10117

HELLFROST

ATLAS OF THE FROZEN NORTH



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OFFICIAL SAVAGE WORLDS LICENSED PRODUCT

HELLFROST ATLAS

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FOREWORD BY 'WIGGY'

Welcome Kickstarter backers, fans, friends, and internet pirates to the *Hellfrost Atlas*!

First off, let's be clear that the *Hellfrost Atlas* isn't a conventional atlas. A normal atlas is just a book of maps. What you're holding in your hands is really an expanded gazetteer with all new, small-scale maps. We called it the *Atlas* because "Gazetteer 2," "Region Guide Compendium," and "Travelogue" all sound a bit lame. I've got a big gaming collection, though not an exhaustive one. Glancing around other companies' web sites, I'm not sure if anything quite like it exists. I know that the core *Forgotten Realms* book contains a lot of world information, but not every realm has detailed maps. The Realms also has plenty of regional books with maps, but to be honest they often have more rules material (crunch) than expanded location information (fluff). Whether it's unique or not, the *Atlas* is here and it's extremely fluffy!

The *Atlas* is special to me for several reasons. First, it should never have existed. While you might like to think that we had the line all mapped out when we started production, we didn't. Our plan for *Hellfrost* was very simple—three books (we wanted one book, but circumstances at the time prevented that), a few adventures to get you into the mood, and then on to the next continent. That we've produced two Expansions, an Encounters book, Matters of Faith, 20 adventures, 53 Region Guides, six Creature Guides, and a fistful of other small page count supplements is all down to you, the fans (not the internet pirates reading this), who fell in love with the world and kept asking for more information. A direct consequence of that demand was the birth of the *Region Guide* series. These scratched two of your biggest itches—more information on the physical world and more information on the gods. Thus was laid the foundation stone on which this mighty *Atlas* was built.

That brings me nicely to my second reason. We'd looked at producing a Region Guide Compendium before. We'd discussed printing a single book with just the text, three books to spread the high production costs, and no books at all. For a long time the latter won out—even with the religious and monster information stripped out, the book would be too big to risk investing in. Let's face it, having vocal fans is always good, but a few voices calling for a book do not make a choir.

Then came Kickstarter. We'd known about it for some time, but as a UK company we had no easy way of accessing it until they opened a UK branch. Having run three successful Kickstarters, and with the fans still crying out for a Region Guide Compendium, we laid down a challenge—if you were serious about wanting a compendium then you would have to fund the project. To make it more than a straight reprint of the geographical information padded out with a few pieces of new art, we upped the ante—we'd add completely new region maps at a smaller scale with added detail, but that would up the costs massively.

I'll be honest, no one at TAG held out much hope of getting the project off the ground. Talk is cheap and this book would be anything but that. Even by shrinking the fonts (the only way we could produce a book of manageable size), it weighed in at 352 pages once estimated map space had been allocated. We looked back over our previous Kickstarters to try and work out how many backers we would need and could reasonably expect to attract, and then set the pledge levels accordingly. I know lots of games companies offer a ton of extras and bonuses in their Kickstarters, but this project was deliberately set up with the simple goal Kickstarter was created for—it was a project you would back only if you believed it worthy of being produced.

The bar had been set high, both in terms of final production values and the basic funding total. All we could do was impatiently hit refresh every few minutes. Not only did you fund the *Atlas* with its glorious maps and some art, but you funded seven stretch goals, meaning you'd get an additional 28 pages of new material. I say we added 28 pages, but there is actually much more. We don't waste your money by including white space in our books, so that meant I had to fill out the chapters that fell short. Before we'd even hit the first stretch goal you'd gained the equivalent of 14 pages of brand new material. All told, you've got 42 pages, which at our regular font size would be closer to 50 pages.

I'll tell you for free that those extra pages (chapter balancing *and* stretch goals) were some of the hardest I've ever had to write in my ten years as a professional RPG author. I've often wondered exactly how many locations were in the *Gazetteer* and *Region Guides*, but I've never bothered to count them. It has to run into the hundreds, though. Add on *Land of Fire* and its *Realm Guide* series and the number likely doubles. Now I was being asked to add around 100 more locations to a continent I thought I'd exhausted. Filling those pages consumed a lot of days and nights, and involved a lot of banging my head against my desk, staring vacantly into space while my brain stuck random words together to see if anything leapt out, and cigarettes and cups of tea (or writer fuel, as they're known in my house). Still, you'd paid for this information and I wasn't about to take short cuts or slack off. I can only hope that as you lift open the cover you're satisfied with the written content.

The final reason is one of shameless vanity. While the idea of the *Region Guides*, and thus the *Atlas*, was ultimately suggested by fans, it is my name on the cover. The *Atlas* represents many months of my life and, now that the writing is done (bar any edits), I can say they were months well spent. Saying that, and not just because I have room left to fill on this page, I must thank a few people.

First, Daryl Smith, who won a competition on the forums to write up one of the Alfheim realms and who is duly and rightly listed as a contributor in this hefty tome. He holds the honor of being the only other person who has written official canon. I've written up a lot of suggestions from fans and asked permission to use their ideas in the canon, but *Hellfrost* is my baby. Arrogance? Vanity? Control freak? Maybe, but this approach has been appreciated by the fans. As one wrote recently, *"Hellfrost is not a compromise between many authors who are trying to please the masses to sell as many books as possible, which typically results in a generic/watered down RPG feel. It is Wiggy with his vision, imagination, and creativity combined with his unapologetic nature that makes this a rich RPG."* That's a compliment we're all proud of at TAG.

Getting back on topic as I've noticed that space is now running out, I'd also like to thank all the artists and editors who have worked not only on this project, but on the many other *Hellfrost* titles. And not forgetting Robin, who has designed the interiors and exteriors of every TAG product, and who created the beautiful maps that make the *Hellfrost Atlas* an almost-atlas. And Snowy, of course, who played his part in creating this book by keeping me sane.

Finally, I want to thank those of you reading this who backed this project. Without your faith that we could deliver this book it simply would not exist. I hope you're very proud of your achievement, because you should be!

May your god go with you!

Wiggy
Shetland Islands, August 2014

Foreword by Robin Elliott

To all the Kickstarter backers.

I thank you for allowing TAG to attempt this epic project! Without your support this book would never have seen the light of day. When Wiggy and I discussed the cartography behind this project we first decided to contact Justin Russell who had drawn and painted the original Rassilon map. A beautiful map that we were very happy with and still are and was incorporated into the original Gazetteer. We approached him to see if he would be willing to take on the atlas project but due to other commitments he was unable to accept the commission.

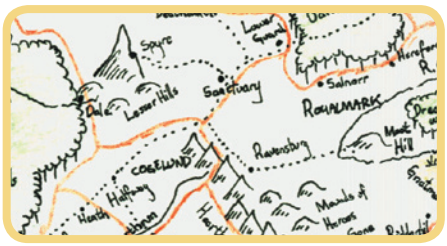
After a lot of soul searching and much discussion with Wiggy I decided I was the only one other than Justin who could commit to such a project and also understand what was required without a lot of guidance. I knew the world that Wiggy had created, I had designed all of the previous books - it seemed a natural step to map the world.

So we plotted and organized and created a plan to make this book and we took our ideas to the fans. We would launch a kickstarter to fund the project and we both really did not know whether the fans would fund it - it was a complete unknown! The experience for us was truly amazing. Our incredible Hellfrost fans committed their hard earned pounds and dollars to our grand project. The kickstarter ended and then we had to actually do this book - which came as quite a shock!

How does one start mapping an entire continent of a fantasy world?

This was a question that floated around in my head for several sleepless nights. If you are an artist or designer you will know the feeling of utter panic when faced with a blank page or screen! The blank page I was facing was truly massive especially at the scale I wanted to use for the lands of Rassilon. The scale I choose to create the new map meant that if we took Justin's map it would need to be enlarged to 400% to match the new scale. This allowed me to include so much more detail that Justin could not in his original map.

Evolution of a Map



Wiggy's Sketch Map



Justin Russell's Gazetteer Map



Atlas of the Frozen North Maps

However there was a problem. I felt a huge sense of responsibility to produce the best maps I could and portray Wiggy's creation in the best possible way. I had to deliver something that did not detract from an already richly conceived world.

I did a lot of research on fantasy cartography on the internet. I looked at many artists and cartographers work and spent many hours poring over their maps trying to understand their methods and approaches. One artist that I admire a lot is Mike Schley who publishes many maps for Wizards. His maps have been used in D&D adventures and settings and I think his style is just amazing. So I took all of this found knowledge and inspiration and began my solitary task.

The words of the atlas on the whole had been laid out. Using Justin's map as a guide and dropping it into the text I could see how much space was needed to leave to incorporate the new maps. I also wanted a common scale across the book and although some of the regions are awkward shapes I was able to make most regions fit on a page or double page spread without too much trouble. Just a few of the regions caused some issues such as the Magocracy due to its relative size. To accommodate such large regions I had to add further pages to display them in their entirety.

I quickly took the decision to split the continent into six areas. At the end of the drawing process I would combine all six areas into a single master map. I could not work on a single file containing all of the regions as my computer would not have coped with such a large file. I feared memory loss and crashes so I kept two copies as I worked with one in removable media in case the computer died!

Part of the process meant I needed to be organized so I thought out my drawing methods and designed a color pallet which meant I could keep a consistent look across the continent. I began always with a costal outline in blue. Filling in the paths of the rivers at the same time. I had Justin's map and Wiggy's original Rassilon sketch to guide me and I slowly built up the geographic features drawing mountains, grasslands, hills, lakes and forests to complete the regions. As the weeks and months went by the continent slowly took shape. Eventually I had all six minor maps which I combined into one master map. I then started the next phase, adding the towns, cities and sites of interest. I created a set of map icons to describe the locations and as I populated the work with these sites the maps really started to come to life! Once you turn a few pages to a map in the book you will see the many icons placed and the sheer amount of adventuring possibilities now presented to you. You could adventure for years and still not see all of Rassilons secrets!

Once I had completed the overland maps I then began on the city maps. These were a very different process and I enjoyed creating the cities and towns which no-one had mapped previously. In some way this was even more daunting as I had no reference so it was very much up to my imagination for how they looked. What I have created is my vision of Rassilon.

Many people have asked how I created these maps, and the question most asked is "What mapping software are you using?" It seems to surprise people when I tell them, "I don't use mapping software, I drew it by hand direct in my pc". I don't think I could have created maps using Dunjini or Campaign Cartographer. Not that there is anything wrong with these software packages. They offer non-artists a way to create fabulous maps and allow GM's to quickly plan an adventure. For me however they are too constricting. I like the freedom to draw mountains, rivers and forests in different shapes, colors and all look slightly different across the regions. The tradeoff here is time. Drawing by hand is time consuming but the results are more natural. For those who might be interested I used a Windows 8 pc machine with Adobe Photoshop CS2 and a Yiynova MSP19U+ drawing tablet to create these maps. The best piece of equipment I own is the drawing tablet which I have come to love, and combined with Photoshop gives me everything I need to design the games I love to make.

With 53 regions to map I knew this would take a lot of time to create and boy was I right! We estimated 8 months to complete this project. This unfortunately turned out to be wrong as we all now know! Luckily our fans stuck with us and allowed me time to complete the maps. Sometimes I felt the task impossible to complete and daunting beyond words. I am immensely proud of the book that Wiggy and I have created and I hope all of my hard work does justice to the world Wiggy conceived and you all find this book entertaining, informative and inspirational.

Go forth and find adventure and glory in the frozen northlands!

Robin Elliott - Wiltshire, August 2015

GUIDE TO MAP ICONS



VILLAGE
(20-1,000 Inhabitants)



TOWN
(1,000-8,000 Inhabitants)



CITY
(8,000-12,000 Inhabitants)



LARGE CITY
(12,000+ Inhabitants)



DWARF STRONGHOLD



ELF STRONGHOLD



ORC CAMP/NEST



CASTLE



FORT



MANOR HOUSE



TOWER



TEMPLE



BRIDGE



ROAD



TRACK



SEA ROUTE



PLACE OF INTEREST



BATTLE SITE



RUINS



SEA WRECK



STONE CIRCLE



TOMB



STANDING STONE



MOUNTAIN PEAK



COASTLINE



GRASSLANDS



HILLS



MOUNTAINS



RIVERS



FOREST/WOODS



MOORLAND



SEA/LAKE



RIVER DELTA



MARSHLAND



ICEWALL



ICE FLOW

We'd like to thank all our Kickstarter backers for making this project happen.

DISCIPLES OF FREO

Kevin Doswell, Vince Kingston, Bjørn Kobæk Søndergaard, Scionofnyarlathotep, Mikko Tikkanen.

SANDALS OF FREO

Ryo Ogawa, Wesley E. Marshall, Robert Brum-below, Tej Cheema, Cory Bonifay, Serf Productions, Aric Wieder, Martin Mcintyre, Stephen Peto, Ghostwolf69, Y. Lee, Neal Freeman, Drsmitty, John Savage, Karsten Kopplin, Paul Dundee, Jesse R Davis, Trevor Sone, Jan Eriksson, Paul Watts, cat jérôme.

WHEELS OF FREO

Matt Whalley, Metaphysicus, Arthur Dent, Andy Sangar, Jaxvor, Philip Vigus, Ols Jonas Petter Olsson, Stlstrapper, 6mmwar, Lloyd Rasmussen, Robert Huss, Steve Cranford, Robert Mckavanagh, Timothy Mullen, Andreas Jaeger, Brandon Robert-son, Wayne Grelle, Frits Kuijlman, Simon Roddy, Forrest Bryant, Philipp Jung, Christian Southwick, Ross Sorensen, Redfuji6, Michael Smith, Bernd Splettstoes-ser, Andreas Lenhart, Joergdiener, Peter Sailer, Savage Robby, Paul Sudlow, Chris Mcneil, Andre Valle, Mike Strefford, Simon Corbishley, Lassi Into, Anthony Martin, Robert Beaver, Kev-La, Matt Logan, Sébastien Allard, Teichdragon, Fredrik Hans-son, Tom Lumley, Caryl Yantis, Jeffrey Rees, Cptmachine, Daniel Nissman, Mike P, Semen Nosnitsyn, Mikael Hassel, Chris Perkins, Paul Abell, Louis S Gowers, Gor-don Lawyer, Marc Hameleers, Mathias Exner, Fiona Elliott, Michael Neil Schne-belen, Vance Ludemann, Koen Van Daele, Dmdoom, Matthew Alexander, Robert Nownes, Brendan Jeffrey Felstead, Simon Ward, Andrew Bierer, Dave Mcalister, Jess, Gilles, Botho, Mark Townshend, Matthew B, Patrik Ström, Barbara Ericksen, Mitchell, Wyatt, Matthew Lea, Thomas Hobday, Fritz W Charles, Simon Hunt, Gun-nar Bangsmoen, Stephen Reuille, Radosław Grzanka, Jordi Rabionet Hernandez, Ian Mckay, Daniel Leggett, Wotan, Jonathon Dyer, Robin Low, Cousin Artaud, Rob-ert H. Mitchell Jr., Jon Woodland, Anders Bersten, Gordon Munn, Brian Ingram, Matthew Whalley, Michael Hall, Andrew Bussey, Ronald Robinson, Jay Hale, Darren Miller, Hans Bothe, Christopher Kearney, Philippe Deville, Mike Wallace, Tim Nickel, Jeff Scifert, Robert Rydlo, Ivan Minyawi, Shane Mclean, Bjørn Kobæk Søndergaard, Xavier Chung Minh, Rupert Sedlmayr, David Harrison, Gianna Masetti, Jan von Schilcher, Leonard Rosenkranz, Danilo Erbe, Mainguet Francois, Derek Jones, Aaron Couts, Kevin Vogel, Peter Jaensch.

NOVICES

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SACRED PLACES

Across the northern continent are many places of wonder. Some are geological, carved by wind and etched by rain over the eons. Others are architectural splendors, worked by living hands. A small few are elemental loci, concentrated places of magical energy for one of the four elements. This section is concerned with a fourth category—sites inhabited by spirits or elemental beings.

The term *spirit* is a generic one, used predominantly by common folk to describe any otherworldly being. The ancestral souls, elementals and their ilk, ghosts and other incorporeal undead, divine heralds, and even the gods fall under this generic title. Although fey are material beings, they too are grouped with spirits for their ephemeral, alien qualities.

Most spirits visit the mortal realm fleetingly, typically at the behest of spellcasting mortals or at the will of the gods. They perform their appointed tasks and depart. Some spirits, though, choose to make their homes in the earthly realm, establishing their domain in a small area. Mortals call these locations sacred places, for they are always associated with a deity.

In a sacred place the boundaries between the mortal world and the spirit world are weak. Worshippers of the appropriate faith, and more rarely anyone, can draw upon this power. Sacred places are not merely physical locations of concentrated magical energy—the spirit inhabiting the site has free will, and the powers are its to use or withhold as it desires.

Sacred places are sites of magical wonder to many and terror to others. They provide mortals with a reminder the gods are ever present and the world is a far more mysterious place than scholars and sages would have them believe.

CREATING SACRED PLACES

Sacred places can serve the GM in many ways. At their most basic, they are places where the heroes can gain some minor boon; sometimes for free, sometimes at a price. They can serve as sites the heroes must protect from rapacious orcs and undead legions, places of pilgrimage (either to the characters or someone they are protecting), or a site they must destroy in order to thwart the maniacal plans of a dark-souled villain. A sacred place might be encountered completely by accident, the heroes having to learn of its powers through trial and error. They also remind the players that *Hellfrost* is a magical setting, where supernatural power takes many forms.

By working through the steps below, GMs can create sacred places for their campaigns in just a few minutes. No die rolls or tables are involved—all that is required is a little time, imagination, and common sense.

CHOOSE A NAME

Names have power. For the GM, that power is the gift of providing you with the answers to many of the choices you need to make in the sections below. Every sacred place needs a name. Names fall into two distinct categories.

In the first instance, the name may be that of the spirit inhabiting the sacred place rather than the place itself. In an attempt to make the spirit feel welcome, and to represent how it fits into the world in understandable terms, mortals typically apply some sort of familial term like grandfather/grandmother, father/mother, son/daughter, or brother/sister to spirits. Sometimes a more general term, such as man, woman, maiden, or child is used.

These titles are never used alone, but are always combined with another element. These additional elements might be the name of a natural feature, a color, a season, an elemental force, or a natural phenomenon. Hence, spirits may carry names like Stormbrother, Mother Winter, Green Man, Sister Blood Fire, Wind Daughter, Summer Maiden, or Flower Child.

Second, it might be a generic name for the location. These names often include the type of feature, such as hill, mountain, pool, lake, river, or field. These names are more inclined to the personality of the spirit and feelings mortals sense when in the location, or the purpose of the sacred place.

For instance, the Green Field may refer to a field in which crops are always bountiful. The Hill of Ancestors may be a burial ground where the spirit guardian can help mortals speak to their ancestors. The Dark Glade implies a place if not of dread, then at least one not to be trodden lightly. The Healing Stone is logically a place where people go to be healed of their ills.

CHOOSE A PERSONALITY

All spirits have personalities, and over time these seep into the sacred place, imbuing it with an atmosphere and ambience mortals can sense. Sometimes the feeling is gentle and subtle, while other times it is harsh and overt. Spirits can also communicate with mortals. Again, the personality should shine through. The name you have chosen should provide some clues to the spirit's personality, but never be afraid to look beyond the obvious.

Thunderbrother, for instance, might speak in a loud, deep voice, booming out words. Alternately, it could be symbolic of lightning, crackling and energetic. Perhaps it combines these, having a deep voice when calm and a crackling voice when angry. The Gurgling Maiden, a section of stream containing large stones that produce swirling eddies, might be calm and peaceful in the Hearthlands, but cold and fierce in the Winterlands. Mother Fire could be a soothing spirit whose words warm the heart, but just as easily a greedy one, yearning for things she can incinerate and hissing out words in a crackling voice.

Personality also affects atmosphere in or around the sacred place. A cave might never communicate with a mortal, but its presence can still be felt. It could be womblike, imbuing travelers with a feeling of security, or dark and oppressive, with deep shadows no light can completely banish. A field of flowers might take anyone walking through it back to memories of happier times, while a field of corn, like a cave, can be oppressive, making mortals feel trapped and claustrophobic.

CHOOSE A LOCATION

Sacred places do not have to be natural features, though they make up the majority. Most times the place existed long before mortals came to the area. If the site happens to be just outside a village, then it is more likely the villagers chose to set up home there because of the proximity to the spirit rather than the other way around.

Most sacred places should be a single, static location of fixed size, even if that feature is within a greater area. For instance, one hill or mountain is preferable over an entire range. The name and personality you have chosen will help you here—the Green Man isn't going to be a mountain anymore than the Healing Stone is going to be a tree.

Some examples of suitable places are given below.

- A hill or mountain.
- A hill fort.
- A burial mound or grave marker.
- The site of a battle or massacre.
- A crop field, orchard, fruit bush, or patch of grass.
- A cave, valley, dell, grove, bower, or glade.
- A bridge or ford.
- A standing stone, trilithon, stone circle, pile of stones or boulders, or chalk figure.
- A section of river or stream, a pool or lake, a waterfall, or a spring.
- A small wood or marsh, part of a greater forest or marsh, or a single tree.

CHOOSE A DEITY

Every spirit owes allegiance to a single deity. While picking the deity for some sacred places may seem obvious based on their location and the spirit residing there, with a little thought you can use almost any god in any sacred place. Naturally, there needs to be some sort of common link between sacred place and deity—Kenaz isn't going to have an ice volcano in the Hellfrost sacred to him under any circumstances, while Thunor won't bless a cave or other enclosed area.

A crop field, for instance, immediately conjures up images of Eostre Plantmother, a logical choice given Plantmother's aspects. Maybe, though, the area marks the scene of a massacre or battle and is sacred to Dargar or Tiw. Perhaps the soil is especially fertile, a gift from Ertha, or crops grow sickly if at all thanks to Vali's influence. Thunor might ensure the crops are never flattened by wind, and that it always receives just the right amount of rain. Maybe golden corn grows there, and the field never freezes thanks to Kenaz's hand.

SENSES

All spirits have the innate ability to sense what is happening within their sacred place. Spirits possess whatever senses the GM deems most appropriate for the location. Although these senses may be described as sight, hearing, smell, touch, and so on, they do not operate in the same way as for mortals. A sacred tree may be able to see mortals, but it doesn't have eyes.

A spirit can automatically sense all that occurs within its habitat and a short distance further afield. For a mountain or hill, the spirit's senses generally extend to the accepted edge of the feature and maybe a few hundred yards above, to the sides, and below. A lone tree or solitary standing stone might extend its senses a few dozen feet, the extent of a tree's root system, but it won't know what is happening elsewhere unless the GM determines it hears things on the wind. Stone circles, pools, lakes, and fields have, by their very nature, defined boundaries. Natural features, such as bends, fords, and waterfalls, mark river sections. A dark cave may be blind, but it can use other senses perfectly well. If a group of travelers stay in the cave and light a fire, it may sense the heat through its walls or hear the crackling flames.

The smaller the area the sacred grove encompasses, the more exacting the details the spirit can discern without conscious effort. A spirit watching over an entire village might simultaneously hear every conversation, whether shouted, at normal volume, or whispered, but it does so as a stream of barely intelligible words. A mountain may feel an army walk over it, but if it wants to identify the army's commander it must focus its efforts.

All spirits should be given a Notice skill. The skill is used only when the spirit must discern detail, such as an individual's features or to pick out a certain name.

The GM defines the skill die as required. A spirit suffers no penalties for distance or poor lighting within the sacred place, as its senses transcend the mortal realm. Magical effects like *obscure* and *silence* remain effective against a spirit's senses, but Stealth is generally of little use—it's very hard to creep around a sacred grove is every tree, leaf, and blade of grass is spying on you.

Spirits have little to no understanding of the world outside their sensory range. A mountain, for example, can tell exactly what creatures have walked upon it by sensing their vibrations—it may even be able to recognize individuals by their footsteps—but it has no idea where they went after they moved on unless the spirit happened to overhear a conversation (assuming it has the ability to hear).

COMMUNICATION

Some spirits communicate only through dreams, others through direct speech, and some through spells like *voice on the wind*. More unusual forms of communication are certainly possible, either as unique forms or in conjunction with other types—a fire spirit may reveal itself as a flickering flame that flares up, while a tree may drop or raise its branches, and water may gurgle or drip. Exactly how, and indeed if, a spirit can communicate is up to the GM.

SACRIFICE

Even the most benevolent spirit does not use its power totally for free. Many spirits demand a price be paid before a power is used, though require supplication afterward. If no sacrifice is offered, the spirit may withhold its abilities in the future or cast spells to the detriment of offenders. As an *absolute* minimum, prayers must be offered to the appropriate deity.

A crop spirit, for example, may require blood sacrifices (animal normally, but maybe a sentient being every decade) each spring or demand a tenth of its yield be strewn back onto the field as fertilizer in order to bestow its crop boosting power. A fire spirit may demand combustible material it can feast upon beforehand. A war spirit may require empowering by the supplicant bending or otherwise rendering useless a weapon, or perhaps it insists on hearing a tale of personal bravery from the petitioner, benefitting only those it judges worthy. A winter spirit may be benevolent, but it unleashes a blizzard in the vicinity if its powers are used to remind folk that its gifts come with a price and should be used sparingly.

CHOOSE POWERS

All spirits have a small and very selective numbers of powers. You should *never* feel constrained to use existing game mechanics when designing a sacred place. We'll look at different types of powers in turn.

It is important to note that the spirit inhabiting a sacred place often grants boons only on behalf of worshippers who share the same patron deity or, if the spirit is tied to a minor deity, that deity and the greater gods to which it is affiliated. There are exceptions to every rule, such as spirits honoring Eira, which are duty bound to help all in need. To avoid sacred places moving from places of wonder to candy stores of magical power for all and sundry, most spirits should remain dedicated to helping only worshippers of the same deity.

SPELLS

Some spirits can cast spells through the standard Spellcasting skill. The arcane skill die and whether a Wild Die is rolled is dependent on the spirit's power, can be determined by the GM or randomly determined.

For a random die, draw a single card from the action deck and check the card's value on the table below.

Card	Spirit Die
2–3	d4
4–7	d6
8–10	d8
Jack	d10
Queen	d12
King	d12+1
Ace	d12+2
Joker	Wild Card. The spirit has a d6 Wild Die. Draw a second card to determine the base Spellcasting die. If another Joker is drawn, the Wild Die is a d10 and a third card should be drawn to determine the Spellcasting die.

Spirits know only a very small number of spells. These should be focused on the spirit's name, personality, deity, and purposes—use the appropriate deity's spell list as a guideline. For example, the Green Man might be a sacred tree. If suitably appeased, the spirit might use *feast*, dropping fruit from its branches. This might be its only power—it doesn't need a huge list of spells to be a sacred place.

Spirits are not subject to the same rules for Maintaining spells as mortals, and can Maintain spells indefinitely. Some spirits might be limited to a few castings, and then only if the recipient remains close, while others may be able to Maintain an unlimited number regardless of distance.

However, just because they *can* do this, it does not mean they *should*—spirits should never become a crutch for the heroes. Take, for example, a war spirit that watches over a small village. If the village is attacked, the spirit may invoke and Maintain *armor* and/or *smite* on the best warriors, but it doesn't keep the spell active any longer than is required.

Whether or not the spirit should obey the rule that an action cannot be repeated in the same round is left to the GM to determine. Spirits empowering sacred places are powerful, but they are not gods.

When a spirit takes up residence in a sacred place, it effectively gives up its normal form to become the entire sacred location. Because of this, spirits ignore the normal Range entry for a spell. The exact maximum range is determined by the GM, but should never extend beyond the boundaries of the sacred place, even if the spirit's senses have further reach.

SPECIAL POWERS

This is where the GM gets to unleash his fertile imagination. Put aside all notions of rules restrictions or thoughts of "That's not in the book!" Sacred places are special places, and they deserve to have special powers.

Special powers fall into two categories. The first is directly tied to game mechanics. These have some sort of numerical factor which directly alters the heroes for good or ill. The second category includes things that affect the world in which the heroes live, but which have no associated game mechanics. Some crossover between categories may exist.

For instance, a solitary stone stands in the middle of a field system. Within 100 yards of the stone, the temperature is always warmer than elsewhere. This is very useful for the villagers, as it means cold weather is less damaging to their crops and thus harvest yields may be higher. In game mechanic terms, it offers heroes a warm place to sleep and weakens enemy hrimwisards within the area.

None of these powers are "always on." The spirit retains full control over these abilities—mortals who offend it or fail to make suitable sacrifices find there are no benefits, or perhaps the benefits become penalties. For instance, perhaps the standing stone mentioned above functions only if the locals build a bonfire around it each winter to recharge the magical energy leeched out during the rest of the year.

Below are some examples of interesting special powers.

- Fatigue recovers twice as fast or twice as slow as the normal rate within the sacred place. Fatigue may be recovered instantly by eating sacred fruit or drinking the water. Food and drink taken outside the sacred grove instantly loses its magical abilities.
- Natural healing occurs faster (maybe allowing a roll after 24 hours) or slower, or a bonus or penalty applies if the injured party stays there for the entire four days.
- Time passes at a different rate (which may be tied into the above example).
- Anyone in the sacred place is invisible to the outside world even with *detect* spells.
- Crops are healthier and disease resistant, giving the crops double their normal yield.
- The temperature within the sacred place is always one level higher (to a maximum equivalent of a Hearthlands summer) or lower (to a minimum of the Hellfrost core at night) than the outside world.
- Lighting conditions are one level higher or lower than the surrounding landscape, regardless of what light sources the party has. Alternately, noises may be sharpened or deadened in the sacred place, or smells made richer or less detectable. These in turn may affect game mechanics, such as increasing or decreasing Notice roll modifiers.
- Food is more nourishing (only half the regular daily amount need be consumed within the sacred place) or less nourishing (twice the daily amount must be eaten to stave off hunger).
- Skill rolls may be boosted or penalized with a fixed penalty (typically no more than +1 or –1) or be raised or lowered one die type.

EXAMPLE PLACES

Detailed below are several example sacred places. These sites may be placed anywhere in Rassilon. As such, they do not appear on any of the maps in this work. Names of settlements (and indeed the site's name) are included for flavor only, and should be changed as required.

THE BLOOD GIANT

Carved into a remote hillside is a colossal chalk figure. Skalds tell how the figure was once a giant, a follower of Dargar, who was cut down in bloody combat by Tiw. The chalky outline is said to have been formed when the giant's foul blood killed the earth as it lay dying. The spirit which dwells here is the soul of the giant. Unlike most chalk figures, which are white, this one is blood red—hardly surprising given how its powers are activated.

Spirit Name: Blood Giant.

Ambience: Blood Giant emits a baleful aura on the surrounding countryside. Within a five mile radius, tempers grow shorter and anger boils to the surface more readily. People with the Mean or Stubborn Hindrances become considerably meaner and more stubborn.

Rolls on the Reaction Table suffer a –2 penalty. Any character who rolls a 1, totally ignoring any Wild Die, on his Trait die while resisting a Trick or Test of Will or when making an Intimidation roll goes berserk. Characters with the Berserk Edge have a –2 penalty to their Smarts rolls to avoid going into frenzy and to calm down. Unlike a normal rage, the character must attack the creature nearest to him at the start of his turn.

Deity: Dargar.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: None.

Sacrifice: A pint of the supplicant's blood. The lost blood gives the worshipper a level of Fatigue for 12 hours.

