women of good families have been known to disguise themselves and quietly hire bands of armed escorts to take them north, while claiming to be visiting aunts in warm climes.
Getting there

You are not yet in the Devoured Land, where there are no men alive and the world is ripped away from itself. You will be soon. The unexplored wastes are large, do what you like with them. Outside the map you will be given, with 64 areas partially filled in for you, there are only four things to remember: the sea—from which flows the River Slith, the Hatemountain—where the frost giants live, and two outposts of what men do, and women often do not, call "civilization". They are:

Nornrik
This is a city, with a castle and lords and everything. Sophisticated, brittle, mannered. As large as you're comfortable making it. If you prefer a historical city, you can use Trondheim, which was the Norwegian capital during the Viking era and is eminently Googleable.

Rottingkroner
The closest harbor to the Devoured Land, also known as Rotting Crowns—named for the enfoldng shape of the abraded rock formations comprising the surrounding fjord. Merchants and seaman come to be tattooed, regaled with rumor, murdered, and inveigled into any other grotty seaport cliché your campaign requires.

Although this module is set in the same world as my book Vornheim: The Complete City Kit, it can as easily be set in a semi-historical Norway. Just remember Norway has no East coast, so its equivalent of Rottingkroner would be somewhere to the west of the Devoured Land map provided.

We're going to the Devoured Land now, which will first be described by describing who lives there in alphabetical order. This is surprisingly convenient: It starts with Amazons, Animals, and Avalanches, and finishes with Witches and Wolves and Worms.
The Devoured Land is distant, unfathomed. They say the cleft peaks are the uneaten half left torn when the first Cannibal God bit the world. Things there are as things were in the day before all days, when all that is now knew a common tongue and a young, smoother moon hung pearl-like in a black bed gestating the unborn stars.

The ice is clearer, the wind sharper, every sound echoes, and all time unravels with a clear and open order. The ancient tolerance with which each contemporary thing regards and gnaws at the thing adjacent in our sensical and passive-aggressive world is here undone, and all struggle is known, explicit. The shadow falls across the rock, and the rock despises that. The oldest witch is here, the proudest stag, the most vicious wolf, the fattest hog and most lustful goat, the most avid crow, the most resentful of rats, and worms so lazy they have been here since “here” began.

There are trees that grew in first rain, and horses that have never known a rider, stones cut by the hand of the first women and recut by thousands after, parasites grown from the guts of the first men, there are fortresses buried since the first battle. It’s said time started and will end in this place.
Who says this? The Amazons. But then: they will say anything. To you, anyway. I know because you can read this and I wrote it and I wrote it in a language of cities and so if you can read it you are not one of them. So they will lie to you. Or tell you the truth. Whichever is more likely to frighten you away. If their knives, their war animals, their bacchanals, their cultured exotoxins, their enmity, cuisine, enigmatic gods, complex obstetrics, and internecine warfare have not frightened you first.

These are the daughters of the she-goat and they have chosen another path.

Their diet is meat mixed with things found while looking for meat, every craft they possess is taught after having learned the lessons of axes, bonebreaking, and the taking of blood. Amazons that are neither hunters nor reavers nor witches are called children—they have stats as ordinary humans and will bite for d4 damage.

These are a few of their tribes.