Powers: A worshipper of Dargar who spills a pint of his blood onto the exposed chalk gains the ability to go berserk at will, but only once. This gift otherwise works exactly like the Berserk Edge. Once the fury passes, the subject loses the ability to enrage at will. Blood Giant will not grant another use of the power until the previous one is used.

THE BONE FIELD

The land of Rassilon is soaked in blood. The great battles of the Liche-Priest's reign of terror, the Blizzard War, the Saxa Rebellion, and the Golem Uprising all shed countless gallons of blood into the soil.

As the Hellfrost armies crashed south through the Icebarrier Mountains, a great host rallied to meet them. Anari and Saxa stood side by side with dwarves, elves, and engros, and brave warriors locked shields with fearful peasants. Before the bloodshed began each man swore allegiance to Tiw, forsaking the other gods, for in the chaos to come only Tiw would be of assistance.

The sun set on a landscape of death and carnage. To a man, or so the stories go, the great army was slain. Tiw wept tears of blood at the failure and, in his anger and frustration, cursed the spirits of the fallen to remain bound to their earthly remains.

While the battlefield covers an area of ten square miles, the sacred

site is an area just a half-mile to a side in the center, the location of the allies' last stand. It is haunted by red mists and dread wraiths.

Spirit Name: Unlike many other sacred places, the Bone Field has not one spirit but a whole host of spirits, the spirits of the dead warriors.

Ambience: The Bone Field is a sorrowful place. Not only was it a scene of death and suffering, but Tiw's curse was unjust.

Deity: Tiw.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: The dead listen to requests, but they do not speak to the living. Should the site be looted for the grave goods that lie with the fallen, their earthly remains rise up as skeletal warriors and commanders. Although undead, these are not servants of Hela and thus do not count as supernatural evil foes.

Sacrifice: None.

Powers: Once per month, supplicants can petition the spirits of the fallen to aid them. This requires a Persuasion roll at –4. Warriors (GM's call) and worshippers of Tiw roll at –2, devotees of Tiw at –1, clerics of Tiw with no modifier, and disciples of Tiw at +1.

With success, the petitioner is possessed by one of the spirits inhabiting the battlefield. At any time within the next month, he may spend a benny to gain one Combat or Leadership Edge of his choice. He must meet the Rank and any Edge requirements, but ignores attribute and skill requirements. For instance, a Seasoned character may gain Block regardless of his Fighting die, but in order to gain Improved Block he must already have the Block Edge. When the benny is spent the spirit takes over the hero's body, granting him use of this Edge for the next hour.

During this time, the hero also gains part of the spirit's personality. Draw a card and check the table below. While the hero benefits from the Edge, he also has the Hindrance the spirit brings with it.

Card	Hindrance
Deuce	Yellow
Three	Arrogant
Four	Bloodthirsty
Five	Cautious
Six	Code of Honor
Seven	Delusional (Minor on a red suit; Major on a black suit)
Eight	Greedy
Nine	Heroic
Ten	Loyal
Jack	Mean
Queen	Overconfident
King	Stubborn
Ace	Vengeful (Minor on a red suit; Major on a black suit)
Joker	None

Unfortunately, the spirits are eager to live again, and are reluctant to relinquish control of their host. When the hour ends, the character must make a Spirit roll. With success, he may keep the spirit for another hour or set it free. On a failure, he has no choice but to retain the spirit. He may make another Spirit roll each hour thereafter.

If the spirit stays, willingly or not, the character continues to benefit from the Edge but must also suffer the Hindrance. Once the character falls asleep or is knocked unconscious by any means the spirit is forced from the body automatically.

If the possessed character slays or helps in the slaying of a Wild Card foe or six Extras using the spirit's Edge, then Tiw lifts his curse. When the spirit departs, it does so to the Afterlife. Those wishing to liberate all the spirits have a lifetime's work ahead of them, for many thousands died upon the Bone Field.

Although the Bone Field is sacred to servants of Tiw, disciples of Hela are frequent visitors. As a battlefield littered with earthly remains, the site grants them the +2 bonus to casting *zombie*. Skeletons animated here are always warrior skeletons.

CASTLE OF FLAMING RAMPARTS

Many who pass by this low hill fail to recognize it as an ancient hill fort, yet alone a sacred place. Its perimeter is marked by a single ditch and rampart. The ditch is five feet deep and the rampart five feet high (thus making it 10 feet from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the rampart). The rampart is 2 yards (1") wide and has no palisade. Any hero who understands defensive warfare can see the fortifications are minimal, hardly worth of the name fort.

There are no permanent structures within the fort's interior, which measures some 30 yards across. Only a patch of scorched earth in the dead center indicates the fort ever receives visitors.

Spirit Name: Firewall.

Ambience: The hill fort has a homely feel, the sort of relaxed comfort one enjoys when seated around a friendly hearth. The temperature within the fort is always that of a Hearthlands' summer.

Deity: Kenaz.

Senses: Notice d4. Beyond invoking his power to aid those who give him supplication, Firewall has little interest in the affairs of mortals.

Communication: Firewall speaks only to demand sacrifice and sing praise Kenaz. His normal voice is the sound of crackling fire. Once the sac red bonfire is lit, its voice becomes the fearsome roar of a mighty conflagration.

Sacrifice: In order to supplicate Firewall, a bonfire must be created in the center of the fort. Once it is lit, those who wish to benefit must join in prayers to Kenaz and sacrifice spiritual energy. The entire process takes two hours.

The latter requires participants to temporarily reduce their Spirit die by a minimum of one step. Clerics of Kenaz suffer a loss of Faith rather than Spirit. Individuals can offer more dice if they so wish. Traits cannot drop below d4. This means a hero who begins with d4 in the Trait cannot be part of the sacrifice. Dice sacrificed in this manner are automatically restored once the bonfire dies down.

The size of the bonfire, which requires no earthly fuel once lit, is unimportant. Likewise, it does not need to be tended. The fire burns for one hour per die of Spirit or Faith sacrificed and cannot be extinguished by any being short of a god.

Powers: Firewall does not benefit individuals. Instead, suitable sacrifice causes a fiery *barrier* of intense heat to spring up around the entire length of the rampart. The barrier runs along the outer edge, allowing defenders to move around the rampart.

Anyone who did not participate in the sacrifice who moves adjacent to the *barrier* or begins his turn adjacent to the *barrier* suffers 2d4 damage with a heat trapping. Anyone trying to leap through the *barrier* takes 2d10 damage with a fire trapping.

Defenders who took part in the ritual treat the *barrier* as being non-existent—not only can they pass through it unimpeded, but they can attack through it with melee weapons, ranged weapons, or spells without damaging it or having their vision obscured. To their eyes, the barrier is a faint flicker of spectral flame rather than an imposing wall of fire.

Attempts to *dispel* or *negate* the *barrier* are opposed by Firewall's arcane die (d10 + d10 Wild Die). Success removes 2 yards (1") of the *barrier* and a raise 4 yards (2"). The breech remains only until the end of the current round, at which point the *barrier* is automatically renewed.

THE CAVE OF THREADS

One legend tells how the Norns learned the art of spinning threads from Spiðari, goddess of spiders. Within the confines of a dark forest (Spiderfell Wood is best suited) stands a dark cave, its maw covered in thick webs. Here, it is said, the Norns beseeched Spiðari to reveal her art, for the cave winds through the Underearth, emerging eventually in Spiðari's lair. In return for her knowledge, Spiðari desired knowledge of the past, present, and future. The Norns, not about to give up their greatest power, tricked the spider goddess, imbuing the cave with a spirit which would reveal the fates to Spiðari, but only on rare occasions.

Angered at the betrayal, Spiðari vowed her children would be hostile to all other races. Those who wish to consult with the powerful spirit which resides at this sacred place must face the perils of Spiderfell Wood and its deadly inhabitants.

Spirit Name: Fatespinner.

Ambience: The cave mouth exudes an air of menace and fore-

boding. Part of this comes from Spiðari, for the cave does indeed lead to her lair, though it is a journey no mortal could survive. The fact the cave is sacred to the Norns is responsible for the foreboding, for knowledge of the future is rarely a great gift, and many citizens would rather not know what their future holds.

Deity: The Norns.

Senses: Fatespinner shares the senses of the Norns, having unbridled access to the past, present, and future. As such, it automatically knows all that transpires within 20 yards of the cave mouth. No Stealth roll or spell can conceal a trespasser's presence, for its senses transcend such things.

Communication: Mortals may try to coax Fatespinner to speak of their wyrd, their fate, by spending a benny and making a Spirit roll, though only once in their lifetime. With success, three ghostly figures materialize in front of the dark cave. The first speaks of the past, the second of the present, and the third of the future.

The three utterances should be related in some manner, for a hero's past, present, and future are interwoven. What the spirit chooses to reveal of the past is up to the GM. Fatespinner knows *everything* about a hero, and it has no qualms about publicly voicing a terrible secret if that somehow relates to the hero's fate. With regard to the present, remember that events may be transpiring outside the character's immediate vicinity. That he does not know of them does not make them any less part of his present.

The future prophecy should always be worded loosely. After all, the GM has no real control over the exact future of the campaign—he can deal only in the probable future, not the definite future. As an example, Fatespinner may say, "King killer thou shalt become."

What king shall be slain? Will it be in battle, self-defense, for the good of the realm, or cold-blooded murder? When and how will it happen? These are things of which Fatespinner will not speak. Perhaps the GM is planning to have the heroes attack a powerful orc lair, or is intending to run the *Giants' Saga* series of adventures. Of course, the hero may actually die before ever achieving his fate, but such is the impossibility of predicting the future.

Fatespinner's role in a campaign is very similar to that of the three weird sisters in *Macbeth*—they speak of what will come to pass, but not *how* it comes to pass. Macbeth does become king, as the witches foretold, but he does so through murder and betrayal, a conscious choice he made based on their words. Had he waited patiently, he may well have become king legally and without resort to bloody murder. After all, his fate to become king was decreed.

Sacrifice: None required, those many Saxa leave offerings here just in case a distant ancestor is buried on the Mounds.

Powers: Clerics of the Norns can sense the strands of fate with greater ease at the mouth of the cave, though the Norns still guard the future jealously. Once per month, on any night of the Deorcmonan, disciples of the Norns may use their Disciple Edge without those whose futures being glimpsed spending a benny.

EIRA'S HALL OF HEALING

This small longhouse has gleaming white walls and a roof made of white interlocked shields. Only those who are suffering physical injuries may enter the hall—other would-be visitors find it impossible to gain ingress by any means. As the goddess of mercy, Eira does not discriminate against those who follow an evil path. Thus, one might just as easily find an orc chieftain resting here as a civilized being.

Spirit Name: Wound-binder.

Ambience: The hall has an air of utter peace and restfulness. It is impossible to commit acts of violence or utter threats while within the hall. Patients always feel the temperature as being the most comfortable for their race. Hence, a frostborn will find it as warm as a Hearthlands' spring, while humans enjoy the heat of a Hearthlands' summer.

Deity: Eira.

Senses: Notice d8. Wound-binder's senses extend only to the interior of the building.

Communication: Wound-binder speaks only to welcome patients, advise them of the required sacrifice, and inform them when they are healed. Its voice is feminine, soft, and soothing.

Sacrifice: Wound-binder draws power from medicinal herbs. Anyone wishing to benefit from its gift must burn 20 gs worth of herbs. For this purpose only, assume that fresh herbs are worth 10 gs per bunch due to their greater potency.

Powers: Anyone who performs the required sacrifice may make a natural healing roll each 24 hours they spend inside the hall. Wound-binder's power is such that any affliction from the Injury table, permanent or otherwise, caused by wounds the patient is currently suffering are removed once all wounds are healed. It has no effect on older injuries. While recuperating, patients have no need to eat or drink.

Once fully healed, a patient must leave within one hour. Should he refuse, he is treated as being Exhausted until he steps through the doors.

FARVIEW HILL

Farview Hill is a towering, isolated hill. From its summit viewers can see for many miles in every direction.

Long ago, a cleric of Freo died atop this hill. Knowing his end was near, he beseeched Freo to let him stay on the mortal realm for, although he had traveled far, there were many lands he had never seen and many peoples he had never encountered. While the cleric was free of sin, his desire not to take the great journey to the heavenly realm was an affront to his god.

Freo duly obliged his servant though, as punishment, his soul was bound to a solitary stone atop Farview Hill. For countless ages the spirit has remained fixed here, forever unable to see new lands. Now he is restricted to seeing new lands in his mind's eye when told wondrous tales by passing travelers. On Freo's decree, he shall remain bound until he has heard tale of every settlement, every culture, and every wonder of Rassilon. Centuries have passed, but eternity remains, for the world does not remain static.

Although remote, Farview Hill has become a shrine for clerics of Freo, especially those whose faith is waning. Great piles of shoes and boots, rotted to almost nothing at the bottom and brand new near the top, lie at the base of the menhir. Tethered to the stone by a stout chain is a large signal horn, carved from the horn of an enormous aurochs. This is a later addition, placed here by a cleric of Freo after the Blizzard War.

Spirit Name: Depending on the purpose of the visit, supplicants refer to the spirit as either Farspeaker or Shoe-Devourer.

Ambience: Those reaching the summit feel fidgety, finding it very difficult to sit still. Each hour he spends on the summit a character must make a Spirit roll. With success, he controls the wanderlust imposed on him and is able to relax or grab a few winks. Otherwise, he is compelled to keep moving. He may walk on the spot or in circles, but he cannot sit or stand still.

Deity: Freo.

Senses: Notice d8. The spirit's sight extends to the distant horizon, though its visual acuity is no better than that of a human.

Communication: The spirit, imprisoned here for so long, desires to know of distant travels and realms beyond its sight. As soon as the hill is broached it makes its presence felt as a voice on the wind, asking to be told a story of foreign lands and strange sights.

Sacrifice: Shoes and stories (as detailed below).

Powers: Visitors leaving a brand new pair of boots or shoes here are rewarded by the spirit. At some point before the next Deorcmonan they may spend a benny to receive the effects of *speed* (cast with a success) or *wilderness step* (chosen when the benny is spent). Should they spend two bennies at the same time they may gain *speed* with a success and *wilderness step*, or *speed* with a raise (again, chosen when the bennies are spent). This boon lasts for 12 hours. After this time the wearer's shoes or boots are worn through, leaving him without footwear. No matter how many pairs of boots are left, the boon is granted only once per season. Each boon is one use.

Anyone who tells the spirit a story of some distant land, settlement, or culture, which Freo defined as any realm not within its sight, are allowed to blow the horn if they so desire. This casts *voice on the wind*, with a word limit of 25 words per Rank of the hero. The spell can reach any land in Rassilon. Again, this boon is permitted only once per month per person.

GOLD-FLAME CAIRN

Flickering lights or tongues of spectral flame hovering over or emanating from cairns and barrows are common in folklore. In most tales they are called ghost lights and are associated with Hela's fell brood. Others tell that they indicate tombs stacked with treasure, the lights being signs left by Nauthiz so that his larcenous worshippers know where to dig.

One such cairn, marked by an eternal flame the color of polished gold, is a sacred place. It is can be distinguished from other such sites by two large stones, one of which is marked with the holy symbol of Nauthiz and the other that of Auðun, lesser deity of wealth.

Spirit Name: Gold-Nose.

Ambience: Those who come within 12 yards of the cairn feel the nervous tension felt by gamblers before a high-stakes game.

Deity: Nauthiz.

Senses: Notice d10. Not much escapes Gold-Nose's attention, though he isn't interested in mortal affairs beyond gambling.

Communication: Gold-Nose loves nothing more to tempt mortals into gambling with him.

Sacrifice: Gold-Nose gives nothing for free. Those wish to curry his favor must engage him in gambling. The supplicant must wager, and prove he has, equipment or coins equal to 100 gs. Gold-Nose has Gambling d10 and a d6 Wild Die. If Gold-Nose wins, the stake disappears and the supplicant is out of luck. If he wins, Gold-Nose bestows him with a blessing. Gold-Nose never cheats. Mortals caught cheating can *never* try to appease Gold-Nose again.

No matter whether he wins or loses, a supplicant may gamble with Gold-Nose only once per three months.

Powers: Gold-Nose grants whoever bests him the ability to sniff out wealth. So long as the character is in the party, any randomly generated treasure is increased by 10%. Furthermore, the hero picks up bits and pieces on his travels. At the end of each game month, he automatically acquires 50 gs worth of trade goods. These can be spent as readily as coin but weigh 2 pounds per 5 gs of goods.

Multiple successful supplicants in the party do not produce any additional benefits with regard random treasure. In terms of general trade goods, the 50 gs is divided equally between the number of blessed heroes in the party—there is only so much wealth to go around.

THE RED FIELD

Near the village of Steinkjer stand four tall stones. Each is four feet high and carved to honor Eostre Plantmother. Together they form the boundary of a five acre field known to locals as the Red Field.

Spirit Name: Mother Red.

Ambience: Anyone within the boundary stones has the unmistakable feeling of being watched, though the unseen presence is not malevolent.

Deity: Eostre Plantmother.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: Mother Red sometimes communicates with clerics of Eostre Plantmother. Most often this is done to identify thieves and despoilers. When communication is sought the crops begin to sway wildly, alerting the farmers to fetch the incumbent cleric. Mother Red has no voice. Thus, the cleric must ask questions, which Mother Red answers in yes or no terms by swaying the crops windward (yes) or against the wind (no).

If the crops are stolen or trampled, the perpetrators' hands (or equivalent) instantly turn blood red and remain that way for the next month. No amount of scrubbing can remove the stain, but *dispel* works as normal (resisted by a d10 arcane skill). One *dispel* is required for each person involved in the act.

Sacrifice: The locals sacrifice animals, spilling the blood of one cow, one ox, one sheep, and one ram on the four stones during Sangdaeg of Frostmonan. If the ritual is performed, the harvest that year will be resistant to blight and have double the normal yield.

Powers: On Heah Sumor Daeg, worshippers of Eostre Plantmother who smear a drop of their blood on each stone are rewarded with a casting of *feast*. The food is not magically summoned, but picked from whatever crop is planted in the sacred place. If the spell fails, the villager finds it impossible to remove any crops—they resist cutting and pulling. If successful, the crops taken instantly replenish.

The *feast* spell is cast with a d10 arcane skill die. The spirit counts as a Novice for this purpose, granting five pounds of produce per worshipper. Unlike the normal spell, food not consumed by midnight does not spoil; rather, the food spoils normally for the crop type.

THREE MAIDENS' HALL

The hall's appears is not fixed. Sometimes it appears as a longhouse, other times as a wheelhouse, cottage, or even a ger. Its tapestries speak of youthful promise, middle-aged contentment, and faded dreams. Within live three spirits, earthly echoes of the Norns. The three have physical forms, though they cannot be harmed by mundane or magical means. The first has the guise of a young girl, the second a matronly, middle-aged woman, and the third an old crone.

Spirit Name: The Three Maidens.

Ambience: Visitors are struck by the weight of their woven fate. Some feel empowered, for they are destined for great things. Others become depressed, sensing that their lives will ultimately prove to be meaningless in the grand scheme of things.

Deity: The Norns.

Senses: Notice d12+2 (d10 Wild Die). The Maidens have senses that extend far beyond the limited abilities of mortals. With a successful roll they know the most intimate and secret knowledge about those who enter their earthly domain.

Communication: Each of the Three Maidens has a unique voice. The youngest speaks like an innocent child, the middle-aged one in the tome a mother speaks to her children, and the crone in a voice like brittle paper being crumbled. Unless they have something to say individually, they speak as one.

Sacrifice: The Maidens have the power to alter a mortal's fate, albeit temporarily. Fate is a fickle thing, however, and every boon comes with an equal bane. In this case, the recipient of a Maiden's blessing receives one less benny per session until the power ends. A hero can only benefit from one blessing at any time.

Powers: A supplicant receives one of three blessings. When he performs the sacrifice, each spirit names her gift. The spirit reveals only the names of the gifts, not its specific mechanics.

Gift of Knowledge: The youngest Maiden offers knowledge, something the elderly have and children crave. He treats his Smarts as being one die higher when making Common Knowledge rolls and increases all his Knowledge skills by one die for 1d12+1 months.

Gift of Wealth: The middle spirit offers material wealth, something the young have yet to desire and the elderly have learned is worthless. The hero gains the same gift offered by Gold-Nose (see above) for 1d12+1 months.

Gift of Spirituality: The third spirit offers spirituality, something those near the end of their time come to contemplate. The character receives the Disciple Edge of his patron deity for 1d12+1 months. He ignores all the requirements but must adhere to his god's sins list. A hero with the Edge receives a one die increase to his Faith for the same period, instead.

THUNOR'S FOOTPRINT

Atop a blasted heath is a 50-yard diameter circle of blackened, scorched grass. The stench of ozone hangs heavily in the air, incense to those who worship here, and a warning to those whose gods dwell elsewhere. Tall, slim, wooden posts, from which fly prayer kites and windsocks, circle the perimeter. The site is sacred to Thunor, serving as a temple to the god of thunder and lightning.

Nearby worshippers of Thunor hurry to the site whenever a thunderstorm rages in the vicinity, for lightning blasts and burns the earth here with great regularity. Once gathered, the faithful jostle and fight for position within the scorched circle, attempting to knock their colleagues prone and leave themselves standing in the hope they are struck by a bolt of lightning!

Spirit Name: Brilliant Striker.

Ambience: Regardless of the weather, the atmosphere within

the blasted circle is literally electric. Hair stands on end and harmless, crackling lightning sparks on metal objects.

Deity: Thunor.

Senses: Notice d10.

Communication: When Brilliant Striker speaks lighting slams into the ground, scorching Auld Saxa runes. These fade within one round, as ephemeral as spoken words.

Sacrifice: None specific. As a temple of Thunor regular sacrifices are made by worshippers, appeasing Brilliant Striker.

Powers: Any character standing within the circle during a thunderstorm must draw one card from the action deck. Characters who have Thunor as their patron deity draw two cards, devotees of the storm god draw three cards, clerics of Thunor four cards, and those with the Disciple of Thunor Edge a total of five cards. If a Joker is drawn and the character is a worshipper of Thunor, he is struck by a bolt of lightning. He suffers no damage from this heavenly bolt. Instead, for the next year he gains the benefits of Arcane Resistance against all electrical attacks. This stacks with any other Edges providing a similar bonus. Non-worshippers of Thunor receive no blessing if struck, instead suffering 4d8 damage with an electricity trapping.

Spells with an electricity trapping (whether magic or miraculous) are cast at +2 within the circle. This rises to +4 if cast during a thunderstorm.

WATCHFUL HALFDAN

On the only approach to a small village, atop an artificial stone mound that provides a commanding view of the approaches, is a squat standing stone. Through squinting and a lot of imagination one can just make out vaguely humanoid features. Local legend says that during the Blizzard War, a cleric of Rigr by the name of Halfdan the Ready volunteered to stand watch for marauding frost giants, as a refuge column snaked its way through the landscape to safer lands. He vowed he would remain awake and watchful until relieved of duty or frost giants came.

Alas, no one ever came to replace Halfdan and neither did frost giants walk that road. Five centuries later, Halfdan, now calcified, remains at his post, ever vigilant, to this very day. The nearby village grew up around the stone after the Blizzard War, when the story was invented to explain the sacred place. The site is sacred to Rigr.

Spirit Name: Halfdan the Ready.

Ambience: Anyone within 50 yards of the stone feels awake and alert. Any Fatigue due to sleep deprivation is negated, but not permanently recovered, while within the area. Anyone trying to sleep while within 50 yards to Halfdan must make a Spirit roll or be unable to do so. While a hero can go without sleep for eternity when close to Halfdan, deprivation catches up once he leaves the spirit's presence.

Deity: Rigr.

Senses: The spirit has Notice d12+2 and a d10 Wild Die. Its keen eyesight extends for two miles in all direction. It halves penalties for poor lighting and ignores all cover modifiers.

Communication: When strangers are spotted, the local cleric of Rigr (or whoever heads the village's defenses) gets itchy eyes. The communication power only works if the cleric is within two miles.

Sacrifice: While Halfdan the Ready desires no sacrifice, the villagers leave food and drink at the base of the stone, ensuring their watchman is never without provisions.

Powers: Beside watching over the village and communicating with the local cleric of Rigr, Halfdan has no special powers.

WILLOWMAN

A solitary willow stands on grassy hills, its leaves a warm orange-red regardless of season. The tree, and the spirit that dwells within, are sacred to Kenaz. According to legend, Kenaz was being harried by Thrym. Cold and tired, Kenaz called upon Eostre to help. The goddess sang a willow into being, beneath the branches of which the fire god hid. Kenaz's presence turned the willow's leaves hearth red, which in turn attracted a fire spirit.

Spirit Name: Willowman.

Ambience: Within Willowman's embrace characters feel safe and relaxed, as if they were sitting around a hearth in their home. Worshippers of Thrym find the embrace stifling and claustrophobic—they recover no Fatigue and suffer a –1 penalty to Spirit rolls while within the spirit's leafy enclosure.

Deity: Kenaz.

Senses: Notice d12 within the area encompassed by its branches. Notice d6 within 100 yards.

Communication: None. Willowman reacts violently if a fire is lit within its embrace, or if it is attacked with fire or cold-based spells. Although a servant of Kenaz, it has no protection against the ravages of fire. Treat the animated tree as a static war tree (see *Hellfrost Bestiary*).

Sacrifice: The branches droop down to ground level when alcohol is poured onto the base of the trunk. This natural shelter provides +1 to Vigor rolls to resist cold if beer is used, +2 if wine is poured, and +4 for sacrifices of mead. The boughs also provide the same bonus to Stealth, blocking vision and muffling sound in both directions.

Powers: Each year on Heah Sumor Daeg, the willow weeps, dropping fiery red seeds. These seeds can be used to create warming herbal brews with no creation penalty. Additionally, the seeds remain fresh indefinitely and so never count as being dried herbs.

Willowman ensures all can enjoy the fruits of his bounty by dropping only a handful of seeds for each person present. Worshippers of Kenaz automatically gather enough for 1d4 doses, while clerics gain enough for 2d6 doses. Other hopefuls must make a Spirit roll in place of the usual roll to find herbs and offer prayers to Kenaz. Herbalists buy these rare and potent seeds for 20 gs per batch, four times the value of herbs with similar (but less potent) effects.

WHITE MAIDEN HILL

White Maiden Hill is dominated by a huge, naked, anatomically correct female chalk figure. Legends claim Eira once lay here with Tiw, and it was on this site she became pregnant with Scaetha. The site remains sacred to Eira.

Spirit Name: White Maiden.

Ambience: The area encompassed by the chalk figure is restful and relaxing. Anyone who spends the entire night here can make a natural Healing roll at dawn. The power only works once per individual per 40 days (a month), and the sleeper cannot bring any weapons or tools of war onto the hill. The nearest point considered off the hill is 50 yards away from the edge of the chalk figure.

Deity: Eira.

Senses: Notice d4.

Communication: None.

Sacrifice: Worshippers of Eira pour *healing* potions and rub healing salves onto the chalk figure, replenishing White Maiden's regenerative powers.

Powers: Local women having trouble conceiving sleep here on Raestdaeg Eve to improve their chances of becoming pregnant. Any woman who has sex here will give birth to twins nine months later.

Once per year, a worshipper of Eira who vows to use no violence against the living, and who makes a Faith or Spirit roll (character's choice), is subjected to a *regeneration* spell. This remains in effect until a year passes, the recipient uses physical violence (includes spellcasting) against a living creature (voluntarily or under duress), or the power is *dispelled.* The spirit has Spellcasting d10 to resist the latter. For the purposes of this power, "living" does not include elementals, spirits, demons, golems, or undead. It does include plants, animals, and fey.

BEYOND THE MUNDANE

The inhabitants of Rassilon know next to nothing of scientific thought, especially geology. When early men (and other races) came across something unusual or spied a site for the first time, they assigned it a myth in order to explain its existence. Thus, many hills, forests, marshes, rivers, fords, creeks, streams, lakes, boulder fields,

and valleys are more than just mundane geographic features—they are part of the fabric of the world as influenced by gods and mighty heroes. An example already in *Hellfrost* is that of Thunor's Anvil, a rock outcropping sacred to the cult of the storm god.

The same mentality applies to the creations of older cultures—barrows, henges, hill forts, megaliths, and chalk figures. The Refuge, whose creation is attributed to Tiw's foot, is an example of this type of feature.

GMs can assign minor myths to ordinary features to help break up otherwise dull journeys and encourage the characters, especially clerics, to view the landscape as much more than a mundane place. Some examples are included below. None are tied to any particular realm and thus they do not appear on any of the maps.

Such places can be taken a step further, becoming sacred places already honored by the locals or out of the way shrines where itinerant clerics might honor their god. If the latter is repeated often and fervently enough, a mundane site might well transform into sacred place.

The Bitterstream: The waters of this stream taste bitter, though imbibing them causes no harm. Legend has it Kenaz once emptied the ash from his hearth here to spite Neorthe, forever tainting the water.

Dragon Bone Ridge: After slaying the great dragon, Sigmundr attacked its offspring. The bones of the fallen were cast from the heavens, falling to earth. They fell with such force they embedded themselves in the rock, where they can still be seen to this day.

Eira's Necklace: Eira's marriage to Tiw was doomed from the start, for their natures were completely opposite. Following one argument, she cast off a necklace of precious jewels, a gift from her spouse, and flung them from the heavens. They crashed into the mortal realm. The metal chain on which the stones hung has long since decayed, leaving just the stones visible. Once glittering gems, their fiery fall left them dull and gray.

Ertha's Chimney: Although no volcanoes in Rassilon have spewed lava since written records began, there are plenty of smoking cones. One of the most well-known is Ertha's Chimney. It has produced a thin veil of smoke since the days of the great gatorman empire.

As the name implies, it is believed to sit above Ertha's hearth. Clerics of the earth goddess seeking penance from grievous sins come here to make sacrifices. Elementalists who know air, earth, and fire come here to study, for the volcano represents all three elements in one feature.

Ertha's Hounds: A set of round stones situated atop a hill. According to folklore, Ertha used them when playing fox-and-hounds with the Unknowable One. One legend claims the game is still ongoing, and that the stones move position when no one is looking.

The Fey Stones: The small stones that make up this wide circle are said to be the seats of powerful fey lords, who gather here twice a year on Summer and Winter Court Day to discuss the terms of the changeover between the Seelie and Unseelie courts.

Freo's Campsite: A small circle of six standing stones. Freo built a campfire here, using the stones both to contain the fire and as a platform to rest his cauldron over the coals.

Freo's Stool: This flat-topped hill is said to be where Freo once sat to rest his weary feet.

Giants' Miss Fort: Large, grassless boulders protrude from the side of this hill. Skalds claim the hill was a fort and was attacked by giants, who threw stones at the defenders. The outcome of the battle is not recorded, but the large number of half-buried stones is testament to the giants' ferocity. A variant story says a wise king challenged invading giants to throw stones onto the top of the hill. If they failed, they swore to leave the realm and never return. Since no boulders are found on the hilltop and no giants trouble the land, skalds assume the king won.

God-Piss Bog: Freo's constant traveling, not to mention his boasting that he could travel anywhere, finally got the attention of the Unknowable One. Pulling down his pants, the trickster urinated on a field, turning it into a stinking bog. Freo, unwilling to walk in the Unknowable's One puddle, detoured around the bog. It is said Freo has never entered the bog, and that any cleric of his who dares tread where he has not will be blessed.

Grimlock's Legs: These two standing stones are said to be the shins of the giant Grimlock, slain by a mighty hero. Stories say the hero cleaved the giant's legs off at the knees is a single blow. The fallen corpse was then dragged off so the hero could prove his deed, leaving the lower legs standing where the giant died.

The King's Stone: A large flat stone overlooking one of the Marklands from nearby hills. Saxa mythology claims the first king of the Marklands was crowned here and swore an oath to Hothar.

Nauthiz's Folly: On hearing that Ertha kept a vast store of precious stones hidden in the earth, Nauthiz immediately set about trying to dig down to them. Each time he dug a hole, he found it ended in solid stone. Undeterred, he tried again, and again, and again. When he finally gave up, he left behind a landscape dotted with small hillocks.

Sigel's Fire Hill: The top of this large hill is exposed rock, a stark contrast to the heath-strewn lower slopes. According to Saxa mythology, this is where Sigel taught men the secret of the Purification Day ritual. The grass atop the hill was scorched by Sigel's fires, and has never grown back.

The Skalds' Chair: On top of the ridge is a stone formation. Here, believers say, the Unknowable One taught mortals the secrets of poetry and satire. Anyone who sits in the chair overnight will awake a trained skald, a madman, or die the instant he next speaks, depending on the god's mood.

Sword-Cut Hill: Many hills are flat tops. A common myth to explain them says that Tiw, after being berated by Eira (back when they were married), sulked off, swinging his sword in frustration and accidentally lopping the top of several hills (for which he had to apologize to Ertha).

Tiw's Shackles: This story relates to a pair of extinct volcanoes, explaining their truncated tops and craters. Loki once tricked Tiw into letting him shackle the war god, claiming he had invented chains so strong that no god could escape them. The trickster bound Tiw's wrists and fed two great chains down through the top of neighboring mountains, fastening them to the root of the world to prevent Tiw from escaping. Loki then told the frost giants of Tiw's predicament, and urged them to invade Godsheim. Incensed at being tricked, Tiw ripped the chains from their mountings, inadvertently tearing the tops off the twin peaks in the process.

Ullr's Arrows: During the God War, Ullr unleashed great clouds of arrows, firing as many as a hundred in one shot. Several of these missed their target, falling to the mortal realm and embedding themselves deep into the earth. The feathers have long since been lost, but the flights, tall slivers of stone, still dot the landscape.

Veth's Column: A single tall stone juts through the soil. According to the mythology of Eostre's cult, Veth stopped here to relieve herself while hunting for the Rat King. Wild hunting cats whose territory lies nearby regularly urinate here, making it a sort of communal toilet. It is said that any domestic cat that urinates here will never suffer bladder problems.

Weather-Watch Hill: The heather flowers on this hill have a distinctive red hue and are said to come from Kenaz's garden. Locals claim that if the heather flowers early, summer will be long and warm. If it flowers late, the summer will be short and the winter particularly cold.

Wheel-Rut Fort: An old hill fort with a double ditch, Wheel-Rut Fort is said to have been formed from the wheels of Tiw's war chariot, which left deep tracks in the earth as the war god raced around the base of a large hill. One legend claims that Freo was tricked into driving his chariot in a circle over and over again by the Unknowable One.

The Whispering Huscarls: This strange edifice consists of three tall stones leaning into each other to form a vertical triangle. Legend has it that three huscarls once plotted to kill a just king, for they craved his wealth and power. A cleric of Ertha turned the traitors to stone while they huddled together discussing their treacherous act. It is claimed they still conspire, for when the wind whistles across the stones it sounds like men talking quietly.

The Wyrd Stone: A single tall stone. Whoever stands at the tip of the stone's shadow at dawn on their Birthing Day will have their future revealed in a series of omens. Legend has it the stone is a castoff from the Norns' loom, and that it is still linked to the great tapestry by a thin thread of fate.

ALFHEIM

Betwixt the realms of mortals and gods lies the land of the fey. It is a realm of mystery and wonder, danger and delight, they are little traveled by mortals yet widely named and described in songs and poems of old.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following rules apply in all realms of Alfheim.

Ambient Lighting: In Seelie controlled lands it is always daylight (there is never night). In Unseelie lands, the full moon is always in the sky, making the typical lighting Dim (–1).

Fear: Rolls to avoid Fear are made at +1 in Seelie lands, and –1 in Unseelie lands.

Food & Drink: Eat half pound of Seelie food ingested counts as a whole pound. Each pound of Unseelie food ingested counts as a half pound. Each pint of Seelie beverage counts as a quart, while each quart of Unseelie beverage is treated as equally a pint.

Healing: Under Seelie governance, all mundane Healing rolls are made at +1. This becomes a –1 penalty when the Unseelie assume control.

Intimidation: Rolls are at –1 in a Seelie domain, and +1 in an Unseelie domain.

Magic: Mortals are unused to the strange threads that permeate the fey realm and never grow used to manipulating them, no matter how much time they spend here. Mages do not suffer the Siphoning here, but they are subject to the standard core rules for backlash (whichever version you are using is the right one for your game).

Druids treat the entire fey realm as completely natural. This applies even in fey castles, towns, and villages, for the fey live at one with nature and do not seek to impose authority over it as do mortals. Hrimwisards suffer and benefit from the ambient temperature as normal.

Magical trappings (but not those of miracles) may be affected in Alfheim, depending on the trapping and which court rules. When the Unseelie rule, spells with a cold, coldfire, darkness, or ice trapping are cast at +1, whereas those with fire, heat, and light are at –1. The reverse holds true when the Seelie ascend to power. Spells with necromantic trappings cannot be cast in any part of Alfheim. All other trappings are unaffected.

Miracles: All of the gods except Hela (whose madness never affected the fey realm) are honored by the fey, but some are more powerful depending on which court holds sway.

Clerics of Dargar, Niht, Thrym, and Vali have +1 to Faith rolls when the Unseelie rule, but –1 when the Seelie are in charge. Conversely, clerics of Eira, Kenaz, and Sigel have +1 to Faith rolls when the Seelie rule, but –1 when the Unseelie assume power.

Clerics of the Unknowable One always enjoy a +1 modifier—the fey are renowned tricksters—as do clerics of Eostre (both aspects). Clerics of Hela have no ability to cast miracles at all—there is no gateway between her accursed realm and the fey realm. All other clerics are unaffected.

QUICK RECAP

The following notes are taken from the *Hellfrost: Rassilon Expansion*, and are included here for completeness. The supplement also details many new fey types, and introduces the mighty fey nobles.

The fey are divided into two courts, the Seelie (meaning "blessed" in Auld Saxa) and the Unseelie (or "non blessed"). It is important to note that these divisions are not direct equivalents to good and evil or law and chaos—all fey are alien to the civilized races, and their motives are strange to even the most learned fey scholar. The GM need never feel he has to justify a fey's actions to the characters. In general, the Seelie court is concerned with spring, summer, light, sunshine, song, dance, and happiness. Their Unseelie kin favor fall, winter, ice, snow, darkness, threats, and misery.

Still, most Seelie are mischievous rather than malicious, though they may take drastic measures to avenge an insult against them (real or perceived). By comparison, the Unseelie are generally spiteful and cruel by nature. Given a choice, Seelie fey prefer to help mortals, or at least hinder them in non-harmful ways, such as altering paths to lead in circles, whereas the Unseelie tend to think of violence as their first option in any situation.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Alfheim ("elf home") is the Trader name for the mysterious realm. The Saxa know the fey realm by two names, Ljossalfheim ("light elf home") and Svartalfheim ("dark elf home"), depending on which court is being described. Elf, in this instance, comes from the Auld Saxa *alf*, and simply means "mysterious being." To the Anari it is Alvalon (from the Classical Anari for "Land of the Elves"). Tuomi speak of it as Afallach, which has the same meaning as in Anari. Whether the name was adopted by the Anari after their invasion of the Tuomi's lands is as yet unclear, but the similarity is widely accepted as beyond coincidence. The Finnar sing of it as Pohjola, which simply means "North." This is most often taken to mean that it lies beyond the mortal realm, rather than a literal geographic direction.

Elves refer to it as Tir inna n-Óc, which in their ancient tongue means "Land of the Young." Unusually, the same phrase is found in both the hearth and taiga elf languages. Frost dwarf legends speak of Hulduland ("Hidden Land"), while engro know it as Antumnos, which translates as "Unseen Place."

The name "fey" is a Trader one. It stems from the Classical Anari word *faie*, which means "spirit." When discussing these strange creatures, both modern Anari and Saxa use "faerie," while the

USEFUL TRAITS

Mortals who seek fey permission to enter their realm or who end up by "accident" will find knowledge of the Arboreal and Fey languages vital.

Knowledge (Fey) is important for not only knowing the names of who rules what area, but also for acting around the strange creatures who inhabit the land. Among the fey, what might be normal among mortals may be a grave insult, and what seems like a kindly offer may have hidden connotations that spell doom for an unwary mortal.

Knowledge (Folklore) can be used to remember information about the fey, but one must remember that successful use of the skill does not impart truth—it imparts what is accepted as truth by one's culture. Any "facts" should be taken with a large pinch of salt.

Taunt and Intimidation are handy skills, for many fey use such methods for settling disputes over swords and pain. Likewise, mortals are advised to take Strong Willed if they wish to resist the many tricks and threats that will be thrown at them during their visit.

Auld Saxa term is "alf." Tuomi call them *aes sidhe* (pronounced "ez shee"), which means "people of the mounds." Among the Finnar they are the *kontios*, or "dwellers of the far land." Elves of both species know them as *tuatha* ("the people"), dwarves as *huldufólk* ("hidden people"), and engros as *mooinjer veggey*, or "little people."

General Notes on the Fey

This section lists common traits found among all fey.

* **Two Courts, Many Courts:** They fey have two courts—the Seelie and Unseelie. Opposites of each other as day is to night, they are akin to mortal factions. Each of these is governed by a single fey, a high king or queen whose power is beyond that of the god's heralds, for they were once the mightiest servants of the gods.

Each fey noble, powerful beings in their own right, runs his own estates, in the same way as a mortal noble. These nobles see little difference between they fey domain and its mortal counterpart, and so consider themselves master of both. Fortunately for mortals, they prefer to rule over remote locations.

See the Fey Noble entry in *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 1* for more details on these enigmatic lords.

* **One Race:** While the fey vary immensely in physical form, temperament, and special abilities, they are one race. Hence, Knowledge (Fey) covers knowledge regarding all members of the species, regardless of their court.

* **Immortal:** Barring injury, fey do not die. As beings that were never mortal (see *Angarion,* p. xxx, for their origin), fey do not possess souls. Should they die in the fey realm, they are erased from existence. However, those who die in the mortal realm have their essence returned to the fey realm, whereupon it reforms. How long this take varies with the power of the fey—lesser fey may require a month or two, while the great nobles may take a century or more as measured by humans.

While fey can sire children with humans, they cannot sire them with other members of their race. Mortal scholars are unsure whether this means they are a doomed race, or whether they possess some manner of keeping their numbers steady.

* **Religion:** The fey once served the gods directly. They understand them better than any mortal, and yet as outcasts from the celestial realm are incapable of receiving their blessing. Fey can never cast miracles.

The fey see Scaetha as a minor goddess and Hela as guardian of the gates of the Abyss, since these were their positions when the fey were exiled. Hela's madness did not trouble the fey realm, and necromancy, which did not exist when the realm was created, is powerless here.

Gaining Entrance

Except on rare occasions, one does not simply wander into the fey realm. Indeed, it is impossible for mortals to enter the fey lands without permission, whether an express invitation or unwittingly on the whim of a powerful noble. The gods are worshipped here, but have no authority to grant access, and no spell known to mortals can breach the barrier that separates the two realms.

Points of access are plentiful, at least for the fey. Ancient stone circles or mounds, twin standing stones, certain chalk figures, trods (so-called fey roads, which in the mortal realm appear as lines of lighter colored grass), and even circles of mushrooms allow the fey to travel between the realms as easily as a mortal walks through a door. When a mortal is invited into the fey realm, a rare and dubious honor, it is often through such a portal.

These portals radiate magic when viewed with *detect arcana*, but must be studied to grasp their true purpose (such locations may simply be sacred places).

However, there are other ways for mortals to tread the otherworldly realm. A traveler lost in the depths of a forest or caught in fog may suddenly find himself in the same geographic place, yet not in his own world. A swimmer who dives beneath the waters of a pool may surface to find the landscape subtly altered, or one emerging from a cave may realize he is no longer in familiar territory. Again, such entrances never occur by chance.

Escape is equally rare. Unless a fey noble grants permission to leave or expels a mortal he is consigned to remain in the fey realm until he somehow finds an exit. Often this means waiting until a fey opens the barrier into the mortal world, though there are supposedly secret passages that allow one-way travel.

In short, characters can only enter the fey realm if the GM wishes them to, and they may have no choice.

Physical World

The fey realm mirrors that of the mortal world, but it is not a perfect match. It is more akin to an ancient version of the continent, dominated by forests and marsh, with very little cleared land. Major geographical features, such as mountains, rivers, and marshes exist as in the world of men, but they may be taller, wider, or larger. More importantly, the landscape varies depending on which court is currently ruling.

Day and Night

The fey realm has day and night, but they do not follow the short cycles known to mortals. Rather, day and night last for many months.

On the day the Seelie court assumes power, the sun breaks the horizon in the east, brightening and warming the land. During their reign, it slowly climbs higher in the sky as the months in the mortal realm pass, until, halfway through their tenure, it is at its zenith. As summer fades into fall, so the sun sinks lower, touching the western horizon on the day the transition of power is completed. During this time, there is only daylight.

As the Unseelie assume power, so the full moon rises, following the same passage through the sky as the sun. Throughout their rule there is only cold, pale light, for the sun does not rise.

Note that the ambient lighting is based on the mortal season, and thus there may be differences in neighboring realms. While it may be summer in the fey equivalent of the Low Winterlands in Hegmonan, meaning the local Seelie hold sway, it is already fall in the High Winterlands counterpart, and thus the Unseelie have taken over the reins. Thus, a party of mortals that crosses from one to the other will find themselves walking from bright sunlight into full moonlight. In the fey realm, these boundaries are always marked in some manner. Standing stones, a gateway, or even a road mark the border. On one side it may by light and warm, while a step away it is dark and cold. Mortals can always be sure who is ruling simply by glancing at the heavens.

Temperature

When the Seelie are in power, the temperature is always as a summer's day in the Hearthlands. During Unseelie rule, it is forever as a winter's night in the Hearthlands. Minor local variations do exist, but in general the temperature difference is slight, with no more than a one level drop even at high altitudes.

The Hellfrost has not dramatically lowered temperatures in the fey realm, but it has had an effect. According to an ancient pact, the Seelie court rule the fey realms from the first day of spring until the start of fall, at which point the Unseelie take over the reins. With winter now much longer, especially in the Winterlands, the Unseelie have broken the spirit of the pact and now govern for much longer. In the High Winterlands, for instance, the Seelie rule for a mere two and a half months each year.

The Passage of Time

While day and night far run more slowly than in the mortal realm, causing mortals to quickly lose track of time, visitors should not attempt to record the passage of time by such common means, for time has little meaning to a race of immortals.

There are countless stories of mortals who have spent a hundred

years (their time) in the land of the fey, only to emerge back in the mortal world to find less than a day has passed. But for each of these stories there are tales of mortals who spend what they believe to be but a handful of days among the fey, only to discover years, decades, or even centuries have passed by in the mortal world. No matter how time flows, the party can never arrive in the mortal realm at a point later than they left—even the gods are subject to the continuous forward flow of Time.

There is no set pattern for this occurrence, except that all members of the same party will suffer the same time dilation or extension so long as they enter and leave together. Even a few minutes difference can lead to enormous differences when the mortal leaves.

As for the fey, they keep track of time only by which court rules. Thus, they know only summer or winter (spring and fall are part of summer and winter respectively). While they know how long it is until their time in as the ruling court ends, their measurements have no earthly counterparts. For instance, in one fey land it may require a crow to deliver a message to the incumbent noble that his time in power is nearly over, while in another a single snowflake might fall and refuse to melt. Until that occurs, it is simply "now." Some fey use a sundial or moondial to record the passage of the celestial bodies.

Unfortunately, while fey do not need to sleep, mortals do. They also need to eat and drink. Remembering when one last ate or slept can be problematic, and visitors are advised to listen to their body—when Fatigue strikes, it is time to take preventative measures. The question is, which ones?

Note that because of the way time flows in Alfheim, the GM can call for natural Healing rolls as often or as infrequently as he likes. Weak parties or those who suffer misfortune need not carry wounds for long, while parties who are merely here to loot and maim may find their wounds linger for long periods.

THE FEY LANDS

In Rassilon, the land is divided into domains, and each is individually named. While the fey realm almost mirrors the mortal world, it does not acknowledge these borders. Fey domains are much smaller, rarely more than a few hundred square miles at most. Thus, while a mortal land may have one ruler, its fey counterpart will comprise a patchwork of estates.

For instance, Angarion is a vast forest, yet the Shining King is the sole ruler. In the fey realm, the forest is not only divided into multiple independent estates, but each estate has two overlords, one Seelie and one Unseelie, serving at different times of year.

Mortal names have little meaning here. Angarion is the name of the mortal forest, and while the fey know of it, they never use it in reference to their native realm. Instead, each lord or lady has a unique name for their domain, and this is the one used by the fey. Given the courts change every year, this means each estate actually has two completely different names. They fey do not see these as mere titles. When a court is not in power, the land literally ceases to exist in the eyes of the fey.

For instance, the Queen of Gossamer Wings rules an estate mapped over a portion of mortal Angarion. Her domain is known as the Gossamer Kingdom. When her Unseelie counterpart, the Buzzing King, assumes power in fall, the realm becomes the Land of Biting Flies. In spring and summer, no fey can direct a mortal toward the Land of Biting Flies. In fall and winter, asking the location of the Gossamer Kingdom will result in blank stares and shrugs. This makes no sense to mortals, but the fey dance to their own tune.

LANDSCAPE

When the Seelie lords govern, the landscape is one of light and splendor. While there is always danger, the landscape is never menacing, even in the deepest forests or darkest caves. Cheerful bird song fills the air, animals gambol without fear of predators (though such still exist), the breeze is cool, water fresh, and food succulent, and flowers bloom in radiant colors. If one word can describe the realm at such times, it is vibrant.

NEW BACKGROUND EDGE

FEY-TOUCHED

Requirements: Novice, Human

The character may have been taken as a baby and raised among the fey, or perhaps sired by a fey. However, the fey have left their mark. A hero may have purple eyes, hair that flutters as if in a permanent wind no one else can feel, fingers of equal length, a sing-song voice no mortal could hope to mimic, scaly skin, and so on. Even if the hero has no obvious physical taint, his presence is unsettling. Whether a hero is Seelie- or Unseelie-touched depends on the sort of Hindrances he chooses.

Fey-touched characters have a version of the Arcane Resistance Edge. This does not affect spells they cast on themselves, but provides only half the bonus against magic and supernatural special abilities wielded by fey. This benefit and restriction apply even if the character later takes Improved Arcane Resistance. In addition, the character has a natural understanding of the fey. He begins play with Knowledge (Fey) d6.

Although human, fey-touched characters can take Arcane Background (Druidism) or Arcane Background (Glamour) (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2* for the latter).

Fey-touched are universally shunned for their unearthly features or aura. They have the Outsider Hindrance except among fey, elves, and druids.

But once the Seelie lords ascend their thrones the landscape changes, literally overnight. Frost and snow blanket the ground, shadows are deeper and more menacing, the bird song is the caw of crows and other carrion beasts, predators stalk the gloom, the only plants that bloom are poisonous, mist and fog hover near the ground like a funeral shroud, water is cold and bitter, and food tastes like ash (though both food and drink provide nourishment to those who can stomach them). The word most often used to describe the realm in such times is morbid.

As a rough analogy, imagine the Seelie realms as Oz from the movie the *Wizard of Oz*—brilliant technicolor. The Unseelie realms are like Kansas in the movie—drab, gray, and depressing.

TRAVEL

Walking the roads and trods of Alfheim or sailing the rivers is both mysterious and frustrating. Pathways (even waterways) come and go seemingly at random, and the shortest distance between two points is rarely ever a straight line, even when one appears to exist. In order to navigate Alfheim, one must know the nature (not the geographic location) of where one is headed and look for appropriate clues.

For instance, to visit the land of the Black Queen of the Midnight Court, a fey noble strongly associated with spiders and cold, one first needs to find a spider web covered in frost. The traveler then follows the next such web, a route which will lead him into lands where the webs are thicker and the frost harder. Eventually, he will arrive at his destination. Cleverness should also be rewarded. A party that knows the Black Queen favors spiders may capture one and let it lead them to her. As noted early, though, her realm only exists in fall and winter, so there is no hope of finding it in spring or summer.

The time a journey takes is utterly meaningless. Time always passes, but it cannot be measured. Rather, it is like a walking dream—the landscape passes and you know you've made progress, but you're not sure how far you've come, how far you have to go, or how much time has passed. Travel between two places in line of sight of each other may take a week, while crossing the realm, say from the equivalent of Aspiria to the Cairn Lands, might take just a few minutes.

Never, ever step off the path. As noted above, the landscape of Alfheim is prone to changing, and without a path of trod to follow, one is invariably doomed to wander helplessly until a fey turns up and offers to show you the way, for a suitable price.

TWO REALMS, ONE LORD?

It was love of the mortal realm caused the Second Fall, and yet fey nobles have long been attracted to the earthly domain. Perhaps it was the desire to remind the elves of what they had lost. Perhaps it was a subconscious envy for what the elves had gained, for while their lives were now finite, they were possessed now of infinite potential. Perhaps it was an attempt to appease the gods by showing they cared for their creation. Whatever the cause, the nobles laid claim to the wilds of the mortal realm long ago.

So it is that fey nobles claim ownership of both their Alfheim home and its mortal counterpart. Despite their claims of rulership, they have little interest in mortals save as passing curiosities or playthings. Time means nothing to the fey, and a human may go from being a baby to an old man in the blink of an eye. Thus they largely ignore the lesser beings scurrying to and fro unless they defile nature in some manner without leaving suitable offerings. For instance, a Seelie noble might sit by impassively while two armies batter each other to a bloody pulp, but dare to cut down a living tree without supplication and they may unleash their full fury.

Despite calling themselves by grand titles and claiming ownership of mortal realms, fey take no interest in local politics, and even war between nations is boring to most Unseelie. As they have done since the earliest days of time, the fey do what they do, and leave mortals wondering exactly what it is the fey do.

Many mortals, even the elves, have long believed the fey dwell in the world of flesh and blood, hidden away in secluded glades, pools, and valleys, as well as in Alfheim. Much of this erroneous thought comes from humans accidentally stumbling into Alfheim (the portals are usually in remote locations) and not realizing the true extent of their encounter. In some cases, the fey nobles do temporarily appear in the mortal realm, treating the trip much as a modern reader might a vacation.

Many lesser fey, as an aside, can pass between Alfheim and the mortal world without thought. Many do not even realize what reality they are currently inhabiting, and few actually care—they fey travel as they will.

FLORA AND FAUNA

As a general rule, animals in Alfheim are smarter and more durable than their earthly counterparts. Smarts and Vigor for creatures with a Smarts (A) notation are each increased one die type, with no maximum. Many animals are capable of speech, though this does not mean they can hold conversations outside their understanding of the world. For instance, a wolf might describe how it is going to devour your flesh rather than just snarl, while a squirrel can talk about nuts all day, but knows nothing about the price of goods in fey markets.

Flora changes with the seasons, and more dramatically than in the mortal world. During fall and winter, a forest may comprise pines and spruces, but come spring these transform into oaks and birches. Ground vegetation changes from delicate flowers and fruit-bearing bushes to tangled weeds and thorny plants as the seasons wax and wane.

ARCHITECTURE

The homes of the fey vary immensely. While a wood warden might live inside a tree, a redcap may take refuge in a stone tower. The ruling court has no power over a fey's home. Instead, that depends on an individual fey's chosen court and the type of fey.

For instance, a Seelie wood wight's home is surprisingly warm and dry, cozy and comfortable if not spacious. It might be decorated with posies of flowers and well-carved furniture. But the home of an Unseelie wood wight will be damp and dank, with insects slithering crawling everywhere. It reeks of mold and decay, and any furniture will be rotten and crudely fashioned.

This can lead to certain variations in the landscape. An Unseelie lord's castle will always be dark and brooding, even when the Seelie rule. However, it is less threatening at such times, something to avoid, but not to fear. Once the local lord takes his seat, it becomes a bastion of the darker aspects of the fey world, while his rival's fortress of gleaming white stone and lofty spires is marred by snow, its glory and majesty diminished though not negated.

While the fey have settlements and fortifications, they very rarely map onto mortal counterparts. Instead, they are found in the remote places of the mortal world—deep inside forests, in valleys, on the sides of mountains, or on islands in lakes.

Which brings us to the question of where the fey go when their court is not in power. Most lesser fey simply hibernate, patiently waiting for their time to awaken and perform their duties. The fey nobles seal themselves away in their towers and castles, feasting and dancing until they emerge once again to rule. However, neither is a requirement, and powerful fey have little to fear from their rivals beyond taunts and threats. In some cases, fey simply disappear while their court lacks power, folding a portion of the realm around their domain to ensure seclusion. Such pockets of reality can only be entered if the ruling noble grants permission.

FOOD AND DRINK

Fey do not age or require sleep to rest their physical forms, nor do they require food and drink. However, many do eat, if only out of curiosity. Here, the courts again play a major role.

Seelie food is delicious, fragrant, and nourishing. Fruit and vegetables are preferred over meat, though Seelie fey are not strict vegetarians. They dine on warm, soft bread, eggs, cheese, and thick stews flavored with herbs and spices. They sip fine wines and mead, drink delicate teas made from flowers, and occasionally quaff ale. They feast from plates, whether wooden, glass, or metal, and drink from tankards, horns, or glasses, always taking care to present a meal that both looks and tastes exquisite.

Their Unseelie counterparts prefer meat, since that involves hunting and thus killing, and lots of it. They also serve insects and spiders (sometimes still alive), hard bread, black eggs, moldy cheese, and slimy fungus, while quaffing strong alcoholic drinks (sometimes flavored with herbs that will kill a mortal) straight from the bottle or skin. Plates are rarely used, and meals are more a free-for-all. Regardless of the food or drink, it tastes bland at best, bitter on average, and totally foul at worst.

GMs should see banquets as a chance to be bizarre. For instance, in a Seelie house, chunks of food may be plucked from the spines of hedgehogs, which wander around the tables, while Unseelie diners may be handed live venomous serpents to use as a fork.

GIFTS AND GOLD

Many mortal races have a saying that translates roughly as, "Beware fey bearing gifts." Fey can be notoriously generous, but such generosity always comes at a price.

At the lower end of the scale such gifts are mundane. Brownies, for instance, work around steads performing minor chores. In return, they demand gifts, but pack their bags and leave if the gift is ever called a payment for their services. At the higher end, a fey noble may grant a powerful magical boon, possibly one that affects an entire mortal land, but it will demand either service or a gift of equal value. Here mortals must be very wary.

First, a fey gift may appear trivial to a mortal but be viewed as a fortune by the gifting fey. Conversely, the fey may see the gift as trivial, and take offense if a valuable gift is offered in return. Be warned—many fey have little use for gold and precious objects. A Seelie might view a delicate flower dripping with dew as a prize worthy of a king, while an Unseelie may take delight from a rotting carcass. Both might accept a suitably poetic description of themselves as payment enough.

Second, a fey may ask for something innocuous as payment, like two fingers or the color of a mortal's eye. Invariably these prove more detrimental than at first appears, for the fingers may be an archer's middle pair, preventing him from drawing a bow, while having the color of one's eyes removed leaves the mortal color blind.

In both instance, Knowledge (Fey) will prove especially useful in determining the approximate value of a gift and the true price involved.

Third, offering services in return for boons are just as fraught with peril. A fey might ask a mortal to complete a quest in either realm, or it might demand service for a set period. Because of the way time works, a year's service would be seen as the passing of 416 days in the fey realm, and since each fey "day" can last many months, such servitude may last for a century or more of mortal time. Still, with the weird time dilation, a century working for a fey might equate to a year in the mortal world.

Goods in the fey realm are not always as they appear once a mortal returns to his native realm. For instance, a fey may grant a hero a crown of woven grass. As he passes back to the world of mortals, this might transform into a crown of spun gold. Likewise, it may just be a grass crown, worthless among men, but highly valued among the fey (and perhaps the elves).

Stealing from the fey is foolish. Any valuables, such as gold or gems, weapons, armor, clothing, and so on, will invariably prove to be worthless once it is carried to the mortal realm. Gems become rocks, spears blades of grass, armor turns out to be made of leaves, and so on. This applies even to relics stolen from the fey.

Fey have little concept of personal possessions, something only the Finnar can truly grasp, for their culture operates a similar principle. Few fey will look twice at a mortal who just walks off with one of "their" possessions. In many instances the fey will borrow something in return, such as a hero's family's prize bull or a sack of flour, cancelling out the loan. Seelie fey who borrow something from a mortal will usually replace it with an item or service they deem to be of similar value. For instance, one may walk off with a side of beef, but in return the farmer might awaken to find his cows have been milked. Unseelie fey rarely leave gifts.

REALMS OF ALFHEIM

This section details a number of specific fey realms within the confines of Alfheim. As noted elsewhere in the canon, there are literally thousands of fey realms. Some may cover a vast area; others might encompass a single valley, stretch of river, or glade. Thus, the entries below should not in any way be seen as a finite list. Instead, they are a very small sample, intended to act as a springboard for the GM's imagination rather than impose limitations.

Each entry has the same format. The nature of this is described below.

Ruler: The common name of the realm's lord or lady.

Court: The fey court to which the ruler holds allegiance.

Unique Setting Rules: Any setting rules that apply in addition to the standard ones.

Mortal Location: All fey realms overlap some part of the mortal realm. Some locations have specific and generic entries, while others are purely generic. Those presented are only suggestions, not canonical absolutes. GMs should place fey realms to best suit their campaign. However, the overlaps between Alfheim and Rassilon are, save for one realm, static—if you place a realm in part of Angarion, then it must always be in that same place.

Entry: Suggestions as to how a mortal might, accidentally or at the ruler's unspoken (and probably unwanted) invitation, enter the realm.

Description: An overview of the land, its denizens, and its ruler. GMs are free to create stats for the various fey nobles. Just remember that these beings once served the gods in high positions. Their stats should reflect their unearthly power.

Opposite: All realms have two forms—Seelie and Unseelie. This entry provides a very brief description of a given realm's alternate name, ruler, and state of existence, but leaves the majority of details for the GM to determine.

ANCIENT OAK

Ruler: Grandfather Oak.

Court: Seelie.

Unique Setting Rules: None.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Kings Wood (Orcmark), Angarion; (Generic) any forest in the Hearthlands or Low Winterlands.

Entry: Sleeping under an ancient oak; climbing the tallest tree, only to descend into Alfheim; sleeping inside a hollow oak trunk; following a red squirrel.

Description: Grandfather Oak rules an expanse of primordial forest replete with leshiji, skogsra, wood warriors, and wood wights. Intelligent talking squirrels scurry along the branches in search of plump nuts, which grow here out of season compared to the mortal realm.

The heart of his unearthly realm is a squat wooden tower. It rises from the ground as if it were grown from a seed rather than constructed. It comprises just two rooms—an entry chamber, and a chamber at the very top, in which stand a pair of simple wooden thrones. In spring and summer, Grandfather Oak, who resembles a carved wooden statue of an earthly lord with a crown of intertwined oak leaves, sits as lord. In winter, the domain is ruled by his wife, the Unseelie Queen of Bare Branches. The pair see each other only twice a year, on the days when the courts change. Though their story is often seen as a sad one, fey see spring and summer as mortals see one day, and fall and winter as one night.

For generations the king has been honored by the local mortal lord as both provider and guardian, though not once has he ever met with his mortal counterparts in person. Hunting and forestry occur regularly, but Grandfather Oak is always thanked for his generosity. In return, the forest has long been impassable to hostile intruders. At best they become lost and turned around, emerging at the point they entered. At worst an army of tree men and wood warriors attacks them.

Grandfather Oak takes the form of an ancient oak tree with vaguely human facial features. His hair is the leaves that grow from his branches, and his beard a curtain of green moss. He speaks in a deep voice, and very slowly. Long minutes pass between single words.

Opposite: Realm of Bare Branches; Queen of Bare Branches. The trees are devoid of any vegetation, their skeletal forms instead bedecked in icicles and delicate winter flowers.

FOREST OF THE LIGHT ELVES

Ruler: King Alf.

Court: Seelie.

Unique Setting Rules:

* Mortal elves, druids, rangers, Wood Wardens, and other woodland friends of good heart receive +1 to Charisma in the realm. Those of black heart have –1 to Charisma.

Mortal Location: (Specific) The heart of the untamed western region of Angarion, the last remnant of the great wood that once spanned much of the continent; (Generic) any forest.

Entry: Straying from a path, sleeping in the forest, walking widdershins around a standing stone, following a sun mote.

Description: Believed by many mortals to be the true center of Alfheim, this realm is a vast stretch of unspoiled deciduous forest. The canopy is thick, yet the realm is never threatening or dark. Glowing flies flit through the air, sparkling motes dance in sunbeams, and lanterns casting warm light hang from boughs.

Though many species of Seelie fey call the realm home, the dominant inhabitants are creatures not dissimilar to hearth elves. They are taller, frailer in appearance, and glow with an inner light, the latter a clear indicator they are not mortal beings. The natives spend their time singing and dancing, feasting, tending the forest and animals, and otherwise performing light duties considered pleasing. Laughter and song fill the air. Many of the fey are shy creatures, disappearing whenever a mortal strays too close to their work or revelry. Others are curious enough to approach mortals.

King Alf rules here. Benevolent and kind, yet prone to fey capriciousness and trickery, the immortal ranks among the most powerful of the fey lords. The few visitors who have met both Alf and the Shining King have commented that the fey bears more than a passing resemblance to the Shining King who rules mortal Angarion. The key difference is the fey shines with an unearthly golden light.

King Alf speaks of his mortal counterpart as a friend and ally, nothing more. An ancient pact, laid down long ago, promises the mortals the aid of wood warriors, war trees, and fey knights should they ever need it. In return, the elves are avowed to protect and care for the forest and its inhabitants, and to perform certain rituals of which the elves never speak to outsiders.

His hall is a hollow tree of truly gigantic proportions. Brilliantly lit by an unearthly light, it is a place of diminishing merriment, welcoming to mortals yet tinged with a hint of sadness. Here he rules with his queen, the Lady of Spring (his opposite ruler is his sister).

Opposite: Forest of the Dark Elves; Queen Alfa. The trees transform into winter-hardened evergreens, snow and ice prevail, and the elves, who are more violent and suspicious of outsiders, resemble taiga elves. Shadow and darkness dominate the forest, and even magical light does little to dispel the gloom.

FUNGAL MIRE

Ruler: The Lord of Damp and Decay.
Court: Unseelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* Any spells with a fungus trapping are cast at +1. Such a trapping has no specific game mechanics, and is thus most likely a roleplaying hook.
* Ambient lighting is Dark (–2) in much of the realm due to the thick canopy.
* The slimy ground covering is difficult ground.

Mortal Location: (Specific) The Mushroom Forest (see p. xxx), Höyrytys Sieni Kenttä (see p. xxx); (Generic) any dark and dank forest where fungus grows in abundance.

Entry: Falling asleep inside a circle of toadstools; dancing around a circle of fungus while there is a mist; following a trail bordered by rows of fungus.

Description: Fungal Mire is a repulsive land. Towering mushrooms and toadstools grow like trees and filter out the moonlight, while the ground is thick with spongy fungal growths. The place reeks to high heaven, the terrain is slippery, the air is dank and damp, worms and centipedes slither and crawl through the mold, and the dominant colors are dirty browns, sickly greens, putrid yellows, and curled milky whites.

The resident fey dwell inside tall mushrooms, carving out not only chambers, but also stairwells to higher levels. As well as conventional fey, a species more closely related to fungals dwell here. This has led some scholars and clerics to ponder whether fungals originated in Alfheim and chose to colonize the mortal realm. Any of the fungal creatures found in *Hellfrost Creature Guide Compendium 1* can be found lurking in the rotting realm.

The noble rules from a hall constructed from the stalks of gigantic mushrooms sawn into planks, the roof shingled with flattened mushroom caps. Inside, toadstools serve as benches and tables. On a raised platform is the lord's throne—a huge mushroom, its stalk curved to provide a seat its cap hanging over the lord like a canopy. If threatened, the lord can cause the cap to close down around with a mere thought.

The noble closely resembles an elf. His skin is deathly pale and clammy to the touch, constantly peeling in thin slivers like the skin of a mushroom. His eyes, while possessed of malevolence, are as dull as the realm he rules. His robes are spun from thin strands of fungus and carry the scent of mold and damp earth. Where he walks new fungal growths sprout, and a touch of his long, thin fingers causes the skin to erupt with a flesh-eating fungus.

Dining here is not a pleasant experience (unless one happens to be a fungal). Food comprises almost entirely of fungus (since that is all that grows here), and the slimier the better. Usually it is boiled down into a thick mush, which serves as food and drink combined. Extra crunch is added by throwing in a handful of centipedes, while thick worms add a certain piquant flavor. Though the local fey are immune to any poisonous effects, mortal visitors are not.

Opposite: The Meadow of Pleasing Scents; The Lady of Sweet Aromas. The bog transforms into a water meadow, radiant with colorful and fragrant spring blooms.

HALL OF BOUNTIFUL REPAST

Ruler: The Lord of the Feast.
Court: Seelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* No matter how much alcohol a mortal consumes, he never passes out.
* Fey are relaxed here, and willing to converse with mortals. Streetwise rolls to learn gossip about the realms of Alfheim or a fey's knowledge of the mortal world are made at +1.

Mortal Location: Anywhere (see below).

Entry: Entering into a mead hall or ale hall in a mist; drinking oneself into a stupor; falling asleep after over-eating; being of good heart and hopelessly lost in the remote wilderness.

Description: Unlike most other realms, this fey abode comprises but a single building. The precise dimensions of the feasting hall have never been measured, but skalds describe it having 840 doors, each of which is wide enough to accommodate 600 fey marching side-by-side. Its exact location in comparison to the mortal world is equally unknown. Each of the doors leads to one fey realm, making it accessible from everywhere in Alfheim, if one knows the route. The door that leads to the mortal realm is not fixed, though. One may enter in Midmark, and leave to find oneself in Aspiria.

Aside from the local nobleman, there are no permanent residents. Instead, the Hall is populated by visitors from other fey lands, who sate their fill at a feast that lasts while the Seelie court rules, and a handful of mortals here by design or accident. Any type of Seelie fey can be found here. The air is thick with talking, singing, boasts, poetry, taunts, and laughter, all of it good-natured and fuelled by alcohol. Anyone who stoops to making threats, drawing weapons, or enacting physical violence is expelled from the Hall, carried aloft on a tide of jeering fey revelers, and unceremoniously dumped through the nearest door. There is no rhyme or reason to the seating order, save in the minds of the fey, which do not work as mortals' do. One fey nobleman guest may be seated among his peers, yet another placed with the lowliest wood wights. None ever seem to take insult at their place, for whatever strange and unspoken system is in place seems to be clearly understood.

The drink is refreshing, the food nourishing beyond comparison, and all of it is boundless. As soon as a flagon or serving dish is emptied, it magically replenishes. Any drink or food taken beyond the bounds of the hall instantly turns to ash, unless the Lord of the Feast has granted permission for it to be removed.

The nobleman is a clurichaun who spends his waking time doing what his species do best—drinking heavily. He asks naught of his guests save they eat, drink, and be merry, and occasionally perform a poem, song, or dance for the amusement of others.

Opposite: Hall of Bountiful Repast; The Lord of the Feast. When the Unseelie rule, the food and drink are no less plentiful, though they are unpleasant to mortal palates and less nourishing. Instead of a gentile feast, the Hall becomes a rowdy, debauched party, with insults, threats, and violence the norm. Note the realm and its lord always have the same name and title regardless of who rules—something that may cause mortals confusion.

HALL OF THE KOBOLD KING

Ruler: The Kobold King.
Court: Unseelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* Clerics of Ertha, earth elementalists, and other spellcasters using an earth trapping are +1 to arcane skill rolls.

Mortal Location: Anywhere there is a long, deep cave system (i.e., many places within Ertha's Realm).

Entry: The Hall can be reached only be descending into Ertha's Realm. Travel deep enough or far enough beneath the surface world, and one will eventually emerge in the fey realm.

Description: The realm is a sprawling labyrinth of natural tunnels and caves, and carved tunnels and chambers. Though there is only one way to reach the realm, it is widely rumored among students of the fey that the tunnels extend to all parts of Rassilon. One could travel here, and emerge the other side of the continent.

Unfortunately, exit is by the express permission of the Kobold King, a foul-tempered creature with no love of mortals save those who can work metal and cut gems. Such persons may think to earn approval by revealing their talents, but most end up permanent residents, "guests" of the king, who refuses to allow others to benefit from their skill.

So long as their court rules, kobold miners hammer and chip at the walls, hauling away great quantities of stone and ore to be processed by others. Dotted here and there in the rock walls are the homes of kobolds, the predominant fey inhabitants. Simple carved chambers, they are sparsely furnished, but comfortable enough for those of short statute who do not suffer from claustrophobia. Not that the fey welcome intruders, for they know all too well mortals covet their king's fabulous wealth.

At the heart of the realm is an immense cave, in the center of which rises a towering castle. Though the workmanship is excellent, the castle is not appealing to the eye of mortals, for it is built without thought for aesthetics or security. Towers rise at uneven heights, walls change thickness, and the type of stone varies along the same section of wall. It gives the appearance of an architect who could not make up his mind about how the finished structure should look, and yet was determined to keep building anyway.

Inside, it is home befitting the most covetous mortal lord. Precious metals and gems are plentiful here, and the Kobold King makes frequent use of them. Guests may be seated on stools of solid gold, sip bitter herbal brews from chalices carved from a single diamond, stab at bugs and fungus served on platters of pure iron with utensils made of slivers of granite. And yet, the audacious wealth is, like the misshapen denizens, ugly to mortal eyes.

Deep beneath the castle lie the dungeons. Here the king's permanent "guests" languish alongside mortals foolish enough to try and steal from the monarch. Kobolds do not particularly enjoy torture, and prisoners are more likely to be forgotten. Since fey do not need to eat or drink, and little understand mortals, many prisoners die long before the king remembers they even exist.

Opposite: The Glittering Cave; The Queen Beneath the Mountain. The tunnels are light and airy, illuminated by beautiful, glowing gemstones. The realm is populated by bergsra and pechs, who dine of wafer-thin slices of metal and small gems, which taste like the most succulent fruits. No mining occurs, for that despoils the earth.

Isle of Apples

Ruler: The Lady of Golden Orbs.
Court: Seelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* Any mortal who wishes to attack, intimidate, or otherwise show aggression to the fey or the trees must make a Spirit roll at –2. Success allows a single round of hostile action. Characters whose Spirit roll is a modified 1 or less while attempting to commit an aggressive action gain the pacifist Minor Hindrance for the duration of their stay, while a critical failure earns them the Major version.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Appledore (see p. xxx), Dalsetter (see p.xxx); (Generic) anywhere apples are an important crop.

Entry: Walking widdershins around the oldest apple tree by moonlight on Apple Day; singing to the apple trees; getting drunk on apple cider and falling asleep in an orchard.

Description: The Isle of Apples (also known as the Peaceful Isle and Isle of Rosy Orbs) comprises a large island in the middle of a placid, crystal clear lake. On the shore is a jetty with a silver bell attached to a stout pole. When the bell is rung, a low ship sails itself from the island to pick up passengers. The ship charts only one course—directly back to the isle—and nothing can alter its route.

Save for a solitary, flat-topped conical hill at its center, the rest is flat ground completely swathed in apple orchards. Here the fey tend the trees, pluck weeds from the fertile soil, harvest the crop, and dance and sing to their heart's delight. Life here is simple and joyous—there is no arduous toil, no metalworking, and no strife.

The noble's home is naught but a wooded glade atop the hill, within which stands a stone circle. Dressed in velvety robes of green, gold, and red, with a garland of apple blossom at her crown, the Lady is a fey whose beauty is beyond human comparison.

The fey's diet quickly grows tiresome to mortals—apples, apply blossom, apple wine, and apple cider are the staples. The inhabitants have never tired of it, primarily because they feast so rarely. Still, it is not without some benefit. The apples are magical, and each one counts as a *healing* potion as if cast with a success. Picking one without the Lady's permission invokes her anger. Favored visitors may be granted one or more apples as a parting gift. They remain edible indefinitely. The seeds of these fruits produce only mundane apple trees when planted in the mortal realm, albeit very healthy ones.

Opposite: The Isle of Bitter Fruits; The Worm-Ridden King. The apple trees are stunted and bent, their fruit moldy, worm-eaten, and poisonous.

Isle of the Blessed

Ruler: Lady of the White Robe.
Court: Seelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* Natural Healing rolls are made every day (by mortal reckoning). The standard +1 bonus for this being a Seelie realm applies.
* Mortal visitors have no need to eat, drink, or sleep while on the island.
* All visitors to the realm automatically receive the Major Pacifist Hindrance for the duration of their stay. Bloodthirsty, Greedy, Mean, and other such Flaws are temporarily lost.
* Any mortal who seeks or is offered a way out must make a Spirit roll at –4 or forget the foolish notion.

Mortal Location: Across the western ocean.

Entry: Sail west and eventually one will reach the island, ride a sea horse west for many days; sail though a fog bank on a western voyage, and one will emerge with the island in sight.

Description: Visitors to the Isle of the Blessed swear it exists far beyond the shores of western Rassilon, and that it is part of the mortal realm. Such talk is, of course, nonsense—the transition between the lands of mortals and fey can be exceptionally smooth, and pass unnoticed to even the keenest observer or student of the fey.

The terrain comprises mountains and forests, rivers and plains, all wild and unspoiled, but not threatening. The forests are never dark and brooding, and streams quietly whisper and laugh as they tumble gently through the landscape. The island is a paradise, untouched by winter, disease, hunger, or death. Crops and fruits grow without need for tending, their bounty always ready to pick, yet never spoiling. Crystal clear streams of the sweetest water run fast and untainted by weed or algae. The breeze is gentle and warm, and when rain falls it is always refreshing.

Here dwell only female fey of exceptional beauty—bergsra, glaistigs, kajsa, nykr, and skogsra. Leading them is The Lady of the White Robe, a former servant of Eira. Her looks are entrancing (an automatic *puppet* spell), her gentle smile can soothe the worst pain or despair, and a touch of her hand can heal the most grievous wound (though she cannot return life to the dead). The Lady has no grand hall—the entire island is her court, and she holds audience wherever she feels.

There is naught to do but sing and dance, sew garlands of wild flowers, feast merrily, and cavort with the fair maidens. Alas for mortals, paradise grows weary after a while, for the human soul cannot tolerate such joy while encased in flesh. Unfortunately, leaving is not easy. Such is the unearthly beauty of the land and its lady that mortals find it hard to break away and return to their world of pain, hardship, and death, even when offered safe passage.

Opposite: Isle of Pain; Lord of the Black Robe. All negative emotions are accentuated. Tangled forests filled with predators, raging rivers, and craggy mountains prone to avalanches replace the terrain. Only ugly or violent fey call this place home.

Labyrinth of Endless Paths

Ruler: Lord of Many Paths.
Court: Unseelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* No form of movement-based spells (such as *burrow, fly, speed,*

or *teleport*) function here, nor can summoned creatures use abilities that resemble these powers.

Mortal Location: (Specific) The Trickster's Maze (see p.xxx); (Generic) anywhere there are labyrinthine paths (such as a cave system or deep forests).

Entry: Becoming lost in a maze; walking a maze backward; entering a maze as the moon rises.

Description: As its name suggests, this realm is a vast labyrinth. No matter how and where they enter, all mortal visitors appear in the same location—a large walled courtyard with four doors. The labyrinth, its shape marked by huge walls (that grow taller if one tries to climb them), comprises many natural dangers, such as crumbling bridges over bottomless chasms, quicksand, and miniature storms. Added to this are the dangers of Unseelie fey (some of whom are violent, others are merely tricksters), traps, doors that open only when the correct answer to a riddle is given, glades of flowers whose scent is poisonous or soporific, walls that move to create new openings and seal existing ones, and such like.

Exiting the labyrinth is much easier than solving it. Numerous, clearly marked exits exist, though where, and indeed when, they might lead is anyone's guess.

In the center of the labyrinth stands the Lord of Many Paths' tower. Here reality takes a strange twist. Stairs run upside down, corridors run vertically or twist so the ceiling acts as the floor, and doorways lead to other parts of the structure. Somewhere, possibly at the top of the tower, is the lord's throne room.

No creature has ever seen the Lord's true form. His appearance alters to each viewer, taken on a form pleasing to them. One mortal might see his wife, another an old friend or mentor. Not even the fey know the truth, for they see only reflections of themselves.

Those who solve the labyrinth (a task which should be extremely arduous and take many sessions) and stand before the nobleman may ask him one question and one question only. Like his former master, the Unknowable One, the fey lord never gives a straight answer to any question. While he never lies outright (unusual for an Unseelie), his answers are a labyrinth of cryptic phrases, half-truths, and erroneous logic.

Opposite: The Hedge Maze; The Lady of Choices. The labyrinth remains, but it is no longer threatening. Instead, it is a sprawling hedge maze, with verdant glades in which fey dance and engage in all manner of idle pursuits, secluded spots filled with statues, flowers, and trickling streams, magnificent wooden bridges, and helpful (if still mischievous) fey.

LAND OF REGRETS

Ruler: The Lady of Futures Lost.

Court: Seelie.

Unique Setting Rules:

* Remaining in the realm for too long is dangerous. The chance to take a new course in life, one that undoes a major regret, is a strong lure. Unless the character makes a Spirit roll, he is doomed to remain here, living out his new life. Another roll is allowed every time the Seelie Court rises afresh.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Dreamwood (Royalmark), near the Whispering Stone in the Stone Forest (The Freelands), Hollow Oak near Oakstead (see p.xxx); (Generic) any forest.

Entry: Going to sleep regretting a past deed; entering a barrow or other tomb, for while the dead regret nothing memories still lurk in dark shadows.

Description: Very few mortals do not regret something in their life. Some regrets are trivial; others are grander. Not asking a girl to dance, obeying one's parents and becoming a farmer instead of taking holy vows as you wanted, neglecting your elderly parents, spending too much on an item—the list of possibilities is endless.

Many mortals have difficulty understanding that the realm is tied to the Seelie Court. Here, mortal regrets are undone and an alternate ending played out by shades. These shades are not trapped souls, nor are they echoes of possible futures. Rather, they are actors, playing out a role of what might have been.

When a mortal enters the realm, his personal regrets are given a semblance of existence. This not only allows a mortal to change his decision, it allows him to live through the consequences as long as he desires. For instance, in his youth, a warrior could not summon the courage to ask a pretty girl to dance. She later went on to marry someone else. Although his life has been meaningful, he still regrets that decision, and often ponders what might have been. At some point during his visit, he sees the very girl from his childhood. Coincidentally, she is sitting alone while other shades and fey dance. If he asks her to dance, the pair might begin courting. They might even get married and have children.

In a way, this is very therapeutic, for few mortals get the chance to correct their mistakes and then enjoy (or suffer, for happy endings are not guaranteed, even among the Seelie) the results. On the other hand, even the Seelie are possessed of an uncaring streak. As real as all this seems, it is naught but a pipe dream, a play that exists only in the fey realm. If the mortal chooses to remain here, he can play out the false life. Should he leave, then his regret may be all the more painful and bitter, for he has viewed how his life might have transpired. Each mortal receives only one chance to undo a regret. Next time he visits, he either receives the chance to correct a different one or, if he has no regrets, finds the land holds no interest in him.

Physically, the realm is nothing special—a forest broken by the occasional settlement or ploughed field. Its roads are cracked and choked with weeds, each section paved with regret. Buildings and terrain are mutable, though, altering to fit a mortal's specific regret. For instance, a mortal who regretted not attending his father's funeral may find his parent's house (wherein his father lies on his deathbed). This building does not exist for other travelers, save his comrades.

The Lady of Futures Lost is both happy and sad. She delights in seeing how lives might have been and watching regrets come undone, for such things unburden the heart and spirit. On the other hand, she knows these are mere illusions, and the stories she watches were never told. More depressingly, she knows she will never have chance to correct the regret she feels in failing to side with the gods during the God War.

She has no hall, for her home was once the Norns' stead, where she served. Instead, there is only a trilithon marked with the names of the Norns, across whose threshold she cannot cross.

Opposite: The Nightmare Forest; The Lord of Night Terrors. Mortals' worst nightmares are given form here. Some involve terrible (and very real) monsters; others take the form of scenes in which the fear of failure at some important task or the loss of a loved one in some horrific way is played out for them to witness.

LAND OF STORMS

Ruler: The Prince of Storms.

Court: Unseelie.

Unique Setting Rules:

* A permanent storm rages over the realm. Visibility is reduced to 24" and verbal communication to just 3", normal fires and extinguished within 1d10 rounds, only volatile materials have a random chance of catching fire, and most actions suffer a –1 penalty. The ambient lighting is Dark (–2).

* Clerics of Thunor, air elementalists, and other spellcasters using an air trapping are +1 to arcane skill rolls.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Storm Mountain (see p.xxx), Thunor's Anvil (see p.xxx), anywhere in the Thunor Range; (Generic) anywhere prone to frequent storms.

Entry: Being struck by lightning; caught in a thunderstorm; sleeping outside in a storm; leaping from a great height into a strong wind; the top of Thunor's Anvil during a storm.

Description: One cannot mistake the Land of Storms for any other realm. Violent winds constantly sweep and swirl across the land, cold rain falls like a waterfall, thunder crashes like a collapsing mountain, and blue-white lighting rends the air like the scream of a dying god, illuminating the sky for a brief instant before plunging it back into darkness. Within seconds visitors are soaked to the skin, with little chance of finding shelter and drying out—the terrain is rolling hills and towering peaks, broken by only small copses of wind-bent, leafless trees.

Unseelie glimmerwings and kajsa dwell here in great numbers, as do fey equivalents of mortal flying beasts, such as wyverns. Air elementals of varying types, storm dragons, and storm giants are frequent visitors. Clerics of Thunor are rare but not unknown, for this realm is the nearest many will ever get to their god in life.

The fey noble rules from atop a colossal column of rock. If you're using Nordmark as its mortal shadow, then the column resembles Thunor's Anvil, only ten times taller. For those who cannot fly, the only access to the summit is a narrow, treacherous path spiraling up and around the column. It would be an arduous climb in normal conditions, but with the battering winds, stinging rain, rolling thunder, and forking lightning it is virtually suicidal.

At the top stands the Prince of Storms. Tall and well-muscled, he is bedecked in robes of gray, and wears a storm cloud for a cloak. His eyes are as dark as the heavens, but flash brilliant like lightning whenever he is angered. His temperament is as fierce as the storm, his voice is the boom of thunder, his laugh the howling wind, and he does not suffer fools gladly. Those who offend him may find themselves struck down by lightning arcing from his fingertips, torn limb from limb by the wind, or thrown off the summit to their doom.

Opposite: Land of Gentle Breezes; The Princess of Fluttering Gowns. The storm-wracked land gives way to open plains across which blow gentle, refreshing breezes. Rainfall is light, and leaves one invigorated rather than sodden and miserable. Airborne fey flit through the cloudless sky, making mischief, though never with malicious heart. Even visiting dragons and giants are apt to be polite with other mortals.

COURTS & TROOPS

It is well known to even the dumbest mortal that the fey are divided into the Seelie and Unseelie Courts. These are also known more poetically, among other terms, as the Summer and Winter, Light and Dark, White and Black, and Sun and Moon Courts. Never is the term Good and Evil Court used to describe them, for these are meaningless terms with regard the capricious nature of the fey, not to mention rather insulting.

What is less known, save to true scholars of the unearthly race, is that the creatures can also be described as trooping or solitary. Many trooping faeries are nobles, who travel through their realms (and occasionally the world of mortals) in long processions.

The name actually applies to any fey who congregate together, whether or not they are truly trooping. Solitary fey are generally malevolent creatures, and are thus primarily linked to the Unseelie court. Such terms are never absolutes, however. Certain Seelie fey, such as brownies and those tied to the elements, prefer privacy over companionship, while Unseelie fey like kobolds live and work in close proximity to others of their ilk.

Clerics of Eostre and Kjalarr, minor goddess of the home, have long argued that there exists a third category—household fey. These are the fey that, for reasons of their own, specifically favor living among humans, albeit in secrecy. Banniks, boggarts, brownies, and possibly glaistigs would fall into this category.

MARSH OF LOST SOULS

Ruler: The Lord of the Lost.
Court: Unseelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* Anyone who runs on the walkways and rolls a 1 on their running die slips and falls. He must make an Agility roll to avoid falling into the mire.

* A traveler who leaves a walkway and does not return to it by the end of the current round becomes lost. The walkway disappears from his sight, as does anyone on it. In effect, they are no longer part of his reality. He can hear their voices, but they sound distant, the voice always coming from a point away from the walkway. However, those on the walkway can still see their companion, cast spells on him, and so on, so long as he remains in range. Retrieving him before he becomes irrevocably lost requires brains, patience, and luck.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Shade Marsh (Royalmark), Stenchrot Marsh (see p.xxx); (Generic) anywhere there is marsh or bog, any burial ground.

Entry: Walking through a pair of standing stones by moonlight in a marsh; walking through a marsh when a mist rises; entering a barrow, crypt, mausoleum, or other place of burial; becoming lost in a bog, whereupon one may find a raised wooden pathway.

Description: Deep bogs, cloying mud, tangled beds of reeds, and constant mist stretch as far as the eye can see. In places, the water is coated in a thin layer of ice, concealing the sometimes fathomless depths below. Winding through the bog are myriad raised walkways, slick with slime and crumbling in places. There are no handrails to prevent unwary travelers from falling into the mire a few inches below.

Faint lights are often seen in the gloom, though never on the path, and voices call out for help. Invariably these are duergar and will-o'-the-wisps. These creatures give the marsh its name, for though they are now fey, they began life as mortals. Unfortunate enough to stray from the walkways, they became lost. Over time, they transformed into malevolent Unseelie, their souls cut off from Scaetha's heralds, for the gods have no hold over Alfheim or its occupants. Other fey dangers exist, for grindylows lurk along the paths, ever ready to pull a traveler to a watery doom, and mephits drift on the gentle breeze, another pungent stench in a realm of decaying odors.

The hall of the Lord of the Lost is mobile. It resembles a primitive wattle-and-daub hut with a thatched roof. When the noble wishes to move, it is carried aloft by an army of luminous spirits, the souls of those lost in the realm who have yet to become fey. Inside, the hall is huge, easily capable of seating a hundred guests.

The master of the realm is tall and gaunt, attractive in a disturbing way, with entirely white eyes and raven-black hair. With a wave of his hand he can call forth the shade of any person. These are illusions, for as a fey he has no true power of the dead. Most are the images of lost souls, but he can draw an image from an intruder's mind and use it to taunt them. He has the power to return any wanderer to the walkways, but rarely does he perform such an act—pity and mercy are not in his vocabulary.

Opposite: Meadow of Lost Souls; The Lady of the Host. Instead of a marsh straddled by walkways, the land becomes a summer meadow broken by well-maintained paths. Here, mortals can interact with the shades of loved ones who have been taken by Scaetha's heralds. They are illusions, of course, but they act exactly like their once-earthly counterparts. The fey are still lost souls, mortals who refused to leave the realm so as to near their former loves, but they are Seelie in nature.

PALACE OF THE GOLDEN PRINCESS

Ruler: The Golden Princess.
Court: Seelie.
Unique Setting Rules:
* Mages casting spells with a light trapping and clerics of Sigel gain +1 to spellcasting only if they enter the realm in summer (by mortal reckoning). During spring, they gain no modifier (but suffer no penalty).

* During spring, the temperature is the same as a Hearthlands' spring.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Feywood (Seithrby), Silverleaf Forest (Aspiria), any taiga elfhome, Frozen Forest; (Generic) any forest in the High or Low Winterlands.

Entry: Walking through the mortal location at dusk or dawn; entering any barrow on the first day of spring; falling asleep in a stone circle and waking exactly at dawn.

Description: The forested land was once a bountiful place. The epitome of the perfect summer, it was bathed in warm sunshine, plants grew thick and luscious, fields of golden wheat stretched toward the heavens, and the fey danced and cavorted without care or wont. Over the last five centuries, though, the land has slowly

changed. The sun is less radiant, the air has a marked chill, leaves are perpetually tinged with autumnal reds and oranges, fruits are less plump and succulent, the fields are dotted with weeds, the wheat is shorter, and the fey dance and sing with less conviction.

The realm's decline is directly tied to its ruler, the Golden Princess. The disappearance of Sigel, whom she once served, weighs heavily on her heart, and the shortening of her reign has sapped her will. Once a creature of beauty and boundless energy, she is now diminished in radiance and lethargic. Her robes of spun gold are frayed and worn. Her luxurious blond hair lacks sheen, and her warm, golden skin is cool to the touch. Her voice, once capable of lifting a mortal from the depths of utter despair to dizzying heights of elation with a single word, is tinged with sadness.

Her home was the source of many stories among mortals. An elegant palace of white stone clad in beaten gold, skalds considered it the perfect representation of the Seelie Court. It shone like the soon at noon, yet its glare was not harsh on the eye. Its halls, warm and comforting, echoed with laughter and song. Were a skald to visit today, his song would be melancholic. The gold is tarnished and dull, shadows creep into the recesses of the halls, and the echoes are muted.

To a frequent mortal visitor, the change would seem ponderous and slow, a mirror of the fate befalling the land of men. To fey, it is occurring at a frightening pace. Unfortunately, there is little they can do to halt the process. Fey give little thought to the future, for time is a concept they struggle to understand. Today is today, and that is all that exists. Were they capable of pondering the future, the fey nobles might well ask themselves what fate awaits. Will the Golden Princess switch allegiance (an extremely rare event) to the Unseelie Court? Will she simply fade from existence as her heart grow wearier, to be replaced by another?

Opposite: Palace of Icicles; The Frozen Prince. The epitome of winter, the realm is blanketed in snow; thick icicles hang from every surface, and the wind of biting cold. The noble lives in a glittering palace of deep blue ice. As well as fey, all manner of cold-based creatures cavort here, though even Hellfrost dragons must bow before the Frozen Prince.

PEARL KINGDOM

Ruler: The Queen of Silver Orbs.
Court: Seelie.
Unique Setting Rules:

* Mortals can breathe normally in the realm, as if protected by an *environmental protection* spell. This cannot be *dispelled* or *negated* within the realm, but ends the instant the mortal departs.

* See *Hellfrost Expansion 2* for other rules concerning underwater activity.

Mortal Location: Anywhere beneath the deep ocean waves (at least 20 miles offshore).

Entry: Drowning in the sea; swimming very deep; following a mermaid or aquatic fey beneath the waves.

Description: Reachable only by descending deep beneath the waves, the Pearl Kingdom lies within a forest of enormous kelp, through which lead many trails. Though the kelp is thick and might conceal many threats, there is little fear, for there are no dangerous predators here. Despite its great depth below the waves, the realm is amply illuminated by glowing fish (which might act as a mobile lantern for friendly mortals), while buildings are lit by magical pearls. As one might expect, pearls are plentiful here. Whether tiny grains or one's the size of a mortal's head, they are flawless specimens. The mermaids do not stop mortals from taking them, for they know that when the visitor leaves they will transform into worthless stones. Only those pearls given as gifts by the queen retain their value. Some are merely expensive orbs, while others are minor relic possesses magical powers such as *light* or *environmental protection (water)*.

The realm is populated almost entirely by a fey variety of havmandr (mermaids), though a rare sea dragon or sea giant might be visiting. As with the elves, the mermaids found in the mortal realm are voluntary exiles, drawn to explore the oceans. The mermaids live in houses crafted from gigantic shells or woven from strands of seaweed. These simple dwellings are decorated with seaweed woven into tapestries, colored shells, pearls, and debris collected from the ocean floor. Much of the day is spent frolicking, telling stories of visits to the world above the waves, harvesting seafood, collecting pearls from the many oyster beds, and making things.

The Queen of Silver Orbs rules over the undersea kingdom. A mermaid of stunning beauty, she wears a robe of finely spun seaweed of rainbow hues into which are woven countless perfect pearls of varying sizes. Her jewelry is fashioned from coral. She speaks the language of all undersea beasts, though only those of good heart obey her. Her home is the Coral Palace, a majestic castle of twisting spires furnished with the finest treasures the aquatic realm has to offer.

Opposite: Realm of Bloody Water; The Lord of Slicing Teeth. The kelp forest becomes a menacing, dark place, filled with carnivorous mermaids with sharp teeth, blood eels (giant and swarms), and hungry sharks. No pearls are found here. Instead, teeth are used as ornamentation. Kreana are frequent visitors, though the fey consider them base creatures, little better than the sharks they keep as pets.

REALM OF AUTUMN FOG

Ruler: The Gray Lord of Shadow.
Court: Unseelie.
Unique Setting Rules:

* When not in the fog, lighting is Dim (–1). In the fog, lighting is Dark (–2) and illumination is cut in half.

* Survival rolls are made at –2. Wood does not burn well—it produces more smoke than heat or light.

* Because of the realm's effects on sound, all song magic is at –1.

* The mournful voices and whispers in the fog require mortals to make a Spirit roll every 24 hours (by normal reckoning). Failure causes a level of Fatigue (max. Exhausted). Only finding shelter from the mist or leaving the realm can remove this. One level of Fatigue is removed for every 12 hours spent out of direct contact with the fog. *Refuge* provides shelter from the effects of the fog, but a tent does not.

* While in the open, a Vigor (–2) roll must be made for each night's rest. Failure results in sleep deprivation. Plugging one's ears removes the penalty.

Mortal Location: (Specific) In or near the Mistlands, Barrow-Fog Vale (see p.xxx); (Generic) anywhere one finds mist or fog.

Entry: Being lost on foggy night; attempted suicide during autumn or winter; being in mourning at a grave when fog rolls in.

Description: The realm is bleak and shrouded in swirling fog. There is a creepy stillness to everything—no breeze rustles the trees, and there is neither rain nor running water. All bodies of water stand perfectly still, producing no ripples if disturbed. Sounds of distant crying, moaning, and whispers can be heard in the fog, interrupted from time-to-time by shrieks of anguish. All sounds or noises are muffled and slightly distorted.

A sense of sadness and hopelessness dominates. Travelers in this realm may chance upon crumbling remains of once magnificent stone buildings, a toppled lichen covered statue, or the patchy remains of a paved road. Nothing stands whole; everything feels abandoned, and absolutely nothing brings joy or delights the senses.

Fey ravens can be seen perched in the lifeless trees, silently watching those who pass below. They are the eyes and ears of the Gray Lord, and shadow any visitors.

Mortals who become trapped in this realm eventually transform into creatures of broken spirits known as *unhydbigan*, (Saxa for "unhappy"). Similar to wudewasa, they slowly become something neither entirely fey nor entirely mortal. Too lost in their grief to care about their person, they are filthy wretches who eke out a meager existence. Numb to physical pain, they are surprisingly tough. They are generally not a threat unless commanded to attack by the Gray Lord.

The Gray Lord of Sorrow appears as a thin, stooped, shadowy figure covered in a tattered gray cloak. He can randomly appear and

fade in the fog anywhere within his realm. If encountered, he has the unsettling tendency to phase intermittently from one spot to the next. He can look into a soul and see what sadness lies therein. Speaking this into the mists, the sadness echoes throughout the realm. Under the deep cowl of his cloak hides the visage of a pale, haggard old man with dark sunken eyes and wispy strands of hair. Seeing him does not inspire fear so much an overwhelming sense of sadness. Both his gaze and voice can overwhelm mortals with sorrow. He rules his realm from Lathspell Keep (Saxa for "sad tidings"). A shell of what was once a magnificent castle, it stands as a monument to lost hope and forgotten greatness.

The Gray Lord is not popular among the other Unseelie lords, who find his presence to be too dreary even for them. He feeds on the sadness and hopelessness of others. Unlike many of his fellow Unseelie, he prefers not to exercise violence against mortal visitors unless given no choice. Rather, he seeks to slowly wear their spirit down until, when all sense of hope and joy are abandoned, they surrender to a perpetual state of sorrow and join the ranks of the *unhydhigan*.

Opposite: Realm of Spring Mists; The Lady of Bliss. This is a realm of perpetual spring morning, buzzing with new life, hope, and joy. Droplets of dew cover the beautiful lush foliage. Fey of unearthly beauty frolic, sing, and feast in an endless garden of cascading waterfalls, perfumed flowers, and spectacular trees bearing ripe fruit.

Realm of Harsh Tones

Ruler: The Lord of the Cutting Tongue.
Court: Unseelie.
Unique Setting Rules:

* Song mages have +1 to arcane skill rolls to invoke powers that harm or impair. Powers that boost, heal, protect, or otherwise benefit the target are cast at –1.

* Persuasion, Stealth, and Streetwise rolls suffer a –1 penalty. Intimidation rolls gain a +2 bonus (this replaces the usual +1 bonus).

* Charisma bonuses do not apply to Persuasion or Streetwise rolls.

Mortal Location: Anywhere.

Entry: Wandering through a forest while deafened (such as from a spell trapping), walking into a barrow or between standing stones after an argument or receiving an insult not returned.

Description: Also known as the Land of Anger and Land of Bitter Words, this fey realm is inhabited by angry and intimidating fey. Here, words and sounds are always harsh and grating. The wind roars, raindrops pain the ears with their loud drumming, leaves rustle like fingernails dragged across slate, songs inspire discord and fear rather than harmony and joy, and voices hold bold menace. The denizens know nothing of kind words, and insults sting like bees. Visitors who seek information cannot rely on pleasant words to loosen tongues, but must intimidate those from who they seek wisdom or aid.

Ruling over this realm is the Lord of the Cutting Tongue, a fey nobleman whose words wound as readily as any blade, and cut far deeper. His robe is made from the tongues of those who offended him, and many of his servants have their mouths stitched closed as punishment for a misspoken word.

He rules from the Palace of Cacophony. Within the fortress sounds echo strangely, making it difficult to understand speech, everyone talks at once, and irritating sounds of unknown origin gnaw at one's wits.

Opposite: Realm of Sweet Words; The Lady of Soothing Song. Sounds never rise above a gentle whisper, tempers never fray because of harsh words, threats hold no venom, and songs are invigorating.

Realm of Retold Stories

Ruler: The Prince of Tales Won.
Court: Seelie.
Unique Setting Rules:

* Clerics of Hoenir and song mages have +1 to arcane skill rolls within the realm.

* At the start of each session, a character may make a Knowledge (Folklore) roll. This simulates his knowledge of the stories in which he will be involved, and is handled as a single, advanced roll for ease. Remember, Knowledge (Folklore) cannot be used unskilled. Only the highest roll counts, and it earns the character one benny per success and raise as he recalls details of the stories that may prove useful. These bennies may be handed to any character. Unspent bennies are lost at the end of the session, or if the party leaves the realm for any reason.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Barrow-Fog Vale (see p.xxx), Cairn Lands, Draugr Hills (Angmark), Mounds of Heroes Gone (Royalmark), Scathmoor (Crystalflow Confederacy), Spyre (The Freelands); (Generic) close to where a mighty hero of old is buried, or where folk gather to swap stories and recount epic tales.

Entry: Walking three times around the burial place of a mighty hero whose name lives on in stories at sunrise or sunset; falling asleep while dreaming of such a hero; being a mighty hero (Immortalized Glory benefit) in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Description: In many ways the fey are a static race. Utterly devoid of ambition and drive, they do not grow old, expand their realms, or list for glory. Mortals, however, are creatures of change. Short though their lives may be, they can inspire generations to come with their deeds. For the Prince of Tales, this unique form of magic is an irresistible lure.

The realm is a storyteller's dream and worst nightmare combined. The landscape is mutable, as are the sorts of creatures one encounters. One moment the heroes might find themselves on a battlefield from the Saxa rebellion, reliving the story of Cenwalch Cerdicsunu, who led the Saxa to victory against the famous Anari Storm Dragons (see adventure *H1: Sins of the Father*). In the blink of an eye they may find themselves in the tale of Sir Aethwald ap-Herrith, founder of Scayle's Dragon Guard, who won victory over a terrible marsh dragon. The temperature, terrain, and lighting changes to fit the story. In no instances are the actual heroes represented in the story present—that part is played out solely in the mind of the Prince of Tales Won. This sudden change in landscape occurs as a result of the Prince of Tales Won. As his mind drifts over the many, many stories he has heard, so the landscape physically alters to match his thoughts. The only constants are the local fey, who move with the scenes. The physical appearance of the prince's abode changes with the story. An Anari fortress, a Saxa mead hall, a temple, a simple peasant hut—anything is possible. Similarly, the noble's physical appearance matches that of the current story.

The fey noble detests intruders, for they distract him from his stories. Addressing him by the correct title (that of the hero whose story he is recalling) is essential in appeasing him. He craves new stories, for while he knows many, he is not omnipotent, and different versions of the same tales exist. A high Knowledge (Folklore) roll may earn the party a warm welcome, and perhaps even secure a way home. Those with glory to their name may escape his wrath simply by telling the tale of their own lives, for it is unlikely the prince has heard such a modern epic.

Opposite: Realm of Failed Dreams; The Princess of Unhappy Endings. The Unseelie variant is also a realm of myths and stories, but these never end well for the protagonist. They retell the ignoble deaths of mighty heroes and the failures of heroes who never were.

Realm of Silver Threads

Ruler: Black Queen of the Midnight Court (see *Hellfrost Expansion* for stats).
Court: Unseelie.
Unique Setting Rules:

* Ambient lighting is Dark (–2) in much of the realm due to the thick canopy.

* Though intelligent, the spiders can be controlled with *beast friend*. However, the Black Queen's hold over them is fearsome. Any attempt is automatically met with an opposed roll by the Black Queen (d12+2, d10 Wild Die), as if she cast *dispel*. This is an au-

tomatic and subconscious action, works at any range within the realm, and suffers no multi-action penalties. Depending on her mood, such a brazen act may offend or amuse her.

Mortal Location: (Specific) Spiderfell Wood (Midmark), Forest of Omens (Shattered Moor); (Generic) any forest haunted by giant spiders.

Entry: Being bitten by a giant spider (damage applies as normal); cocooned in a spider web (the victim suffers Fatigue from suffocation, but emerges in the fey realm fully healed of his Fatigue when he reaches Incapacitated); a tunnel of spider webs.

Description: The Realm of Silver Threads exists within a vast forest of towering trees. The full moon sheds pale light only in isolated patches, leaving the rest of the land cloaked in darkness. Between the trees are countless spider webs of glittering silver thread, from where the name derives. Others hang down from the branches in long, thick strands like moss on an ancient oak, dancing and swaying in the breeze like ghostly figures.

From the moment a traveler enters the land he comes to the attention of the Black Queen, for she knows all that occurs in her domain. If she is feeling curious or generous, travelers may be greeted by one of her knights seated upon a huge spider (black fey horses are used only when visiting the mortal realm), his black chain mail armor woven from spider silk yet as strong as any steel. Otherwise, interlopers must take their chances with the countless giant spiders that inhabit the realm. These abominations are intelligent, and are capable of speech. She displays no pity, but may spare a life if she feels suitably amused by the mortal's antics.

Though spiders are her primary focus, the Black Queen dwells in a castle of black ice. Coldfire torches and braziers provide flickering blue-white light, doing nothing to warm the flesh or soul of mortal visitors. The interior is opulent. The furnishings are carved of spider carapaces, and engraved with wintry and spider motifs. Long, elegant tapestries made of colored spider silks adorn the walls. Plates, bowls, dishes, and cutlery are made of pure silver. In the grand hall, like the spider at the heart of a web, sits the Black Queen. Bedecked in midnight blue robes embroidered with a silver web design she lounges on a colossal throne of blue ice carved to resemble a rearing spider.

Though possessed of a beauty that is most definitely unearthly, her heart is as cold as the Hellfrost core. Hanging from the walls of her court are the spider-wrapped corpses of courtiers who failed her and interlopers who neglected their manners, or failed to provide sufficient amusement to keep her murderous tendencies at bay.

Opposite: Realm of Golden Threads; White King of the Midday Court. Spiders till haunt the woods, but they are friendly. Their webs are golden strands that gleam like the sun. The lord's fey knights wear similar armor.

RED FOREST

Ruler: Lord of Empty Veins.

Court: Unseelie.

Unique Setting Rules:

* Mortals gain the redcap's Drying Hat and Dyeing the Cap special abilities. A red cap appears on their heads the instant they enter. For these purposes only, record the passage of time as if this were the mortal realm.

* Except as noted above, no form of healing, magical or mundane, works in this land. This includes, but is not limited to, alchemical devices, herbal brews, ***healing, greater healing***, Healing, and natural Healing.

Mortal Location: (Specific) The Blood Forest (see p.xxx); (Generic) the site of a major battle or fell murder.

Entry: Spending the night on the field of battle; shedding another creature's blood on a fey ring, barrow, or other place commonly associated with the fey.

Description: Though an Unseelie realm, winter does not grip quite as hard here as in other lands. There is a noticeable chill in the air and snow lies in isolated patches, but there is an autumnal feel. Everything in the realm is tinged with red. Leaves display the red-orange of fall, only red fruits and berries grow, the grass is rust red, and even the water has the color of red wine. It is not autumn that gives everything its odd color. The realm is soaked in blood, for it is the haunt of redcaps and other malevolent fey (such as bugganes, grindylows, and spriggans). Fortunately, murderous recaps are relatively few in number compared to their slightly less hostile cousins. All liquids and foodstuffs carry the distinct coppery tang of blood, trees bleed red when cut into by axes, and the rain is thinned blood. Those not prepared to kill regularly will not survive long in this realm of unbridled violence.

Ruling over the land is a large and belligerent redcap whose martial prowess is almost without equal among the fey nobility. Great care must be taken when approaching him, for he is as likely to attack a visitor as he is listen to their requests. His lair is a great castle constructed from the bones of his many victims. Within, he sits upon a wicker throne daubed with hair and congealed blood. Deep beneath are the dungeons, where foolish mortals are kept chained in preparation for the day a redcap needs to dye its hat.

While it might seem at first that only the deranged servants of Dargar would voluntarily venture here, the realm holds interest to kings, tyrants, and warlords who crave victory at any cost. If promised suitable opportunities to murder and take prisoners, the Lord of Empty Veins just might be tempted to provide a mortal with a small force of redcaps. Woe betides anyone who fails to supply the murderous horde with their promised quota, though, for redcaps are not forgiving creatures.

Opposite: Realm of Sanctuary; Lady of the White Shield. As the Unseelie realm is red, so this land is white. All native fey have the equivalent of *armor* cast with a raise permanently active. This cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*. Healing is achieved by performing selfless deeds.

WHY COME HERE?

Unlike mortal lands, heroes cannot simply pack their bags and walk into Alfheim of their own volition or because some higher authority orders it. Unless they are led here against their will or offered passage, they have no chance of penetrating the barrier between realities. Thus, common motives for exploration, such as orders, duty, and seeking glory or treasure are meaningless.

Presented below are a few adventure hooks for cooperating with the fey.

* Long ago, a temple sought help from the local fey. In return, a mortal had to be sent to the fey court every decade to help the fey with whatever problem ailed them. That time has come and a cleric player character's name has been drawn at random. While the cults of Eostre and Ullr work best, any except Hela and Scaetha can be used. The nature of the aid the fey seek may range from something utterly trivial (lighting a fire for a lord hosting a banquet or serving him his wine) to the deadly (dealing with a ferocious monster or tackling an Unseelie knight who refuses to hand over his castle).

* The Unseelie have kidnapped a mortal lord's son or daughter. The party must first seek out a fey lord in order to secure passage to Alfheim (a task which may require a favor, and thus another adventure). Once on the fey realm they must track down the Unseelie responsible and bring him to justice. Unfortunately, he is employed by a powerful noble, and merely killing him will led to serious repercussions in the mortal world.

* At dusk on the day winter turns to spring or summer to fall, a player character skald is visited by emissaries of two powerful fey nobles, one Seelie and one Unseelie. Both offer him an invitation to compose a song at their court to mark the changing of the seasons. The skald cannot appease both, and whoever is rejected will promise vengeance.

* Adventures *S5: The Fey Tower & Deadly Glade* and *S4: The Ice Fiend & Other Tales* both involve dealing with fey in the mortal realm. Adventure *N2: The Dark Seed* involves a friendly fey creature, but fey are not the focus. *N5: The Eostre Festival* can easily be adapted to a fey tournament to which mortals are invited or forced to attend—in either case opposition should be fey rather than human, and the prizes more esoteric. Finally, *Encounters Book 1* contains seven short tales involving fey.

ALANTARIS ISLE

Long ago, Alantaris Isle was the center of the greatest empire in the northern continent. Ravaged during the Blizzard War and its mainland holdings lost to rebellious natives, the Isle slipped into obscurity. Centuries have passed, and the once-great isle is slowly rising from the ashes.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Alantaris Isle.

* **No Respect for Nobles:** Holding a noble title means very little on Alantaris Isle unless the title holder is also an elected official. Native heroes with the Noble Edge who take a noble title do not gain the usual +2 Charisma bonus with regard to the citizens of Alantaris Isle. If they ever hold an elected position, something unlikely as this would greatly curtail adventuring opportunities, then the bonus is applied as normal. Characters who use the Noble Edge to represent important or influential members of society other than actual titled nobles retain the bonus.

* **Respected Mages:** The citizens of Alantaris hold members of the Convocation in high regard since the Blizzard War. When an elementalist beholden to the Convocation encounters an NPC of Alantaris Isle, add +1 to the Reaction Table result. This modifier does not apply to other members of the Convocation, clerics of any faith, or nobles.

The citizens are more inclined to assist arkhwisards. They gain a +2 bonus on the Reaction Table among the citizens of Alantaris Isle to reflect their importance and power both in the Convocation and in wider society.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Under the emperors, the inhabitants of Alantaris Isle were a staunchly feudal society, with status being based solely on one's noble titles rather than wealth, military prowess, or landownership. When the empire collapsed, the noble families were allowed to retain at the cost of having all their power stripped. Such drastic changes did not go unopposed, but the nobility was in no fit state to put up much resistance.

Five centuries on and the situation has changed very little. Those natives who sport their noble titles like badges of honor are viewed as remnants of a dark time, when tyrants ruled with a grip of iron and citizens were only little better off than slaves. This is not to say that Alantaris is an egalitarian utopia where all men are equal. As the old saying goes, every flock needs a shepherd.

At the top of the social ladder is the upper class, comprised of arkhwisards, high priests, rich merchants, master craftsmen, wealthy landowners, and so on. Beneath them are the middle classes, their ranks filled by merchants and craftsmen, clerics and mages, military captains, senior bureaucrats, and the like. Lastly there are the lower classes, of whom clerks, shop assistants, farmers, laborers, lumberjacks, and miners form the bulk.

Aiding the council, whose members are all upper class citizens, is a small army of bureaucrats. Important positions are not hereditary, neither are they elected posts. Instead, the council hires and fires applicants based on their skills and results. By law, no council member may also hold a bureaucratic post, and appointing a family member of a councilor is viewed as suspicious behavior.

Senior posts are held by members of the upper or middle classes, while the bureaucrats and laborers who serve under them are generally middle or lower class. The senior posts within the bureaucracy and the area the appointee controls are listed below. They are ranked from most to least important. Where mages may never hold any of these positions, clerics may. Indeed, they are the preferred applicants.

Tresorer (mint and treasury), Taxer (assessing and collecting taxes), Clerc (records), Marchatman (supervises the market), Tradaman (supervises foreign trade) Coroner (civil law), Shirereeve (criminal law), Mareschal (civilian to whom the captain of the city guard answers), Fyrman (fire prevention and response), Wallman (city wall maintenance), Conestable (militia training), and Sewiereman (sewer and road maintenance).

Beyond the city walls are numerous villages, small towns, mines, and logging camps. Some are ruled by the remnants of the old nobility, the hereditary landowners of old. More common these days are elected officials or councils.

Though the Council of Citizens grants the outlying settlements many freedoms, its generosity only goes so far—they may train a militia but not raise a standing army, they cannot impose taxes (save for tolls) or alter state tax levels, and they cannot venture into private trade deals with other nations without official approval. In return, the settlement's' rulers keep half the hearth tax raised locally to help fund community projects and maintain fortifications and roads, and can call on Alantaris' military for assistance.

EDUCATION

Education in Imperial City is free between the ages of five and 12, though it is not compulsory. Children from the provinces may attend, but there are no boarding facilities, and few farmers and miners can afford to pay inn rates. Thus, only those with family in the city tend to receive a formal education. Regardless of where they are educated, children are tutored in basic literacy and numeracy, the basic tenets of the major faiths, history, law, folklore, and culture. In game terms, Common Knowledge covers most of these, since they relate only to Alantaris Isle.

After finishing school, children are expected to learn a trade (many of the guilds run formal apprenticeships) or move onto advanced education. The city's advanced schooling, a joint venture run by the council and the cult of Hoenir, covers a wide range of topics focused on other realms. Unlike basic education, advanced education explains how a native hero picked up specific Knowledge skills.

The temples and Convocation accept apprentices, schooling them in their specific fields of expertise before, at age 14, deciding whether or not to accept them for arcane training. Temples are more relaxed on this, for whereas magic must be taught, faith is a personal connection between mortal and god, and low education is rarely a hindrance.

Youths who wish to join the military spend their first two years scrubbing and polishing kit, helping healers, carrying equipment, cooking, and performing other menial tasks. Only when a youth reaches 14 is he allowed to begin proper training. Although the military has many specialties, all soldiers are taught the basic arts of self-defense with sword and spear before moving onto specialist training.

RELIGION

Alantaris Isle's primary deities are worshipped thanks in no small part to the island's past and present.

The Convocation of Elementalists, whose headquarters have always been in Imperial City, primarily supports Maera, the most common deity. Regardless of whether or not he actually has Maera as his patron, all elementalists are required to attend the temple ceremonies, for without her there would be no Convocation. Non-mages follow her in large numbers, but few chose her as a patron. Their worship is more thanks for the elementalists help in defending the city during the Blizzard War. Maera's temple is within the Imperial Palace, but is open to the public.

As an island, albeit a large one, the sea has always played a large part in daily life. Neorthe is a major deity in Port and in coastal communities, and like Maera, is given lip service elsewhere. His great temple, which spanned the canal leading to the city, forcing all ships to sail under the main hall from where clerics would bless them, was reduced to rubble during the terrifying assault. A new temple, smaller in scale, was erected in Port.

A former trading superpower, Alantaris Isle boasted a vast temple-indoor market to Var. Following its destruction, Var became a lesser deity as the islanders struggled to rebuild their lives and exports from the dying empire ceased. Only in the last century has his cult crawled out from the rubble and rebuilt itself as a major player. The main temple to Var stands at port, and forms a wing of Neorthe's temple. The market square in Imperial City contains an impressive shrine to the god of trade.

Ironically Alantaris Isle is now forced to import iron, a commodity it once exported. Although the island still boasts many working mines, the abolition of slavery crippled the industry, and it has never recovered. Despite this, Ertha remains a popular deity. Partly her worship is led by the miners, but for many it is merely tradition, and many worshippers spend their time in her temple lamenting the loss of the island's wealth stream.

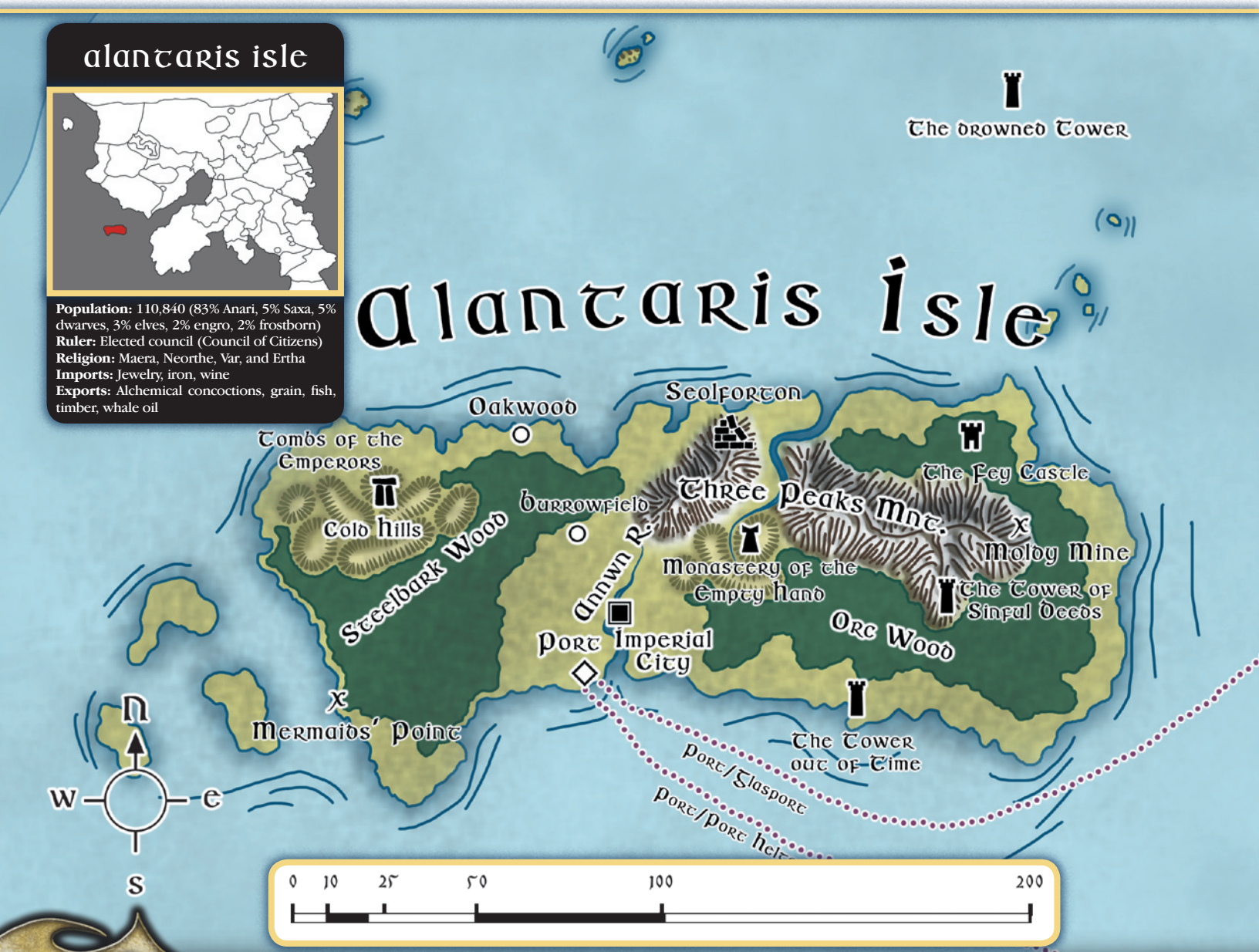
All the other deities, save for Hela, Niht, and Thrym, are well represented by shrines and worshippers. As is typical elsewhere, worship is centered on occupation. Vali, whose cult never operates openly, has a strong presence here, for Alantaris Isle exports sufficient quantities of grain and fish to help alleviate famines in other realms. Were this trade to suffer any substantial setbacks, the effects could be devastating across much of the western Hearthlands and Low Winterlands.

MILITARY

Although a captain leads every five companies, they are not assigned any specific organizational name. While captains are expected to lead the companies under their control in battle, during peace time the role is very much an administrative one. Thanks to the deep-rooted mistrust of military commanders being handed

alantaris isle

Population: 110,840 (83% Anari, 5% Saxa, 5% dwarves, 3% elves, 2% engro, 2% frostborn)
Ruler: Elected council (Council of Citizens)
Religion: Maera, Neorthe, Var, and Ertha
Imports: Jewelry, iron, wine
Exports: Alchemical concoctions, grain, fish, timber, whale oil



too much power, a captain's companies may be scattered across the island.

Due to the growing threat from orcs, the army currently has ten captains commanding a total of 4,000 soldiers, with 1,000 support troops between them. The companies break down into 16 light infantry, ten heavy infantry, eight light cavalry, three heavy cavalry, six archers, and six artillery. Of these, one company of each type except the heavy cavalry serves as the city guard at Imperial City.

Treat the light infantry, cavalry, and archers as common mercenaries and the heavy infantry and cavalry as veteran mercenaries. Company sergeants use the stats for mercenary captains, while captains are Wild Card versions.

The remaining company, known as the Misfits, is a loose formation of adventurers, thieves, rogues within the Convocation, and military troublemakers. The former may enlist voluntarily, while the latter three have the option of signing up for a four-year tour in order to escape more traditional punishments for their crimes.

The Misfits are not so much an elite force as one used when more conventional methods cannot be employed. They are the ones who raid orc lairs and assassinate chieftains and priests, who infiltrate pirate crews to gather intelligence, or track down enemies of the state and ensure justice is meted out. Under the company's charter, any treasure they acquire is supposed to be split 20/80 between the members and the city, with the city coffers receiving the greater share. In practice, the figures are reversed.

In days of yore, when the Anari dominated much of the Hearthlands, Aspiria, and Chalcis, huge galleys powered by slave labor gave them naval superiority. Since slavery was abolished the navy has been rebuilt around smaller, more maneuverable vessels. One skeid, four snekkes, and ten drakkars, employing a total of 1,000 men, patrol the waterways, ever vigilant for pirates and marauding frost giants.

While every captain of a ship holds that title, not all ranks are equal. Those commanding the drakkars are termed captains, those piloting the snekkes as senior captains, and the officer in charge of the sole skeid as captain of the fleet. Despite the latter's impressive sounding title, he has no authority over the other captains.

As part of an agreement with Aspiria and Chalcis, the navy operates along these nations' coastlines as well, sometimes taking part in joint maneuvers. Attempts to add the Magocracy to this naval pact have met with failure.

In addition to the full-time soldiers and marines, Alantaris maintains a militia. Each settlement outside Imperial City may appoint its own militia as it sees fit, but under law the council may call up all militia in time of need. As befits the bureaucracy that oversees the island, accurate records are kept and checked when the militia musters each year (done to test response).

The City Guard protects Imperial City. As well as being a military force they are also keepers of the peace, aided in this duty by clerics of Hothar. A militia of 500 citizens is maintained, though all weapons are stored in the central armory to prevent armed uprisings. Citizens who sign up for militia duty are awarded 1 gs a year, a token sum used to help offset some taxes.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Isle's days as a major mercantile superpower are over. As the capital of a mighty empire, goods from across the continent were transported here by Anari merchants, and huge quantities of grain, iron, gems, and timber exported to the provinces. Its markets were full of luxuries inconceivable in quantities today.

Today trade is far more modest. Ships from Aspiria unload barrels of wine, while those from Chalcis carry metal ingots and jewelry. Angmark has steadily eroded Alantaris' dominance of the trade in fish, timber, and whale oil to Chalcis. While the island is closer to Aspiria and the Magocracy than their Saxa rivals, Angmark's merchants are slowly extending their routes, leading to increased, and unwanted, competition.

The bulk of Alantaris' grain exports are destined for the Freelands, most notably Aslov, and the eastern Low Winterlands. Until recently, goods were shipped to Leirvik. However, the law in Angmark requires all imports to be sold to a local merchant, who then transports them inland and sells them on at hugely inflated prices.

In a bid to weaken Angmark's growing power, grain ships have been transferred to Port Helgen in the Magocracy instead. Cargos are sold for a lower price and much of the shipments are eventually sold to war-torn Vestmark or to Coglelund, but the merchants would rather suffer this drop in profits than directly fuel Angmark's expansionistic mercantile dreams.

Of course, this has had a knock-on effect in the Freelands and Low Winterlands, where grain prices have risen sharply as a result of Coglelund's taxation policies and reduced shipments.

Trade with the Crystalflow Confederacy, once a major trading partner, has all but ceased since the formation of Orcmark. The formerly safe and prosperous route is now considered too dangerous, though merchants willing to risk the orc pirates and increased number of sea monsters can make colossal profits selling whale oil.

One thing the bureaucracy of Alantaris does well is handle taxation. Individual taxes are detailed below.

Duty: 2% of the value of goods being exported, 3% of the value of goods being imported. These taxes apply to Alantaris Isle as a whole and are collected either at Port or the gates of Imperial City.

Hearth Tax: 1 ss per fireplace in the home (paid yearly).

Poll Tax: Every adult who wants to vote must pay 1 ss when they turn up at a voting station.

Property Tax: 5% of a property's value (paid yearly).

Tolls: 1 ss per person, 2 ss per mount or beast of burden, and 5 ss per cart per person traveling between Port and Imperial City. This helps maintain the vital road.

Wall Tax: 1 ss per household. This helps to fund the army and navy, and maintain Imperial City's fortifications (paid yearly).

ARCHITECTURE

Ask anyone to picture Imperial City and they likely imagine rows of stone houses standing amid opulent palatial structures and temples. While the latter is true, the former is not. Even the houses of the rich and powerful are timber structures covered in mortar. Unlike the Saxa, who generally use entire logs, the houses of Imperial City are cut planks, the outer layer laid horizontally and the inner layer placed vertically to strengthen the wall. Roofs are covered in wooden shingles and are steeply pitched to allow rain to run off into the streets.

The warehouses and granaries have stone lower levels, up to about three feet, and then wood atop. This helps prevent flooding ruining the contents and keeps out most of the vermin.

For some strange reason, many of the grander buildings are viewed as having great porticos supported by towering pillars. Quite how this myth arose is unknown, for the grandest structures in the city are blockish affairs with minimal decoration. Archways are more common than squared doorframes and many ceilings are vaulted, but this is the peak of Anari architecture. Even the Imperial Palace, with its high tower topped by a dome and spires, is a rather unattractive building.

In the provinces, houses take a slightly different form. The traditional design is a squared capital "C." The central area is the room, and the two arms containing a bedroom for the owner and a storage room. Most outbuildings are simple wooden shacks with just a single layer of planks nailed to a supporting frame.

While small settlements were rarely fortified before the Blizzard War, the number of orcs has made this a necessity. A standard village has a wide, deep ditch crossed only by one or two wooden bridges. The latter can be pulled down easily by design. The inner edge of the ditch abuts a high earth mound, atop which is a palisade and walkway. Many villages have a watchtower as well.

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are new places of interest for the heroes to visit and explore while adventuring on the isle.

ANNWN RIVER

The protection of Imperial City and Port requires five companies apiece, leaving 29 battle companies (the Misfits never perform regular duties) to maintain order in the rest of the island. Much of the eastern island is in the hands of orcs, and the Council of Citizens has, for now, redrawn the border along the banks of the wide but slow and shallow Annwn River, which flows south from the Three Peaks to the coast. It flows for a mere 30 miles, yet built up on its western banks are five motte-and-bailey forts. Each houses one company, rotated every three months to ensure they remain fresh and alert.

While the forts they occupy vary, there is always two light infantry, one heavy infantry, one light cavalry, and one archer company on duty along the border. During the summer, the border is reinforced with one additional company of light infantry, heavy infantry, light cavalry, heavy cavalry, and archers.

No artillery is based here, for the border cannot be held against a concerted orc attack, and artillery pieces are not cheap. That said, most companies employ at least six artillerists among their strength and have constructed makeshift catapults.

BURROWFIELD

Population: 250 (90% engros, 10% Anari)
Ruler: Lady Mayoress Sower Violet Longstem

During the lengthy rebuilding after the Blizzard War, the council granted land to anyone prepared to work it, so long as they agreed to obey their dictates. Several engro families looking to settle down and make a new life for themselves founded the village that was to become Burrowfield.

Preferring to live with nature rather than impose themselves on it, the engros constructed wooden houses and then covered them in turf. When the first outsiders came to trade with the new community they likened the houses to rabbit burrows, from where the village gets its name. While the diminutive folk still prefer their traditional home, the handful of human settlers who chose to live here erected more conventional abodes.

A mayor, elected by common vote every four years, governs the village. The incumbent is Violet Longstem, a priestess of Eostre Plantmother with big ideas just starting her second term. Burrowfield is primarily an agricultural community, with families keeping small numbers of goats, cows, and chickens for personal use. Violet, a keen smoker (her nickname comes from the long-stemmed pipe she uses), traveled extensively before coming to Burrowfield ten years ago. During her wanderings she saw firsthand the wealth that cultivating pipeleaf has brought the Vale and Ostmark. With its warm, wet summers and rich soil Alantaris Isle is ideal for growing the plant.

To date, there is just a single field of the fragrant plant, enough to satisfy the locals' cravings and permit a small quantity to be exported to the capital. Given time, and if enough other settlements devote farmland to pipeleaf, Alantaris Isle could rise to dominate the trade in western Rassilon. Burrowfield Blend, as the local variety is known, is sold in the village for a very reasonable 8 gs per pouch, but customers are limited to one pouch a week due to the small quantity cultivated.

Violet's plans are not without setbacks, though. Orc patrols occasionally trouble the region, but more worrying is the last two pipeleaf harvests have been reduced due to fungal raids. Neither the local druids nor the cult of Eostre Plantmother have been able to establish communication with the raiders and the small militia (1 druid and 10 Bludgeoners) is finding it difficult to patrol the fields and protect the village. The mayoress isn't about to let a bunch of "mushroom men" spoil her plans. Violet offers a bounty of 20 gs per fungal slain. Their corpses will be mulched down and used as fertilizer as a warning to others of their kind.

THE FEY CASTLE

The first anyone on Alantaris Isle knew of the Fey Castle was seven years ago. On the first day of fall, a day many recall with clarity because of the heavy mist that rose suddenly and unexpectedly, a faerie knight clad in armor of flickering shadows rode into the capital on a horse made of smoke. In a loud voice that seemed to emanate from everywhere and nowhere, he proclaimed that his mistress, the Lady of Shadowy Form, an Unseelie noble of great power, had constructed a castle beneath the boughs of Orc Wood. At its heart had been placed a great treasure, a relic of old. To claim it, one needed only to take it. With that, faerie and horse dissolved into a host of moths and flew away.

The prize of a relic has lured many to the foreboding castle, but none have reached its heart. Survivors tell of shadow elementals, darklings, and shadow trolls, terrifying or deceptive illusions, and rooms of utter darkness littered with deadly traps. Even members of the Convocation have succumbed to the temptation, but they have fared no better than rogues and warriors, for all attempts to circumvent the defenses by magic met with failure.

While the average commoner might greatly desire to possess a relic, he lacks the courage and skills to tackle the Fey Castle. This does not prevent him from speculating on the nature of the relic, of course. In inns and taverns across Imperial City, everyone has an opinion on what the prize might be.

IMPERIAL CITY

Arcane Alley: A nickname given to Earth Street, whose shops cater almost exclusively to the needs of the Convocation. A few of the more notable shops are described below.

Alchemical Apparatus: While this shop does not sell alchemical devices, it does sell the equipment necessary to create them. Members of the Convocation and cult of Maera can purchase an alchemist's trunk for 225 gs. It also sells ingredients for creating alchemical wares, though it has a standing agreement with Scribes and Scrolls (see below) not to offer ingredients for creating scrolls. Ingredients cost Convocation members and clerics of Maera 40 gs per Rank instead of the usual 50 gs.

Alchemical ingredients should be noted down on character sheets simply as "Alchemical Ingredients" and then the amount of gold scields they are *worth*. This way the hero need only cross off 50 gs worth for each Rank of device he is creating. Even though players might spend less money on each Rank's worth of ingredients, they should still note them down as being worth 50 gs per Rank. This will save any confusion when it comes to using them at a later date.

Cover to Cover: Books are rare things in Rassilon, and bookstores more so. One of the few to be found on the continent, Cover to Cover buys and sells any form of written material, providing it has a value or might be of interest to a regular client. The store hosts an auction on the first Marketdaeg of each month, where tomes of lore and tomes of elemental learning acquired during the preceding month are sold to the highest bidder. Tomes of learning other than those concerned with elementalism are never auctioned.

If a player wishes to bid, there should *always* be a rival bidder. To calculate the rival's highest bid roll 2d6 and multiple the result by 50 gs for lesser tomes of lore, 150 gs for greater tomes of lore, or 250 gs for tomes of elemental learning, and add it to half the tome's usual cost (the starting bid). The full bid must be paid before the book is handed over.

The Ermine Emporium: Whereas adventuring elementalists favor tough clothes or armor, those living and working in Imperial City like to dress to impress. The Ermine Emporium is the unofficial tailor to the arkhwisards, which in turns means many members of the Convocation chose to shop here. While it specializes in tailored clothing, formal and normal clothing is available for those with smaller budgets. Most citizens agree that it is the Emporium's skilled tailors who set the fashion for the coming year.

Scribes and Scrolls: Catering to the needs of studious elementalists, this shop sells parchment, scroll cases, and writing equipment. It also offers a range of specialist inks and others ingredients for the creation of alchemical scrolls. Members of the Convocation or cult of Maera are charged 30 gs per Rank instead of the usual 50 gs.

The Arkhwisard's Rest: The finest tavern in Imperial City, the Arkhwisard's Rest caters solely for arkhwisards and their guests. Despite the magical firepower the patrons wield, security is tight. The



The Imperial City

1. Citizens' Palace
2. The Wall
3. Imperial Palace
4. The Theater
5. The Tooth
6. The Arkhwisard's Rest
7. Arcane Alley
8. The Justicary
9. The Rubble
10. The City Wall of Old
11. The Dagger
12. The Dragon's Rest Inn
13. The Ghost and Tankard
14. Helping Hands
15. The Hall of Banners
16. Imperial Palace Library
17. The Humped Horse
18. Horn Alley
19. Public Baths
20. The Rubble Market
21. Temple of the Four

Population: 32,600 Ruler: Elected Council

doormen, all of whom have strong wills to resist magical influence and bribery attempts, carry a list of all the arkhwisards currently within the Convocation. Those they do not recognize by sight have their names checked against the list. No name, no entry, no exception.

Non-arkhwisards are permitted entry only by direct invitation of an arkhwisard and must sign both in and out. This rule applies even to the high and mighty of Imperial City. Many promising magisters and trusted servants actually have letters of introduction, allowing them entry at any time (the tavern operates 24 hours a day, eight days a week). Regardless of one's status, no weapons, not even daggers, or armor are permitted beyond the threshold.

Richly appointed at great expense, the interior is divided into small booths, across which velvet curtains can be drawn to ensure privacy, and separate private rooms, which can be hired for a reasonable fee. A roaring hearth warmly lights the main hall, and each booth has a separate oil lamp for when the curtains are drawn. There is also a well-stocked library. Although it holds a few arcane reference tomes, most books are related to other topics, such as history, law, and travel.

Locals maintain the tavern is the true political heart of Convocation politics. In veiled booths, the powerful mages make secret deals with peers and outsiders alike. While there is an element of truth to this, much of the conversation is rather mundane. Despite its reputation, the tavern is merely a cozy retreat to enjoy good food, strong drink, and polite company for powerful mages who wish to avoid the constant questions of their inferiors and the pressures of life within the organization.

The City Wall of Old: Countless stories tell of how the Anari emperors were so rich they constructed walls of silver and gold (solid in some legends, just plated in others) around their city. Even today, five centuries after the Blizzard War, people scavenge in the Rubble in the hope of finding a sliver of precious metal.

That no one has struck it rich is not surprising, for the stories of silver and gold walls are later inventions. The actual walls were built of limestone and yellow sandstone, monumental in size and decorated with vast murals, but just ordinary stone nonetheless.

The Dagger: Only an idiot starts a fight in this tavern, for it is the favorite haunt of the City Guard. Ironically, it is also a front for the thieves' guild. One of the empty tun casks (holds 256 gallons) in the basement is false—a trapdoor in the back of the cask leads through the wall to the main guild headquarters.

The tavern takes its name from an unusual game played using a throwing dagger. A large wheel is divided into colored segments, with each segment worth varying points based on its width. The wheel is mounted horizontally and spun. Each contestant has three throws. Whoever scores highest, wins the stake.

In game terms, participants simply make three Throwing rolls and add up the totals. This is their final score for the round. A typical game is best of five rounds.

The Dragon's Rest Inn: One of the more famous inns in Imperial City, the Dragon's Rest is named for the huge dragon wing bone sticking up from the floor. According to legend, an elementalist severed a Hellfrost dragon's wing during the attack on the city. The story goes on that the beast crashed into the nearby wall, demolishing a sizeable portion. Some citizens claim the dragon bone is actually from a whale.

Over the years, the innkeeper, Jehan ap-Gontier, has allowed famous heroes to carve their names on the wing bone to commemorate their visit. Jehan has brewed his own ale, which he proudly calls Dragon's Blood. It isn't particularly good, and is more commonly known by another name referring to a warm liquid produced by most creatures with full bladders.

The Ghost and Tankard: This busy tavern gets its name from a most unusual activity—drinks and plates are not delivered by servers, but float across the room seemingly of their own accord. Regulars claim the tavern is haunted by a helpful ghost, though they know the story is bunkum (the cult of Scaetha, ever ones to spoil a party, launched an investigation).

The proprietor, Fluvant Nailbiter, has no hands. A retired soldier who lost his hands in battle, he claims a hermit taught him how to wield the power of his mind. Fluvant can use *telekinesis*, but he is no mage. Etched into his bald pate, which he covers with a hat whenever in public, is a complex pattern of silver threads.

Fluvant doesn't know it, but he is a Puppeteer experiment. His memories of being a soldier are false implants, and the threads are psionic circuitry that allows him to cast *telekinesis*. Somehow he escaped from the laboratory where he was being held before his programming was complete. The Puppeteers are keen to find him before his real memories resurface or his secret is revealed to the public. Unfortunately for them, he was created in the Freelands. They have no idea he has managed to reach Alantaris Isle.

The Hall of Banners: Eylúðr, minor god of heralds, has no dedicated temples, but that was not always the case. In the glory days of the empire, the imperial court sent heralds far and wide to deliver messages of friendship and threats of war. Over time, the temple amassed a great number of banners—gifts from those who bowed willingly before the emperor and trophies brought back from battlefields by the victorious armies. Hung in the temple, they were used to instruct novice heralds.

Although the temple survived the destruction, the survivors had little need of Eylúðr's cult and it quickly fell out of favor. It was widely believed the banners had been burned as fuel during the hard times, but a decade ago they were unearthed in a basement of the Imperial Palace.

Purchased for a token sum by Flore ap-Guiborc, a retired herald of the Council of Citizens, the banners were put on display. For 1 ss, visitors can gaze upon the moth-eaten standards of the former allies and enemies of Alantaris. They are of little use to modern heralds, for the youngest of them is over 500 years old and the realms they once represented are naught but memories.

Helping Hands: Arcane Hands are trained only in the Magocracy, but they are often sent out into the world to work with clerics and other mages in order to learn their particular casting styles. Founded just three years ago, Helping Hands is a joint venture run by five Arcane Hands. Not only do they hire themselves out as bodyguards, they help visiting Hands in search of work find suitable employers.

The Humped Horse: This unusual watering hole sells only coffee, an expensive import from Al-Shirkuh. It is owned and run by Jamal ibn Mustafa. A junior member of a mercantile expedition, he never intended to emigrate from the Free Emirate States. Unfortunately, his ship sailed without him, leaving him stranded with just a bag of coffee beans. Three years later, Jamal runs a popular and prosperous business, has married an Anari, and considers himself a citizen of Alantaris Isle. The name of the coffeehouse comes from its sign, which depicts a camel, a creature very few natives of the isle have ever seen.

Imperial Palace Library: The greatest library in Rassilon resides within the former palace of the Anari emperors, now the headquarters of the Convocation of Elementalists. Although it contains many specialist treaties on magic, it is open to the public between dawn and dusk every day except on high holy days of Hoenir and Maera. It contains a shrine to Hoenir in all his aspects, and to Maera, patron of the Convocation.

Often crowded (roll 2d6 x 10 for the number of patrons), it appears unguarded. Four of the patrons are actually elementalists, one from each school, and two are paladins of Hoenir. While they appear to be browsing books just like the true patrons, they are secretly monitoring activity within the library.

Stories about a secret archive are true. Admittance is restricted to senior clerics of Maera, the Norns, and Scaetha, and arkhwisards. Player character clerics must be disciples and either have the Noble Edge to represent their status or be granted an equivalent rank to high priest in play to gain access. Of course, they must learn the secret archive even exists first.

Admission: Open to all at the rate of 5 gs per hour.

Specialties: The Anari, the Convocation, arcana, cult of Maera, demons*, the Demongate Wars*, elementalism (* found only in the secret archive).

Investigation Rolls: +2 general, +4 for specialties. The library is well organized and the librarians are adept at finding books in record time. Investigation rolls here take only 1d4 hours.

Norn Alley: The residents of Imperial City are not preoccupied

with fate, but the memory of the Blizzard War is strong and folk like to know what perils may be lurking around life's corners. Norn Alley is a local nickname—the street is properly named Water Street.

Along its length is a small shrine to the Norns, a larger one to Hoárri (minor goddess of divination), and dozens of fortune-tellers. For a few silver scields, one can learn one's fate through the runes, cards, bumps on one's head, the lines on one's palm, the movement of the stars, patterns formed by dripping wax, animal entrails, and interpretation of dreams.

While several of the fortune-tellers are clerics of Hoárri, none are clerics of the Norns—the cult of fate does not sell information concerning the future to any one who walks in off the street. Most of the fortune-tellers lack any true powers of divination. The cult of Hoárri tolerates their existence with a wry smile—if it is a person's fate to consult a fraud, then who are they to argue.

Public Baths: The baths are part of the temple of Eira, though they are maintained by the council and are open to the public for a small fee. The baths are typical of saunas across the continent, though on a much grander scale. At least one bannik resides here. Fortunately, the fey is on good terms with the cult of Eira, and takes any grievances to them rather than enacting revenge itself.

Tunnels: Running beneath the city is a warren of tunnels, many wide enough to accommodate two handcarts side by side. Large sections have collapsed, but enough remain that someone who knows the route can cross the entire city without setting foot above ground.

The existence of the tunnels, many of which connect to the basements of shops and the grander houses, is well-known in the city. The stories regarding them are almost as numerous as the tunnels themselves. The most popular one is that they were installed by thieves, allowing them to rob any premises at will and then disappear like ghosts into the labyrinth. Other tales say they were constructed so the citizens could hide in them in time of invasion, are a transit system that could accommodate barges, were used by the emperor's guards to arrest citizens in the dead of night without altering other traitors, or are the remnants of some ancient civilization and were simply reused when Imperial City was founded.

The truth is far less fanciful. The reason the tunnels run between the shops and basements of the rich is because they allowed servants to go to and fro without being seen above ground. Much of their travel was for legal reasons, such as picking up the shopping, but occasionally they carried subversive messages between conspirators.

Because most of the exits are now bricked up and clearing the tunnels would cost too much, no one bothers to patrol them. The thieves' guild has set up its headquarters down here, installing their guildhouse behind a secret door designed to look like a bricked up archway. They are currently researching a way to bypass bricked up doors without having to tear them down and rebuild them, or spend a fortune on alchemical devices.

The Rubble Market: The traders who operate in this shanty market cater to the poor and the curious. Their wares are scavenged from the Rubble and the sewers. Most of it is worthless junk, but occasionally an item of true value (mainly historical, but sometimes financial) appears on a stall. The Convocation makes regular sweeps, confiscating anything magical. They don't always get to the items first, though—the Reliquary has several agents in the capital.

Temple of the Four: Named for the four elements, rather than the Convocation's ruling body, the temple of Maera is part of the Imperial Palace. It is open to the public from dawn until dusk, though it is closed to non-followers on holy and high holy days while services are being conducted.

The cult is currently bereft of a high priest following the death of the previous incumbent two years ago. A corpulent man with a known love of buttery pastries, he died of heart failure. At the instant of his death, clerics tending the grand altar noticed spidery writing forming on the surface. The words spelled out a message, "The one who cannot touch shall rule."

While scholars began studying the writing and trying to deduce their meaning, the clerics elected a new high priest. His ascension ceremony was promptly halted when the priest charged with anointing him was stricken dumb. Six more attempts, each with a different high priest elect, met with the same fate. The clerics are now convinced that the message is from Maera, and that the next high priest must meet the cryptic criteria. Some are beginning to whisper that the next leader of the temple must be a ghost, a thought that begins with it fear and confusion. Others are looking toward Fluvant of the Ghost and Tankard, even though he is not a cleric of Maera.

GMs are free to interpret the message as they see fit. It is intended, however, to refer to a cleric of Maera who has the Magic Forbiddance Hindrance, a very unusual occurrence.

MERMAIDS' POINT

On the southern coast, close to where Steelbark Wood encroaches on the ocean, is a remote headland. Directly beneath it is a sandy beach. For untold generations, the beach has been a favored spot for havmandr to gather. No steps leads from the bluffs to the beach, nor are there any settlements within a half day's ride—the merfolk are happy to interact with air breathers, but they desire the site to remain untouched by the hand of man. Even the cult of Neorthe has been refused permission to erect a temple nearby.

Fishermen from as far away as Port come here to converse with the merfolk and seek their blessing, as did their forefathers. Given the inaccessibility of the beach from land, they sail here in their fishing boats, dragging them onto the shore to prevent them being swept away by the tide. The havmandr voluntarily surface only by the light of the full moon. Those who seek their assistance or company at other times must climb the bluff and blow upon a large conch tethered to a rusting iron post.

The traditional gift to ensure full nets is wine, though of late the havmandr have developed a taste for expensive Aspirian imports. It can be a high price for a lowly fisherman to pay with any regularity, but the potential rewards are equally high—those the havmandr choose to favor are guaranteed not only full stomachs but also plentiful fish to sell. Other possible rewards are less tangible—good weather, fewer tangled or torn nets, and favorable winds.

MOLDY MINE

The gold and silver mines of Three Peaks no longer resound to the clamor of thousands of picks and hammers, save perhaps in orc territory, where wise men do not venture. One of the most prosperous, and one not in orc hands, has become known as Moldy Mine. The last attempt to reclaim the working occurred 25 years ago.

The venture was a joint one. The miners were citizens, promised an equal share of the profits they unearthed. In return for a hefty cut, the Council of Citizens would supply a company of soldiers for protection and to erect a fortified camp. To great applause they marched from the city, the minds of the miners filled with thoughts of the wealth waiting to be exploited and those of the soldiers of the dreary work and monotonous duties ahead. Three months later, scarcely a quarter of those who departed to fanfare stumbled back into the city, a tale of horror on their lips.

The mine was not abandoned. Even as the party approached, they heard the tell-tale sound of picks and hammers on stone. A squad of volunteers was chosen to investigate. Several hours later, the soldiers returned with a story of fragile skeletons working at the gold veins. Washing the powdery bone dust from their faces, the soldiers proclaimed the skeletons had been destroyed and the mine reopened.

The miners hated their new environment, for it was slick with mold and spores often filled the tunnels, though these were easily combatted by wearing masks. The deeper shafts (which happened to be the more profitable) were soon avoided, for those who ventured there reported seeing strange shapes in the shadows and a feeling of being watched.

Within a week sickness had spread through the makeshift camp. The soldiers who first investigated the tomb succumbed first, but others followed soon after. At first the fatigue only slowed production, but soon people were too exhausted to work and later fell into comas. The first death occurred four weeks after the party arrived. Worse, the dead did not stay dead for long.

The sickness worsened and the dead kept rising. With many of

SKELETON, MOLDBONE

Though moldbone skeletons are known in Al-Shirkuh, in Rassilon they have been found only in Moldy Mine. Unfortunately for those who seek to claim the mine's bounty for themselves, the variant found there is far more virulent than its southern cousin. Infected by a virulent mold, their bones are dirty gray or yellow, and very fragile.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d4
Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6
Pace: 7; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6
Gear: Varies, but typically a short sword, axe, or mace (Str+d6) or a mining tool (Str+d6, –1 Parry)
Treasure: Meager per 3 skeletons
Special Abilities:
* **Bony Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Choking Cloud:** A wounded moldbone skeleton explodes in a choking cloud of bone and mold. All adjacent air-breathing creatures must make a Smarts roll to hold their breath. Failure means they inhale mold spores and becomes infected. Each week thereafter, the victim must make a natural Healing roll or gain a level of Fatigue. This can lead to Death. The only hope for a cure after the first 10 minutes is a course of anti-fungal herbal remedies (treat as per antibiotic).
The flesh quickly rots from those who die of the infection. Within 1d4 hours they rise as a moldbone skeleton.
* **Fearless:** Skeletons are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called shots do no extra damage. Immune to disease and poison.

their number dead or dying, the decision was made to abandon the camp. Those too exhausted to walk were left behind and placed in the hands of the gods, for the survivors knew they were doomed.

The story caused widespread panic. Citizens, fearful the miners and soldiers had brought plague to Imperial City, looted shops before barricading themselves in their homes. It took the military a week to quell the unrest and restore order, though it was the cult of Eira's proclamation that none of the survivors displayed any symptoms of illness that eventually brought the matter to a close.

A generation later and the Council of Citizens is contemplating another attempt at reopening the mine. This time it plans to hire adventurers to clear out any remaining skeletons, which the Council considers to be responsible for both the "haunting" of the deep shafts and the infection.

The cause is not the spore mold, but one of the spores of a colony of diseased fungals, into whose caverns the original miners accidentally tunneled. The spores act exactly like the Choking Cloud of a moldbone skeleton (see sidebar on p. xxx), except covering one's mouth and nose has no effect—the spores can enter the bloodstream through the eyes, as well as exposed cuts.

MONASTERY OF THE EMPTY HAND

Population: 45
Ruler: Clenched Fist Verrine Iron-Fist

Three Peaks, once a populated and prosperous region, has been largely abandoned since the Blizzard War. One small outpost that has kept the flame of civilization burning is the Monastery of the Empty hand, a fortified temple to Ermunaz, the god of unarmed combat. Ascetics, the clerics live a life of meditation, rigorous exercise, and constant martial training.

Each summer for the last five years, orcs have attacked the monastery, something they had never attempted before. Despite using only their bare hands and feet, the clerics defeated each wave, though not without losses. The last assault was particularly savage, the orcs assembling a greater force than ever before. When the two-day battle ended there were just 15 clerics and 30 laity remaining.

Despite the heavy losses her clerics have endured, Clenched Fist Verrine has no intention of abandoning the temple. To do so would not only be an admission of defeat, but it would give the orcs an outpost within striking distance of Imperial City.

Verrine is curious as to why the orcs have suddenly turned their attentions to the monastery. Their main bases are further east, in Orc Wood. Are the orcs planning to assault the capital, attacking the temple only because it is an obstacle, as many of the clerics believe? Verrine is not so sure. In the last encounter, one orc warrior managed to utter a few words before death eventually claimed him, "The black orb calls."

Against her better judgment, the paladin has agreed to two requests from her followers. First, outsiders are being hired to investigate the mysterious "black orb," for it is undoubtedly important. Second, adventurers are being hired to track down the main base of the orc tribe responsible for the assaults and deal the creatures a blow that will require several years to recover from, so giving the temple the chance to bolster its defenses.

In return, the clerics offer gold and martial instruction. The latter, which requires four months of constant training at the temple, allows a hero to take the Martial Arts Edge (an Edge prohibited to all characters except clerics of Ermunaz), so long as they meet the requirements.

OAKWOOD

Population: 160
Ruler: High Councilor Blandine ap-Arnoul

Governed by an elected official aided by an elected council, Oakwood is one of dozens of logging settlements dotted along the edge of Steelbark Wood. Remote and inhabited by hard-working people with little time for adventurers and their strange ways, the village would be utterly unremarkable were it not for one thing—its resident high priest of Eostre Plantmother.

Franco the Fey is a much-loved if rather odd fellow. What he lacks in stature he makes up for in exuberance and wisdom. A former soldier, he found faith late in life. Franco's oddness and nickname stem from his heritage, for he is Seelie fey-touched (see p. xxx). His pupils are golden-hued, his beard grows at such a rate that he must trim it back to stubble every day or risk tripping over it, and his right leg is made of living wood.

Asked about his past, Franco claims that his mother was a fey queen and his father a mortal adventurer. His wooden leg is a replacement for one he lost in battle against orcs. Although not made of flesh and bone, it works just as well as his original limb.

Franco is married to a glaistig (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*) named Mame o' the Wood (Mame is a Classical Anari word meaning "mother" or "protector").

Although a cleric of Eostre Plantmother, Franco is not opposed to the logging on which his community relies. He personally selects every tree to be felled, praying to Eostre on behalf of the loggers whose axes will bite deep and thanking the tree's spirit for its sacrifice. In return, he expects every villager to attend Eostre Plantmother's major festivals.

PORT

Port is a small settlement, boasting just over 3,100 souls, including the 500 guards stationed here, but it is a bustling center of trade. A good half of the population are involved with the sea and sea-trade somehow, whether fishermen, chandlers, sailmakers, carpenters, shipwrights, merchants, or teamsters.

Chandlers' Row: This entire street is made up of ship chandlers. With so many competing for business, customers can get a good deal by playing one chandler off against another. Rope and rations, the most likely goods sought after by non-seafaring adventuring parties, can be purchased for 75% of the normal prices if the heroes are prepared to spend several hours shopping around.

Fisherman's Wharf: The informal name for the joint temple to Neorthe and Var, the Wharf, as it is commonly known, caters for merchants and mariners. Divided into two wings, the outside is bedecked in scrimshaw donated by sailors and whalers over the years, as well as shells, lengths of old rope shaped into cresting waves, and other flotsam and jetsam salvaged from the sea.

Directly outside is the fish market. While much of the catch is salted and exported, fishermen hang a portion of their wares here for the townsfolk to purchase. Day or night, the whole area stinks

of fish. Not unsurprisingly, a large number of semi-feral cats congregate here.

In Neorthe's temple are housed the office of the navy, recruiting chambers for mariners and marines seeking employment, the harbormaster's office, and the worship hall. A small shrine dedicated to Thunor and Freo stands in one corner. On the top floor is a communal sleeping area for visiting sailors. For 1 ss a night the mariners receive a sleeping space, to mugs of ale, and a light meal of bread, soup, and cheese.

Much of Var's temple is an indoor market, with permanent stalls set up for locals and visiting merchants. Several small rooms are available for merchants wishing to negotiate prices with buyers or sellers.

Paladins of both faiths maintain security, though they have little to do but break up drunken brawls and arrest the occasional pickpocket.

The Fortress: Dominating the bustling docks is a large, windowless, heavily-fortified stone building. Despite its common name, it is actually the customs and excise warehouse. All goods entering Port by sea from foreign lands must be delivered here for inspection and tax assessment. Until the process is complete, they are kept under lock and key.

The staff are efficient, but they are few in number and overworked. Largely honest, they are not above bumping a cargo up the list in return for a handful of gold scields. Bribing them to stamp a manifest without inspecting the cargo or collecting the appropriate taxation costs considerably more.

The valuable contents are a natural draw for thieves. In charge of security is a cleric of Lasesmed, the minor god of locks and traps. In order that he cannot be intimidated or bribed into giving away the warehouse's security, he wears a mask and gloves when at work. No one in Port knows his identity—he is referred to only as the Master of the Locks. Routine security is provided by a small number paladins of Var, their diligent services paid for from tax revenues.

Meals with Bite: A popular eatery, the Bite serves a variety of fish dishes. Its specialties, when available, are shark steak in butter sauce and a hearty shark and vegetable soup. The proprietor, Rikard ap-Stane, pays fishermen 25 gs for a regular sized shark and 100 gs for great whites. Anyone who could bring him a fresh megalodon would walk away with 500 gs and a friend for life. See *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion* for shark stats.

The Whale Yard: The warm waters flowing up from the southern ocean make the seas off Alantaris Isle rich feeding grounds for whales. Carcasses are towed back to Port, where the blubber is rendered down for oil, a grisly and foul-smelling operation.

Originally, the meat was either sold as dog food or discarded. After the cult of Neorthe threatened to withdraw its blessings from the whaling fleet (allowing water creatures to be harmed except for food is a sin), citizens quickly developed a taste for whale flesh. Not only has it added to the local diet, but the Whale Yard has boosted its profits through the new revenue stream.

The Yard also operates a small shop. Whale blubber can be purchased at the standard price and whale oil at 1 gs per pint. Even with whale now on the menu, there is always plentiful going. Air-dried whale steaks cost 2 ss per pound (enough to count as a day's rations) or 1.2 gs for a week's worth.

SEOLFORTON

Among the many settlements abandoned during the Blizzard War was Seolforton. Once a major town near the prosperous silver mines, its citizens died in agony as a brace of Hellfrost dragons fired upon the town. With the realm in utter chaos following the destruction of Imperial City, looting silver was the last thing on the survivors' minds.

Over the centuries the location of the town has been lost, its site swallowed by forest, but the name lives on in song. Skalds claim the town was so prosperous that the temple of Ertha was lined with solid silver, and that the nobility dined off silver plates and shoveled foods into their mouths with silver cutlery. Many of the town's wealthy citizens were supposedly buried in coffins not of wood or lead, but pure silver.

Fanciful as they may be, these tales, and they were primarily created to warn among the sin of greed and how for all their wealth the inhabitants could not thwart or bribe the Hellfrost army to spare them, attract adventurers to the forest each year.

Some say the souls of the greedy citizens refused to depart the mundane world on their deaths, and that they still haunt the town. Tales of silver-coated zombies, victims who died in agony as cold-fire melted the silver statues and walls of the prosperous town, are common in the taverns of Imperial City.

TOMBS OF THE EMPERORS

What few historical records survived the destruction of Imperial City state the emperors of old were buried with fabulous treasures, as does folklore. Among the fragments are lists of the grave goods for two emperors, treasures with an amassed value of hundreds of thousands of gold scields. Alas, what neither records nor folklore tell are the locations of the imperial tombs. While carved marble effigies of the emperors lie in the crypts beneath the Imperial Palace, they are not tombs—excavations have revealed no human remains nor as much as a single silver scield.

Over time stories have arisen claiming the tombs were carved into the Cold Hills. Protected by dwarf-carved doors of cunning design, deadly traps, and golems, they await discovery and plunder.

Many have searched, but few have ever returned. The Cold Hills are forbidding terrain, inhabited by tribes of hostile orcs, families of vicious giants, and things of which sane men do not speak of save in tortured dreams. Earthquakes are not unknown, and many hillsides are covered in scree and boulders, the result of landslides and avalanches. Of those hardy souls who staggered back to civilization, none have reported finding anything resembling a tomb. Perhaps, as many now believe, the stories are pure fiction. Others are less sure, for the Cold Hills cover a vast area and there are countless nooks, valleys, and gorges yet to be explored.

THE TOWER OF SINFUL DEEDS

On the southern edge of the mountains stands a lone tower. From a distance nothing looks untoward, for the landscape of Alantaris Isle is littered with buildings in various states of abandonment. Only on nearing does one realize the lower level is partially sunk into the ground, forcing those who wish entrance to crawl through the doorway on their hands and knees.

The inhabitants of the nearby sheep farming villages avoid the tower. They claim a corrupt nobleman built the edifice during the dark days of the empire. Within its walls he practiced all manner of debauched and sadistic acts on his victims (often virgins of both sexes). In his lifetime it was known as the Wailing Tower, for the screams of his victims would carry on the wind. The tower is sinking, so stories go, because of the weight of the sins committed there, for such was their number that even Ertha could not support the structure.

Some folk say the noble was deemed so wicked that the gods would not permit him entry into the Abyss, lest he make it a worse place. Instead, his spirit was condemned to spend eternity inside the tower. Here his specter waits for anyone foolish enough to trespass, for he still craves to unleash his perverse brand of misery on others. Locals know when a traveler has failed to heed their warnings, for pained moans and unearthly wails are heard emanating from the tower's slit-like windows.

THE TOWER OUT OF TIME

Both mages and clerics of Maera agree that before the Blizzard War there were many more forms of magic than are practiced today. Most of these schools had few adherents, and the arcane knowledge they gleaned from studying the threads of magic was lost in the war and the chaos that followed.

One such mage was Matthius Wallir, whose name exists only in folklore. By all accounts he claimed to have mastered control of time, a force not even the gods could bend to their will. What became of him is a mystery, for he seemingly vanished. Stories abound

that those who entered his tower in search of him either never returned or emerged decades older, despite no more than an hour passing. Some, so skalds claim, withered to such an age that they crumbled to dust.

Despite being a relatively minor figure, Matthius features in many fanciful tales. One says that both the mage and those who never returned from his tower are still there, trapped in limbo between time, where even the gods cannot reach. A related legend has the mage living his normal life, but always a few heartbeats out of sync with the rest of the world. Variants on the theme have the mage transported backward or forward through time, causing time to overlap within his tower, thus creating several co-existent realities, or causing time to repeat itself over and over until the end of creation. Another claims he learned his art from a time demon. Eventually tiring of the mortal, the demon devoured the mage and took up residence in his tower. He might even have summoned a time elemental, though no such creatures are known to exist.

Whatever the truth may be, time does not always run smoothly in the vicinity of the tower. Firsthand accounts exist of travelers pausing to perform some minor task, such as tighten a strap or buckle, only to complete the task to find hours have passed (as evidenced by the motion of the sun), or reaching their destination several hours ahead or behind schedule, despite no increase or reduction in their pace. Sensible folk give the tower a wide berth.

GMs with the *Hellfrost Encounters Book 1* may wish to look at encounter #36, The Haunted Tower, for inspiration.

PERSONS OF NOTE

ARKHWISARD BRIGGZEE

Scion of a noble Alantarian family whose ancient lands were a dukedom under the emperors, Briggzee was given the name Guicharde ap-Baudouin at birth. Well versed in the history of the empire and the glory of its emperors by the time he went to school, Guicharde was an arrogant child, retaining many of the flaws of the nobility, such as considering himself everyone's better. Needless to say, he was not popular.

At the age of 12 Briggzee undertook schooling at the Convocation. Ridiculed by his peers for his archaic stance on social class, he changed him name and dropped any aspirations to his family's worthless noble title, throwing himself into his arcane studies in a bid to earn a new title by his own merits. His arrogance never went away, though, for he quickly made it clear he would, one day, be proclaimed an arkhwisard. Twenty-five years later, Briggzee's boast became fact.

Despite achieving his goal and being awarded the second highest title in the Convocation (only membership of the Four eludes him), Briggzee still remains arrogant. In his eyes, the Anari of Alantaris Isle were unjustly robbed of their rightful place as rulers of Rassilon by a quirk of fate, that quirk being the Blizzard War. He despises the current government of Alantaris, seeing democracy as preventing the Anari from rising once again.

Too wise to lead an uprising directly, and ever wary of his peers, many of whom have their own grand schemes, Briggzee began researching the island's past in the hope of finding something that would aid his plans. After three years, he stumbled across reference to a secret arsenal hidden far outside the city walls.

Although disappointed not to discover a stash of relics, he was overjoyed with what he did find—a small contingent of steelbark golems. Unfortunately the golems were inanimate, and Briggzee had, and still has, no idea how to animate them. Unwilling to delve into golem lore, an area still heavily policed by his peers, Briggzee has taken to hiring adventurers to delve into old ruins in the hope of finding the enchantment necessary to breathe life into the inanimate army.

Once awakened, Briggzee intends to use the golems against the council and install himself as the new emperor of a resurgent Anari superpower. And if the Convocation stands against him, well, the orcs inhabiting the island are always looking for ways into the City, and Briggzee knows many of the secret ones.

ARKHWISARD PASSEROSE AP-GIRARS

Arkhwisard Passerose, an Anari female from Aspiria, holds the position of Master of the Vaults. Her job is to oversee the Convocation's collection of relics. In order to prevent the Reliquary from gaining possession of these rare and irreplaceable treasures, it was decided the Convocation would root them out and store them in the vaults, where they could be studied at leisure and their secrets gleaned.

As a maegister, Passerose was part of the team charged with investigating relics. An expert in the theory of magic, she hoped to make leaps and bounds into unraveling the nature of relics. Ten years and a promotion later, she is no closer than when she started. Then a man working for a mysterious buyer made her a proposition.

While Passerose goes through the motions of studying relics, most of those she personally investigates are fakes, common items imbued with absolutely no magic. Of the original relics, some she has sold to her mysterious patron, and others she has passed on to interested third-parties.

Under Convocation law, the illegal trafficking of relics is punishable by death (it's hard to hold a wizard in prison, especially an arkhwisard). Though she is fabulously wealthy by any standards, she is trapped in her role as thief. When she told her patron she wanted to end their arrangement, he produced a dossier of her crimes, providing evidence, fabricated of course, that she had been selling the relics to orcs in Orcmark. In order for the dossier to remain their dirty secret, all she had to do was continue to smuggle relics out of the Vault, accept the vast sums of coins, and keep her mouth shut.

Unsure who she can trust in the Convocation, she is looking for outside parties of renown and honor to help her. She is truly repentant of her crimes, and is quite prepared to donate all her ill-gotten gains to the temple of Maera as part of her penance. However, she isn't interested in recovering the dossier, as multiple copies may exist. No, what she is looking for is a group of adventurers to break into the Vault and remove all the counterfeits she has placed there over the years!

Unfortunately, security at the Vault is extremely tight (which is why she managed to steal only a handful of relics every year) and there are many traps, magical and mundane. In order for a robbery to be believable, all the security measures would have to remain in place. Of course, she isn't about to tell prospective accomplices that they are walking into one of the biggest death traps in all of Rassilon.

COMPANY SERGEANT AIMON AP-HUON

Built like an orc and twice as ugly, Aimon ap-Huon, nicknamed Blodskegg (Blood-Beard) by his men because of his fondness for eating raw meat, is commander of the Misfits, and has been for 15 years. Technically he answers to Captain Fierbras ap-Yon, but the captain is scared witless of his subordinate and rarely bothers to give him any orders. Instead, he leaves the council or one of his aides to deal with the sergeant.

Aimon has a well-deserved reputation for being a wild beast in and out of combat. He is ruthless to his foes and harsh on his troops, forcing them to complete long route marches in grueling conditions. New recruits are often told his nickname relates to his tendency to eat those who fail him, a fact many could quite believe.

Although he is hard on those who serve under him, he does it for their own good. His company is expected to achieve the impossible without heavy firepower or backup, often living in the wilds for weeks on end and facing terrifying beasts while operating in small teams. Those who cannot survive his harsh routine would stand little hope of survival if captured by orcs.

That said, if any one else dares berate his troops they must face Aimon's wrath. For all his rage and menacing demeanor, he loves each and every one of his troops as if they were his own children, and no one, but no one, has the right to chastise them except him. His troops grumble, as all soldiers are wont to do, but they respect their commander and would gladly die for him.

Unlike many sergeants and captains, Aimon asks his men for their input when planning a mission, asking them to speak freely, for sometimes even the stupidest idea may contain a brief glimmer of brilliance.

ANGARION

Angarion, the last remnants of an ancient forest, is home to the largest population of hearth elves in Rassilon. Here they dwell in harmony with the world, shunning contact with other races and defending their homes with lethal efficiency as they have done for time immemorial. Their numbers are dwindling, but they remain resolute in holding to the old ways of their ancestors. Much of the material in this section applies to all hearth elf domains.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Angarion.

* **Living Forest:** Thanks to pacts made long ago with the fey, the vegetation of Angarion is prone to moving. Creepers and plants can cover over a trail in moments, and even landmarks such as trees can move around. Avoiding getting lost requires a Survival roll each day. Penalties apply if the elves are consciously trying to confuse intruders.

* **Many Spies:** It is virtually impossible to walk an elven forest without the elves knowing one's location. The animals and plants are quick to pass word of strangers to the nearest elf community. Draw a card from the action deck every day. A red card means the elves' forest spies have discovered the location of the intruders. From now on, they will be watched wherever they go by seemingly innocuous animals. A party of elves begins tracking the characters, typically after 1d4+2 days (sooner of the GM rules the spy was a bird or fast moving animal).

* **Metal Objects:** Hearth elves do not produce great quantities of metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they do trade for them. The price for metal items in their realms, when they can be found, is increased three fold. When trying to sell metal spoils of their adventures, a hero's roll to find a buyer has a +2 bonus.

* **Nobility:** Hearth elf characters can never rise above the title leaflord unless they become the ruler of a domain. Given leaders are expected to serve their community and be present to give advice, their adventuring time is heavily curtailed.

* **Trade:** Hearth elves are fully aware of coins, but they have no use for them within their realms. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in most realms. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

ORIGIN OF THE ELVES

Whether through arrogance or ignorance, the elves (hearth and taiga) believe themselves the first born of the gods. This claim is dismissed by frost dwarves, treated with skepticism by humans, smirked at by engros, and treated with utter contempt by the dragons, an elder race for sure, who refer to the elves as the "twice-fallen." Both giants and gatormen claim to have walked the world before the elves, though history has erased all knowledge of which race first rose to sentience.

The origin of the elven race begins in that unfathomably ancient epoch when the God War ravaged the heavens. The gods, powerful as they are, were served by countless minions of varying power. Some, like the heralds, were mighty creations born from the blood of the gods themselves. Others were lesser beings, ephemeral entities conjured by stray thoughts to perform menial tasks beneath the attention of the great deities. For reasons of their own, reasons now forgotten by the passage of incalculable time, not all these minions, blessed as they were with free will, chose to join the campaign.

The gods never forgot the treachery of their minions. When the God War finally ended, they were judged by Hothar and found guilty of the heinous crime of endangering the existence of the gods, and thus the very fabric of the universe. Some, like Dargar and Tiw, demanded the ultimate penalty—erasure from existence—but greater numbers called for leniency. After much debate a decision was reached—the traitors would be cast from the heavens into physical form, placed in a realm betwixt that of the divine and the mortal. Thus were born the fey—powerful, mysterious, ancient, but eternally fallen from grace.

Though the fey often visited the mortal realm, there was little to hold the interest of most. Some, though, sought comfort and purpose in tending the plants and animals, seeking to redeem their sins by tending the virgin garden. Their love of the mortal world, a lesser plane of existence, caused their kin to grow angry. The rogue fey were ordered to cease their visits or be forever banished from the fey realm. Some caved in under the threat of yet another expulsion, for the memory of their first fall remained vibrant in their minds in these ancient days. Many refused to acquiesce, for they were still gifted with free will and sought to be masters of their own destiny. Thus they were expelled a second time, this time cast down to the mortal world, further removed from their divine origin.

Over immeasurable ages the fallen beings slowly lost their fey heritage. Whether this was a curse laid by the fey or the taint of the world they now called home is unknown. They became mortal creatures of uniform appearance and beliefs, long-lived in comparison to those who would come later, but no longer able to wield the strange glamour of their kind. Eventually, they lost the knowledge of how to return to the fey realm, and with it the origin of their species. Thus were born the elves, a race twice cast out from higher levels of existence.

This tale is now lost to the elves. Though they maintain good relations with many fey (old wounds heal), they have no inkling that once they walked among them as equals, and before that strode the starry firmament as divine entities.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Elven society is divided into social classes. Outsiders refer to these as castes, but the term is highly misleading. To hearth elves, occupation and usefulness to society are more important than birthright.

Hearth elf society is governed by the nobility. The only king is found in Angarion. Other nobles hold ancestral titles based on the original size of their domain. Thus, a forestlord may not rule as much land as a boughlady in the current age, but his ancestors did millennia or centuries ago.

Elf nobles appoint heirs based on who will best serve the community. Thus, the titleholder may appoint any of his children, a blood relative, or more rarely a member of a different caste as his heir. Because of this system, political machinations, something few associate with elves, are rife. Traditionally, the offspring of the king are titled princes, as are their children, while the offspring of other nobles take the title leaflord.

Beneath the nobles are members of the religious caste. Clerics of Sigel hold the highest status, then those of Eostre, Ullr, and finally the other benevolent gods. All clergy are expected to be councilors,

both to the nobility and those of lower status. They have no power to overrule decisions, only the wisdom to help ensure the correct decision is made in the first place.

Druids rank third. Although Eostre has clerics, druids have long been honored as defenders of the wild. It is the druids who maintain relations with the fey who inhabit the elven realms. Like clerics, they are councilors. But they are also warriors, forming a vital part of the realm's defenses.

Within most realms the druids form themselves into a council, the head of which is elected to hold the title Arch Druid until such time as his colleagues deem another should be appointed. The Arch Druid is a senior advisor to the ruling noble and technically ranked among the religious caste rather than the druid caste. He in turn takes advice from the other druids.

Next are the warriors, rangers, and hunters, those who defend the realm from invaders and watch over the communities. Wood warden captains rank highest, then members of the king's bodyguard (the Brilliant Blades), professional soldiers, and finally hunters.

Below them are the crafters. Master craftsmen are senior, then wood-shapers, an ancient caste who retain the magic for shaping wood, and then all others who practice a valued craft. Elementalists often fall into this caste, for they work with magic.

Finally there are the other members of society, those who fit into no other strata. They are not a lower class as humans would understand it, for their skills are still essential to the survival of the community. A humble berry gatherer may not seem like a prestigious occupation, but it is they who know when to harvest, how much to harvest to ensure a good crop next season, and, more importantly, exactly what to harvest.

Exact social caste is flexible. A noble elementalist is still a noble, whereas an elementalist who serves as a warrior is treated as a member of the higher caste.

THE FEY NOBILITY

The Shining King may be the ruler of the elves of Angarion, but he is not the sole authority. Vast sections of the forest are divided among powerful fey nobles of both courts. While they rarely interfere in mundane affairs, and certainly demand no oaths of allegiance from the elves, they are powers the king cannot readily ignore. Most interaction takes the form of gifts, which elves leave to honor the ancient pacts betwixt mortals and fey.

EDUCATION

Given good health and a non-hazardous lifestyle, an elf can expect to live for around 400-500 years. Elf children grow at about half the rate as humans, reaching maturity in their 30th year. After this, the aging process begins to slow dramatically. As a rough rule of thumb, subtract 30 from the elf's age and divide it by five to get an equivalent human age.

Education is very much hands on and handled by all members of the community. Storytellers teach much of the history, culture, heraldry, and law of the hearth elf race, but others are free to add their wisdom. Identification of plants and animals forms a core part of childhood, for the elves retain their role as gardeners and protectors of the wild. In order to learn what it means to be responsible for the wellbeing of nature, young elves are given a plant or animal to nurture to maturity. Typically the animal or plant chosen has a relatively short lifespan—young elves must grow accustomed to death and destruction, for these are a fundamental part of the great and eternal cycle of life.

Children are also expected to serve their community. They help with minor chores, such as preparing meals, collecting firewood, sharpening weapons, feeding livestock, fetch and carry supplies, and so on.

As they mature, they learn how to move through the forest without disturbing it. Partly this is out of respect for the woodland, but it also serves as training for future life, when they may be called upon to defend their homes. They learn the secret names of plants, and charms to make them move aside to allow easy passage.

Hearth elf children are taught Hearth Elven as their first language. Secondary languages most favored are Arboreal, Beastspeech, and Fey. A few learn the languages of races neighboring them, but Trader is not common.

While frost dwarves and taiga elves are quite insular, hearth elves are less reticent about mixing with other races. They are not as comfortable outside their forest homes, and they rarely allow intruders to venture far into them, but they are open to dialogue and limited trade.

RELIGION

While hearth elf society is more uniform than that of humans, the gods worshipped varies by realm, as with the other races and cultures. In Angarion, three are held in higher esteem than others, though most are honored at some time or another.

Sigel is the patron of Angarion. Among hearth elves in general he is considered the husband of Eostre and co-creator of the elves. Every elf community has a shrine to the sun god in the form of a sundial or small stone circle (a representation of the sun disc). Remnants of a bygone age when magic was more plentiful and the elves wiser in such lores, the stones glow at night. Their brilliance has dimmed as Sigel grows weaker, a reminder that all is not well in the heavens.

Eostre is the great mother. While her cult has two aspects, elves in general worship her as a single goddess. She is the mother of their race, and the creator and protector of all plants and animals that grow on Rassilon. Temples and shrines are uncommon, for the whole of Angarion is viewed as one vast, living temple.

While many consider elves to be strict vegetarians, they do eat meat, fowl, and fish. Hunter-gatherers by nature, they honor Ullr as the third most powerful deity. Unlike humans, elves rarely hunt for sport. All parts of the kill are used, for to do otherwise is an insult to Eostre and the spirit of the slain beast.

Among the many misconceptions regarding them is the belief they are pacifists. Elves are certainly not warmongers, but they prefer to kill only in self-defense. Eira is popular, but more for her gift of herbalism, an art in which elf healers are accomplished masters.

Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor are worshipped as the gods of the four elements. Worship is strong among the druids (though Eostre is their patron) and elementalists (elves having developed the art long before humans adopted it). Most elves offer prayers to the elemental deities at some point, for they form the very fabric of the mortal realm, and together allow life to prosper.

Freo is the son of Ullr. He supposedly taught the elves how to move unhindered through forests. Prayers are offered frequently, but clerics are rare—the hearth elves have scant interest in the greater world.

Elves are not bookish creatures, but they are knowledgeable—it is hard not to acquire wisdom when one lives for centuries. However, elves rarely write books. Hoenir's clergy are storytellers, passing on the ancient stories in poem, song, and tale. Hence, among the elves skalds honor the god of knowledge rather than the Unknowable One.

Elves are generally law-abiding, but their laws derive from the natural laws, not the laws of civilization. Free will and community spirit lie at the heart of elven culture, leaving little room for worship of Hothar and his strict conformance to the law.

Maera, Sigel's sister, is the goddess of the starry firmament and patron of elementalists. It is she, the elves believe, who gave them the gift of all magic except druidism, which is a gift from Eostre.

Rigr is popular among the warriors, for elves are ever watchful for intruders. Tiw, by comparison, is not, for elves see no sense in battle for its own sake. Ullr is the primary war god. As much as they detest undead, a twisted mockery of Eostre's vision, Scaetha has few adherents. Her role as defender against the undead is relatively new, at least in terms of elven life spans, and Sigel is still the main champion against darkness. The elves peculiar funerary rites deny her as goddess of death, for nothing ever truly dies.

The Unknowable One has no official status. He has followers and clerics, but most elves have no patience for his japes. If something must be learned, then it is better to be told outright, not taught through experience. The passing of knowledge from one generation to the next is a mainstay of hearth elf culture.

Hearth elves know of Var, but they are poor traders due to their belief in community spirit and sharing. A few hardliners resent him, for his greed encourages the exploitation of the world's resources.

Many other races and cultures consider the hearth elves to be a good race, mysterious and sometimes overly aggressive in the defense of their realms, but incapable of true evil. Such talk is utter nonsense. Hearth elves are just as capable of acts of wickedness and servitude to the dark gods as any other beings. True, there are fewer elves found in the cults of Dargar, Niht, Thrym, Hela, and Vali than humans, but this is only because there are few hearth elves remaining.

Funerary Customs

Nothing lives forever. Flesh ages, trees rot and fall, mountains are ground to dust, and stars fade to blackness. Eons may be required to bring death, but it will come eventually. Even the gods, so it is said, are destined to die one day.

Death is a sad time for elves, for the loss of wisdom is a blow to their diminishing race. Yet it is also a time for celebration, for elves hold that death is not the end of existence.

Hearth elves believe that every mortal creature is made up of three distinct parts. First there is the flesh. While obviously very important to the living, it is nothing more than a physical shell. Contained within the body are two spiritual forces. The first is the soul, which is divine in origin. The second is known as the source.

The soul is a god's breath, implanted in the body at the time of conception. It grows and prospers through acquiring knowledge and honoring the gods. The latter does not mean praying or offering sacrifices—any elf who performs his job well honors the gods. Those possessed of slow wits, who fail to live up their potential or slack off at work, or who dishonor the gods are deemed to be "soul sick." When a mortal dies, his soul returns to the heavens, whereupon it is judged before being assigned to the Afterlife or the Abyss.

The source, on the other hand, is borrowed from the world at the moment of birth. It is the source that ties elves to the natural world, for it is part of their very being. It is fed by merriment and sunlight. Mournful mortals or those who hide in the shadows from Sigel, are said to be "depleted." On death, the source, suitably fattened by enjoying life, returns to the earth.

Standard funeral practice is to inter the dead in the ground. While the flesh decays to provide physical nourishment, the source returns to the earth to provide spiritual sustenance. Cremation is never practiced—burning a corpse deprives the natural world of its twin sources of sustenance.

Given that funerals are both sad and happy times, they are accompanied by a mixture of mournful wailing and joyous singing as the story of the elf's life is recounted.

Military

As mentioned in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, elf communities are protected by professional warriors (rangers) and druids, plus the elite wood wardens.

The largest formation in Angarion comprises every ranger and druid, plus every adult. The army is commanded by the war captain. The war captain, who is also one of the king's advisors and is treated as being a noble, has sole command over the army. The Shining King can overrule his decisions, but he has never done so, nor have any of his predecessors—the war captain is appointed for his experience, not his belligerence.

The professional army, which numbers 1,500 rangers and 300 druids, has never mustered as a single force, and it is unlikely it ever will. Should every potential warrior be called to arms, the elves of Angarion can rally close to 15,000 troops. For such an act to occur, the threat would have to be of cataclysmic proportions (even during the Blizzard War the entire army was never called to arms).

The army is divided into companies. Each company protects a single region within the forest. Due to variations in population, a company comprises anywhere from 20 to 100 troops. They are led by a captain. With additional troops, the strength of any company can swell by as much as fivefold.

The smallest unit comprises three to five members. Typically this is made up of four rangers and one druid. One of the number holds a rank equivalent to that of sergeant among humans. These small patrols watch over the borders, constantly roving through the forest to check on communities and living off the land.

Protecting the Shining Kings and his palace falls to the Brilliant Blades, a company of 100 bladedancers. His closest bodyguards are also paladins of Sigel. They have not seen their master in a century, yet they continue to stand vigil over the king's private chambers.

The Wood Wardens are servants of the Shining King, but they are not considered part of the regular army. They are less concerned with protecting any one realm, and instead focus on protecting forests as a whole. Given their training, they are an elite force, but one which operates largely on its own recognizance.

Elves dislike metal armor, partly because they are not skilled metalworkers and partly because it is heavy and noisy. Speed and stealth are essential parts of elf tactics. Long bows are favored missile weapons, and elves are widely regarded as the best archers in Rassilon. Spears and long swords are the preferred melee weapons.

Elves are often regarded as being dirty fighters, for they prefer ambushes to pitched battles. To the elves, such tactics merely play to their strengths and knowledge of the wild. It also ties into an ancient belief that anyone who fights on their enemies' terms is doomed to fail.

Unlike many cultures, elves have always blended magic and steel in harmony. Many druid spells can be employed in war, and the elves are not shy about doing so. The elves also employ animals in war, as scouts, messengers, and soldiers. Such allies are not treated as expendable assets—the loss of an animal ally is as much a loss to the community as that of an elf.

Hawks fly high on the wind, spying on enemy movements before swooping down to blind enemy commanders and spellcasters. Packs of wolves harry cavalry and skirmishers. Raging bears smash through enemy ranks, rending and crushing with their powerful limbs and jaws. Swarms of biting and stinging insects can inflict much devastation, especially against massed ranked.

The elves can also call upon many fey, both Seelie and Unseelie, to aid them. Such assistance always comes at a price, and the elves are loathe to summon the fey too often or for trivial matters.

A typical small elf ambush is detailed in *Hellfrost Encounters Book 1*.

Trade & Tribute

No trade roads pass through Angarion, nor do the elf settlements house any great markets. Self-sufficient in everything they need for daily life, the elves export art and jewelry only in return for preserved food and seeds (which they store in preparation for hard times) and spare weapons.

When the elves trade, they do so only on the very edge of their territory. Only rarely will they send caravans out of the forest, for bandits are a constant risk and removing soldiers to protect caravans leaves communities exposed. Trade locations are frequently moved, and often at very short notice. Visiting merchants find this annoying, but there is little they can do if they want to do business with Angarion. Although few guards are ever visible, experienced merchants know that any attempt to double cross the elves or take their wares by force will unleash a deadly volley of arrows and spells.

Aside from their swords, spearheads, and arrow tips, the elves have little use for metal. They consider mining a detestable practice—the excavated ore can never be fully replaced. Clothing is mainly leather or wool, though the elves are master of weaving plant fibers into durable clothing. Bowls and utensils are wooden, and cooking pots are rare—meat is roasted on spits while many vegetables are eaten raw or steamed in the stomach of animals (nothing goes to waste).

Elves do not pay tax, nor do they accept demands of tribute from others. Every elf is part of his community, and that community can only survive if the whole is strong. A portion of hunted or gathered food is given to the community, usually through the local cleric of Eostre. Those short of food can request assistance. No stigma is attached to this request.

Angarion



Population: 23,048 (99% hearth elves, 1% engro)
Ruler: The Shining King
Religion: Sigel, Eostre, and Ullr
Imports: Self-sufficient
Exports: Art, jewelry

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E
S
Shapryr/Icirvik
Icirvik/Est
Icirvik
Torvik
Woolacombe
Draugr Hills
Rindal
Deadwood Forest
Stonesthrow
Summer Vale
Orc Nest
Orc Nest
Orc Nest
Orc Nest
Dale
The Dragon Tooth
The Fey Crossroad
White Death Forest
Angarion
Forest of Angarion
Forest Giant's Hold
The Lodge
The Tilting Glade
Bare Hills
Sun-bright Temple
Halfw
Border Crossing
Heath
City of Angarion
The Parliament of Tree Men
Web Wood
Green Stream
Troll Ford Bridge
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Goods are considered joint property, though certain restrictions apply—one would not borrow a ranger's only sword, leaving him defenseless, for instance. Not only does it endanger the life of the ranger, but it threatens the entire community. That said, the elves have been around long enough to understand that other races value personal possessions.

ARCHITECTURE

Hearth elf settlements are always created above ground, in the boughs of great trees. This practice has led many to believe elves live in trees, sleeping on open platforms so as to be closer to nature. Elves ignore such claims, for they know that building in the boughs provides concealment both from above and below, and gives the elves cover while unleashing deadly volleys of arrows and spells.

Architecture takes two forms—ancient and modern. Ancient architecture is organic, artificial wooden construction blending seamlessly into growing trees by magic workers known as wood-shapers. Elven constructions are thin and seemingly flimsy, yet are as strong as stone thanks to the ancient magic employed in their creation. Wood-shaping is a rare art these days, and few have the ability to master the art.

Modern buildings are built on thick circular platforms built around the girth of trees. Buildings are thus similarly round. They are beautifully worked, elegant by the crude standards of humans, but lack the finesse of the older constructions. Angles are still unusual, for elves prefer natural curves.

Similar platforms exist in many places throughout the forest realm. No buildings adorn these, and they are well camouflaged. They are used as watch posts by soldiers and are kept well stocked with preserved food.

Except for the Sun-Home, temples are not enclosed buildings, nor are they found above ground. Most are little more than stone circles or sacred groves.

In order to prevent fire destroying a community, hearths are found only outside buildings (except in the temples of Kenaz). Stones are sometimes used to surround the hearth, but elves prefer to use planks of fire resistant hardwood native to Angarion.

Lighting takes the form of torches (placed away from vegetation), glow flies placed in wicker baskets (they are released after a few days), or ancient glow orbs, rare magical spheres that emit constant light but no heat. These orbs are extremely fragile and most have been broken over the centuries. Today, only the noble palaces and great temples use them.

MAJOR LOCALES

Angarion is a vast, forested realm. Its tangled vegetation and tightly packed trees conceal many elf settlements and sacred places, or well as sites even the elves fear to disturb.

THE DRAGON TOOTH

The battle between Sigmundr, then a huscarl of Tiw and later minor deity of dragon slaying, and the first dragon, Loki's offspring, was long and savage. At some point in the struggle Sigmundr struck the dragon in the jaw, causing one of its colossal teeth to break off. It fell from the heavens like a spear, crashing into the mortal realm in what is now Angarion.

Whether the elves predate the dragons or vice versa is one of Rassilon's many mysteries. What is known for sure is that the tooth was infected. At some point after it buried itself into the rich soil, things emerged from within the hollow interior. The only surviving records from that distant epoch are pictorial. They show elf warriors fighting against slithering and scuttling blobs of tentacled blackness, a host of spiders each with a hundred limbs.

The fell creatures defeated, the elves made sure no more could crawl forth and trouble the realm. Using their horticultural skills and ancient magics, they grew a living barrier, a dense tangle of spearthorn bushes 30 yards deep and 10 yards high.

One of the dangers of longevity is complacency. Once the thicket was watched over by vigilant warriors. Troubles elsewhere, and nary a murmuring from any surviving tentacled things, led the elves to relax their guard. In time, they neglected to post any sentries, though they did not forget the past. Even today children are warned from an early age not to tamper with the thorny barrier or disturb the tooth.

If there is evil remaining in the tooth, the elves' neglect may prove costly. A Wood Warden patrol recently reported that something had hacked a passage through the spearthorn. What they cannot tell is whether someone tried to reach the hill or whether something from inside the tooth has escaped.

THE FEY CROSSROAD

A total of 35 distinct fey realms of varying size overlap Angarion in whole or in part. Time means little to the fey, but even they favor an easy journey. In order to facilitate easy movement between the various realms, the fey constructed a series of gateways in the mortal realm. With just a few steps, a fey can leave his native realm, traverse the crossroads, and appear in a realm across the other side of Angarion.

The crossroads comprises a series of towering trilithons arranged in a wide circle. Each top stone is marked with the name of the fey realm to which the gateway beneath leads. Naturally, this is written in Fey. Because each gateway leads to a separate realm, the crossroads has no shadow in Alfheim. Similarly, the exit from Alfheim is very rarely marked by anything as helpful as a trilithon.

While even lesser fey can come and go through the portals as they please, mortals are not to fortunate. Until a gate is opened, stepping between the standing stones merely moves one to the other side of the trilithon. Doing so is not without risks—a fey noble may decide to momentarily open a portal as a mortal steps through just for fun, separating him from his comrades and stranding him in Alfheim.

Those seeking access to Alfheim via one of the gates can do little but make camp nearby (a risky venture with so many fey passing through the area) and wait to be noticed and invited in. Offering a gift may shorten the wait, but travelers must be careful not to cause offense by offering anything of too great or low value. A successful Knowledge (Fey) roll allows a mortal to select an appropriate gift.

Note that leaping through a gateway at the same time a fey passes through is not a short cut to Alfheim. Unless a fey noble extends and invitation, the fey will enter Alfheim but the mortal will remain in the mundane world.

THE FORBIDDEN RUINS

Among the many ancient ruins half-concealed beneath the vegetation are the crumbling tiers of a stepped pyramid of inhuman design. Explorations made long ago revealed no traces of writing or carvings. The elves consider the ruins to be haunted and largely avoid them. Once or twice a year a patrol makes a brief sweep of the area to check orcs have not moved in.

While the upper structure appears desolate, it houses a cunningly worked secret door. Stairs beyond lead down into the bowels of the earth, where the gatormen who created the structure excavated many tunnels and chambers. During the height of the empire it was used as a crypt for the earthly remains of priests. As the empire fell to decadence and decay, the remaining priests hid away what they had of their race's ancient knowledge and treasure, for they foresaw a time when their empire would stand no more.

While it is widely held that necromancy came into being only when Hela went mad, this belief holds true only with regard to the current pantheon. The gatormen had long known of such practices, though they considered them a fell art. The priests' final act was to awaken the mummified dead as undead guardians. It was hoped the gatormen would ascend from the flames of their empire and the knowledge be reclaimed, but such was not the will of the universe.

FOREST GIANT HOLD

Many forest giants live in Angarion. A small few are staunch allies of the hearth elves, having made vows of friendship in return for past

assistance. Most are neutral, aiding the elves only when common enemies threatens both races but otherwise ignoring them so long as they are not disturbed. Those living near the border with the Magocracy are ancient enemies, having long warred against the elves. The elves could muster the strength to destroy them, but the Shining King is unwilling to destroy them simply because they are unfriendly. A decree forbidding the elves from harming the giants was issued two centuries ago. His merciful order so long ago may cost the elves dear.

Five forest giant families have recently formed a clan. In place of their isolated steads they have constructed a massive stead, a single-story high yet as vast as many human castles. They have allied themselves with Unseelie fey and began raiding nearby elf communities. The elves fear that the giants' strength could soon be swelled by others of their kind. And with war with the Magocracy on the horizon, the elves can ill-afford to have enemies behind their lines.

The Shining King has been beseeched to allow the elves to destroy the vast hold before the situation requires dire intervention, but he has not yet replied. Unwilling to break their bonds of allegiance, the local nobles are considering something almost as unthinkable as disobeying their king's orders—hiring outsiders to do their dirty work for them.

THE GIFTING GLADE

Visually, the Gifting Glade is rather mundane. In the center of the large glade is a single trilithon of weathered gray rock standing 20 feet high and 8 feet wide.

For much of the year it is a mundane site, one rarely visited by the elves, though their animal agents keep a close watch over it. Trespassers the elves have allowed into their forest home are permitted to rest here, but those who defile the glade are sentenced to a swift death. The temperature within the confines of the glade, however, is clearly unearthly. During spring and summer, it is always as a Hearthlands summer's day, even at night. In fall and winter, the air is always as cold as a Hearthlands winter's night, even by day.

On Summer and Winter Court Day, the days when the fey courts swap over, the glade changes subtly. During the former, the day the Seelie ascend, the light is brighter, colors more vivid, and the air warmer. On the latter, when the Unseelie take power, the shadows are deeper, the colors muted into shades of gray, and the air turns colder with the rise of the sun.

Until a century ago, the marking of the two days was led by the Shining King. For the last 100 years he has sent proxies—the High Priest of Eostre on Summer Court Day and the Lord Paladin of Eostre on Winter Court Day. To mark the two days the elves leave gifts for the many fey nobles who govern Angarion. The great procession is ordered along the social hierarchy of the elves. During these two days only elves and those they have honored as friends may enter the glade.

Singing and music fills the air from sunrise to the next sunrise. During Summer Court Day, the songs and music are lively, tales of growth and welcoming back old friends. On Winter Court Day, the entertainment is mournful, though never morbid, telling of lengthy sleep and farewells. Words of friendship are spoken on both occasions, but never are oaths sworn—the hearth elves are a mortal race now and are beholden to their Shining King.

The gifts, while precious to the fey, are mundane in earthly terms—garlands of flowers, bowls of fruits and nuts, and perhaps a small wooden carving of a deity. Throughout the procession a steady stream of fey emerge from the trilithon, which acts as a doorway to Alfheim on these two days only, and collect the gifts. Gifts require gifts, and the fey nobles do not neglect their part in the ancient pacts. Each elf, from highest lord to lowliest commoner, leaves with something. As is the wont of the fey, a great noble might receive something trivial and worthless in material terms, while a lowly berry gatherer is handed a rare and precious object.

THE LODGE

Population: 30 (permanent)
Ruler: Warden-General Parthelo Boughrunner

The Wood Wardens' main refuge in Angarion is known simply as the Lodge. Its general location is well known to the elves, but trying to actually reach it can be a fruitless endeavor. Concealed by potent elvish charms and the living forest, only serving members of the Wardens, those they deem worthy of sanctuary, or those with whom they have wish to speak can find their way to the Lodge's door. In the latter case, wanderers often have little choice—the forest leads them to the Lodge. Even the fey have difficulty finding it.

Built entirely from wood, the enormous structure sits at the heart of a wide clearing. The main hall, the doors to which face the rising sun, can accommodate 100 people in relative comfort, though there are rarely anywhere close to this number present. The north side is devoted to guest rooms, the south to storage and workshops (including the kitchen), and the west to meeting rooms, the armory, and the private chambers of the senior Wardens (when they are resident). Outside, there is a shrine dedicated to Eostre (both aspects) and Ullr.

Visiting Wardens can stock up on arrows, dried herbs, herbal remedies, and druidic alchemical devices without needing to hand over coin. There is a price, though—those from outside Angarion they must either donate suitable goods of equal value or undertake some minor task for the local Wardens. Most often the latter involves checking out reports of orcs, giants, or trolls, carrying messages, or helping to craft replacement items. Wardens living in Angarion are already serving the kingdom.

Using the herbalism workshop grants +2 to Knowledge (Alchemy) rolls during the preparation phase.

ORC NESTS

While the elves would have outsiders believe their realm is free of orcs, Angarion is a huge realm, the elf communities are far apart, and their patrols cannot be everywhere. While it is true the orcs avoid the dark interior, they are plentiful on the western and northern fringes. The elves mete out death if the orcs appear to be gaining strength, but for the most part they are content merely to watch their enemies—they lack the strength to wage total war and so prefer containment. The elves frequently turn a blind eye to adventuring parties out to destroy the orcs.

THE PARLIAMENT OF TREE MEN

According to the elves, Eostre Plantmother created the tree men to tend and protect the forests, an activity the dwindling race continues to this day. The oldest tree men still mobile have ambled through the forest for a millennia, but they are young compared to the elders who make up the Parliament.

In a clearing in the wildest part of the forest stand six enormous trees. Each has a trunk so wide that 20 elves touching hands could not encircle them and they rise over 300 feet into the sky. Ancient beyond measure, they are actually first generation tree men. While they have never forgotten their sacred duty, the passage of eons has altered their nature. Their roots have sunk so far into the earth they are immobile, and rather than being fully sentient they have entered a deep torpor, leaving only the base part of their spirit awake. Despite being static and incapable of communication, they still aid those sworn to protect Rassilon's woodlands. Long honored by the elves, the trees have collectively become a sacred place.

The Parliament typically appears deserted, for the elves come here only on high holy days of Eostre Plantmother to offer blessings and offerings. Those with keen senses know the apparent lack of life is misleading, for the Parliament is home to many fey. While skogsra and wood wights tend to the tree men, wood warriors, sent to the mortal realm by the local fey lords, stand a silent vigil amid the surrounding vegetation. Since the elders are mute, tree men only come here out of respect if in the vicinity.

Spirit Name: The tree men have no distinct personalities and not even other tree men know their individual names. The elves refer to them collectively as Goeden Gyntaf ("First Tree").

Ambience: The area appears peaceful, but there is a subtle undertone. One immediately knows one has entered an ancient site, home to entities whose existence predates that of mortals by many millennia and who, if sufficiently angered, might yet be able to snuff out one's life in moments.

Deity: Ratatosk Tree Tender (Eostre Plantmother).

Senses: Notice d10. The spirit knows everything that has transpired in Angarion in the last few hours, having been informed by the trees and plants.

Communication: None.

Sacrifice: Of the civilized races, only elves, druids, clerics of Eostre Plantmother, and wood wardens can appeal to Goeden Gyntaf. Petitioners must address the trees in Arboreal, stating the reason why they seek the spirit's help. Goeden Gyntaf is not insensitive to the needs of mortals, but responds only rarely to requests that do not involve the protection of a forest. Similarly, it only responds to real and immediate dangers, not possible future threats.

The petitioner must make a Persuasion (–6) roll. He adds +1 for each character Rank after Novice and +1 if the request is made on one of Eostre Plantmother's high holy days. The GM should assign penalties if the request is frivolous or the threat minor and bonuses if it involves a great and powerful menace. A petitioner may make one attempt per season.

Powers: With success, one of the tree men elders drops a seed, a gift to the mortal. The GM may either select a seed type or roll 1d6 and check the result below. The petitioner knows the nature of the seed's power the instant he picks it up, as well as how to activate it.

Activating a seed requires it to be cast onto bare earth and the supplicant to expend a benny. The benny represents a surge of spiritual energy, which nurtures the seed. It instantly germinates into the effect described below. Unless otherwise stated, the boon remains for one hour or until destroyed, whichever comes first. The effects cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*.

Under no circumstances will the spirit gift an individual another seed if a previous seed remains unused—Goeden Gyntaf does not let anyone stockpile his seeds.

d6	Seed	Effect
1	*Aspen*	The seed transforms into a mass of vegetation centered on the spot it landed. It fills a Large Burst Template and acts like *entangle* cast with a raise. For the next hour, it acts as a *hamper movement* spell (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*) cast with a raise.
2	*Birch*	When the seed lands, vegetation grows to mark out an area equal to a Large Burst Template. The supplicant and all creatures allied to him gain the effects of *smite* cast with a raise on *all* their weapons so long as they remain in the circle.
3	*Chestnut*	A *barrier* of thick, sharp thorns sprouts from the point the seed landed. It is 5" long and the supplicant determines the shape it takes. Creatures can try to push through the thorny wall. This requires a Strength roll as an action. Whether the roll succeeds or fails, moving through the *barrier* counts as 3" of movement and inflicts 2d4 damage to the least armored location.
4	*Elm*	The seed transforms into a wood elemental under the supplicant's control.
5	*Larch*	The seed transforms into a war tree under the supplicant's control.
6	*Oak*	The seed transforms into a minor herald of Eostre. The creature is an Extra but has all the abilities of a standard herald. It is not under the supplicant's direct control, but will act in his best interests (so long as they do not oppose Eostre's interests).

THE RESURGENT FOREST

The Resurgent Forest does not yet exist. Bitter at the loss of so much ancient woodland down the ages, a cabal of elven Guardians of the Wild led by fanatical druids has spent the better part of 200 years planning to reverse the fortunes of Angarion. In secret, the elves have been seeding the lands within 50 miles of the great wood, discretely planting seeds in the soil of Angmark, Coglelund, the Freelands, and the Magocracy. Meanwhile, the druids, secluded away in a secret grove, have been conducting a ritual that has lasted almost a century.

Although they have suffered a temporary setback due to the effects of the Siphoning, the druids are nearing completion. The stars are moving into alignment and the great vessel used to contain the magic (an ancient tree) is almost full. When the time is right, the magic will be released in a sudden, tremendous burst. Life-giving energy will flood the region, causing the dormant seeds to not only sprout, but to reach maturity within a few days. Where now lie grasslands and gentle hills will stand a verdant forest

Such as an act is likely to lead to war, for the new borders of the forest will extend as far north as the trade road that cuts through the Draugr Hills, touch the outskirts of Halfway, and stretch to the western tip of Foulwater Swamp, cutting the Dukedom of Eastheath from the rest of the Magocracy (and incidentally surrounding Heath with trees). In the south, half of the Principality of Bremen and County of Llan will vanish beneath the new canopy. The cabal is prepared for this—some of the stored energy will be used to animate war trees and summon wood elementals as guardians.

GLADE UNICORN HORN

It is commonly held that the power of a unicorn's horn loses its potency on the beast's death. This is true, but there is an exception—a unicorn may voluntarily shed its horn. Lost in this manner, the artifact retains its potency even after the creature's death.

Such a blessing is rarely granted, for it deprives the unicorn of its Cold Foes and Glade special abilities. Without their horn, most unicorns wither and die come the next winter.

Such sacrifice should be a significant and moving chapter in a hero's life, not a case of "Here, have this cool toy!" Any hero granted a horn in this manner would either have to have a most remarkable destiny woven by the Norns or have already proven his valor against the most powerful minions of Thrym (ice demons and elder Hellfrost dragons rather than mere frost giants).

A shed horn grants the carrier *environmental protection* (cold). The horn can be used as a weapon. In game terms it can be used as a spear head or made into a short sword (piercing attacks only). Such a weapon does it normal damage for the type, and +2 damage to any creature with Susceptibility or Weakness (Fire/Heat). Neither ability can be *dispelled* or *negated*, for it is elder magic.

The magic works only for the one to whom the horn was gifted, however. Should the owner ever commit a mortal sin against Kenaz (regardless of his actual patron deity), the horn shatters.

SUMMER VALE

Even in the deep of winter, the temperature in this hidden valley is always the same as the Hearthlands in summer. The phenomenon is the result of the glade unicorns who call the land home. Unicorns are a dying breed, sacred to Eostre Animalmother and Kenaz, and Wood Wardens and Seelie fey always watch over them.

The leader of the herd is Balbursti ("Fire Mane"), a magnificent stallion with a fiery-red mane and a horn that glows like hot coals. Unlike other members of his species, Balbursti is sentient and can talk (he speaks only Arboreal, Beastspeech, and Fey, but understands hearth elven). He is a disciple of Kenaz.

How long he has walked Rassilon is unknown. Balbursti's name appears in ancient songs, and it is recorded that he attended the Shining King shortly after his birth. The noble and princely lord of the glade unicorns knelt in submission to the infant and touching the king's heart with his horn. Some skalds claim the unicorn whispered into the king's ear, but none are alive who witnessed the event save the two involved, and they do not speak of the matter.

Those who come to the valley with peaceful intent and seeking shelter are welcome to stop and rest, though they are unlikely to see one of the shy beasts in the flesh unless they are a druid or cleric of Eostre or Kenaz. Even then, a fleeting glimpse is all most

manage. If of sufficient status or deeds, the visitors may be greeted by Balbursti in person. This is an honor few have ever been granted. Visitors Balbursti welcomes gain +5 Glory.

Those welcomed here have +1 to natural healing rolls made here, so long as they spend at least the preceding 24 hours in the valley. If Balbursti welcomes them to his home, the modifier is +4.

Those who come to make mischief or with evil in their hearts will face the wrath of the fey and the elves sooner rather than later. Their fury will be of such magnitude that not even the mightiest foe has hope of escaping with its life.

With its perpetual summer, the valley is ripe with medicinal plants. The unicorns do not mind people gathering these herbs, so long as they take only what they need and leave some for others.

SUN-BRIGHT TEMPLE

While Sun-Home is widely regarded as the center of Sigel's cult in Angarion, rumors indicate the existence of a secret temple of great importance deep in the heart of the forest. One elf legend, passed down by those who witnessed the babe's arrival, claims that when the Shining King was found, he was clutching an amulet shaped like a stylized sun.

Forged from pure gold and intricately carved, it shone with the brilliance of the sun, paining those of dark soul and causing even those of pure heart to look away. Engraved on the reverse in archaic elven glyphs that glowed like hot coals was the cryptic phrase, "The Light shall rekindle the Flame."

The story continues that the amulet could not be pried from the Shining King's grasp, despite his being a mere babe. When the Shining King ascended the throne, the amulet, the existence of which never appeared in any official records, disappeared from history. Those few who know the story claim the Shining King had a temple constructed in secret. Here the amulet was believed stored.

Speculation concerning the temple is rife among those who know of its supposed existence, for there are no hard facts. Some claim it is protected by a fanatical cadre of paladins of Sigel, an elite branch of the Brilliant Blades whose sole duty is the protection of the relic. Their vows require them to slay any creature beside the Shining King who approaches the site. A variant says the amulet is tended by priests of Sigel who are never permitted to leave the temple or communicate with the outside world. Another tale says the temple glows with an unearthly light, a by-product of the relic housed within. As for the amulet, many believe its glare physically burns evil creatures, causing their flesh to blister and melt with prolonged exposure.

The stories are mostly true. There is a secret temple, it is guarded by a fanatical sect of Sigel's clerics, and it does hold a powerful relic capable of destroying evil creatures. Unfortunately, the relic's power has waned dramatically over the centuries. Where once it shone as brilliant as the sun, it is now a pale imitation of its former glory, its majesty reduced to a dim glow. Most of those charged with guarding it are convinced its magic will fail when the Shining King dies, but a few are growing concerned the opposite is true—when the relic eventually fails, the Shining King's life will end.

WEB WOOD

The area immediately south of the Bare Hills has always been a dark realm, largely avoided by the elves except when they have needed to enter to drive out orcs.

Home to a powerful Unseelie fey noble known as the Black Widow, the region is inhabited any several species of aggressive giant spiders, not to mention swarms of their smaller kin. Great webs strand the great trees, while high in the boughs bundles of tightly woven web conceal the withered remains of animals and elves sucked dry of their vital fluids.

Cultists of Spiðari, the spider goddess, recently driven from Spiderfell Wood by the brave actions of a small band of heroes, have taken refuge here. Untroubled by the spiders or their fey ruler, to whom the cultists have sworn allegiance, they have began spreading the influence of their vile cult among the neighboring hearth elf communities. The cult is small, but growing rapidly.

WHITE DEATH FOREST

A deadly curse has befallen a remote region in western Angarion. Winter is now a permanent feature, and many trees at the heart of the area have turned to living icewood. Strange elementals and icy creatures, monsters known to the taiga elves but unheard of in the hearth elf stronghold since the dark days of the Blizzard War, run amok. Wardens have reported sighting frost giants migrating to the area. While many giants have been slain by the vigilant guardians, some have broken through the cordon.

The frigid region comprises two concentric circles of biting cold. The core has a 10 mile diameter. It is blanketed in permanent snow and ice. Treat the temperature as the Outer Hellfrost. The outer ring is a further 20 miles in diameter and has a climate equal to the High Winterlands.

During the Blizzard War, many Hellfrost dragons met their demise while trying to raze Angarion to the ground. One, a colossal ancient beast said to measure 300 yards from snout to tail, fell to the earth in the center of the blighted region. Its flesh has decayed, leaving naught but a few weathered bones and its shriveled, icy heart. Thanks to Thrym's machinations, that withered heart has began to beat once more. Each sickly thump sends frigid waves of magical energy surging into Angarion, threatening to turn the entire forest into a version of Witchwood. The heart now lies inside an ice fortress populated by frost giants and cold-based elementals.

WHY COME HERE?

Angarion is most definitely a civilized realm, but it is not always a friendly one. The elves value their privacy and security, and outsiders are rarely welcomed with open arms. It is a realm where disrespecting the forest can lead to death. In most cases it comes from arrows fired by hidden archers, but the forest itself may choose to retaliate, as might its inhuman denizens.

Aside from elves of both races, Wood Wardens, druids, and clerics of Eostre and Ullr, all of whom are welcome here unless previously banished or known to be troublemakers, what might attract outsiders to venture into the leafy realm?

* Orders. Of the many organizations in Rassilon, only the cults of Eostre (both aspects) and Ullr and the Wood Wardens have much reason to send members to Angarion. Bladedancers, druids, and earth elementalists may occasionally receive orders, or at least requests, to enter the woodland from their superiors. Any hero who is beholden to the rulers of Angmark, Coglelund, or the Magocratic provinces of Bremen, Darovia, or Eastheath may be ordered here as an ally or enemy.

* Duty. The characters' current adventure may require them to trespass in Angarion. For instance, the characters might be hunting a band of orcs who have taken refuge amid the trees (the elves are alert, but they can't be everywhere). The elves tend to be better inclined toward outsiders engaged in such activities, seeing as how they are saving the elves the trouble of dealing with the problem, but this does not give the intruders *carte blanche* to act as they see fit. In rare instances, the heroes may find themselves facing hostile elves as well as their original foes.

As the greatest elfhome, Angarion is filled with all manner of unusual plants and fey. Character types listed under Orders above may wish to come here of their own accord. Perhaps a hero is undertaking a pilgrimage to a fey site or sacred place, or maybe he wishes merely to expand his knowledge or converse on an important matter with a long-lived tree man or enigmatic fey noble. The elves may rule over Angarion, but they do not claim ownership, for they share the forest with many other creatures—if a tree man or fey wishes to converse with outsiders, the elves will permit entrance. They will maintain a wary watch, though, and interfere if they feel they or the forest is threatened.

* Passing Through. Angarion's sheer size and the dense vegetation that covers much of the ground make travel very slow, meaning it is actually quicker to skirt the fringes when traveling between realms bordering the forest. The elves are naturally suspicious of anyone who claims to want passage through Angarion, as it is not a shortcut to anywhere.

ANGMARK

The westernmost of the Marklands, Angmark is a realm of growing prosperity. But with that newfound wealth comes danger, for orcs are growing in strength on the northern border, seeing in Angmark a rich target for raiding. The Saxa's new trading policies have also angered some of its older trading partners. Isolated from their Saxa brethren by the Freelands, the inhabitants of Angmark have grown more independent with each generation.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Angmark.

* **Noble Edge:** Because of the way Angmark's nobility is structured, heroes with the Noble Edge who wish to be true nobles begin as a lendmann. The GM must decide whether they are the offspring of a jarl or the issues of one of his children. Characters who take the Edge to represent non-nobles have the title ridder, and may never rise to higher rank except through marriage or usurping the title from the rightful claimant.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Like the majority of the Marklands, Angmark has a king. However, his authority has never been absolute. By law the king controls only 20% of the realm through direct rule, the remainder being split between the jarls and the landed citizens. This also serves to protect the king from revolution, for the jarls rarely see eye-to-eye, and with each involved in his own political ambitions, alliances are short-lived and fragile. As with the High King, the king's power relies on his force of personality, political machinations, and his generosity. Wise kings gift their jarls frequently though never copiously, listen to their advice, and, occasionally, act on their suggestions.

Kingship is not hereditary, a fairly normal Saxa policy, and any legitimate claimant can make a power play on the old king's death. Thanks to Thunor's influence, Angmark has no laws against civil wars settling such claims, though it has been many long generations since such strife ravaged the land. In recent times, the king has appointed a preferred heir before his death. This is not legally binding, but kings have persuaded, bribed, or intimidated the jarls into swearing oaths to support the heir's claim to the throne, something they naturally resent. Of course, this requires a strong king. Fortunately, strong kings are something Angmark has been blessed with for some time. When the king's demise has been sudden, or no heir has been nominated, the claimants have relied on a council of nobles and priests to determine who should rule. Once the council has elected a new king, the only recourse for claimants who still seek the throne is open conflict.

The jarls, and Angmark boasts a total of nine, are largely independent rulers, free to set their own laws so long as they do not promote sedition, raise their own armies, and impose whatever taxes they see fit. They swear oaths to protect Angmark as a nation, but only a strong king can force them to swear oaths to obey him.

Below the jarls are the nobility. Traditionally, the firstborn son of a jarl takes the title thegn, though in recent generations the first child has this honor. The second child becomes a hauld, while subsequent children take the title lendmann. As their children grow and have their own families, so their children take a rank one lower than their parents', which means the children of lendmann have no title.

The true nobility never uses the title of ridder. Rather, it is used to reward loyal citizens. Stead owners and village rulers, and powerful merchant and priests, are given the title by one of the jarls to acknowledge their service. While it does confer nobility, albeit the lowest level, the title is not hereditary; the jarl may remove it from the family on the death of the current titleholder. The children of a ridder carry no title.

The majority of Angmark's population are free men, known as *karls*, and *bondi*, or landed citizens.

The bondi are the dominant class. They own their land outright, and owe allegiance to no one. Most, however, are wise enough to swear oaths of support to the local jarl or the king. In return for his oath, the *bondar* (singular form) is entitled to legal and military protection, but in return must pay taxes and promise to do military service. A bondar may switch loyalty to another high lord at any time, though doing so often angers the previous lord. Unless the titleholder is outlawed for a crime, his status is hereditary, passing to all his children.

All high priests, a term used to refer to any cleric who runs a temple, are automatically awarded the title of bondar. This title does not confer true bondi status on the individual, but rather on the temple, for the law demands that no nobleman may swear a temple to his service. Rather, they are duty bound to extend legal and military protection to any temple of the civilized deities on their land and may demand nothing in return. While some temples do abuse this special relationship, most are content to provide the local nobleman with special favors.

Karls, by comparison, are not as free as the name suggests. They are beholden to a noble (or more rarely a bondar), though they are not slaves, In return for working the lord's land, or in his fishing fleet, logging industry, or whatever, they are awarded a plot of land to grow their own crops or raise livestock. Any income from this "private" land is not taxed, though it cannot by law be used to generate any personal income. His master may promote a karl to bondar status, though in doing so the nobleman loses a small parcel of land and possibly the loyalty of the individual.

Angmark's laws state that bondi in the service of a nobleman and all karls must accept justice as meted out by their lord or the moot, a gathering of local free men. Truly independent bondi, those with absolutely no allegiances, may ask the temple of Hothar to hear their legal cases, or they may approach any nobleman, even the king. When a jarl is involved as an accuser or defendant, the local temple of Hothar, a cult renowned for its adherence to the law, not personal ties, always hears the matter.

EDUCATION

The cult of Hoenir is particularly weak in Angmark. Until recently, Angmark was largely a minor player in global politics, its citizens content to learn only what they needed to carry out their future professions and leave other lore to scholars, skalds (the most popular form of mage), and priests. Merchants, travelers, and skalds would bring word of outside lands, but for the most part the populace was disinterested.

But now that Angmark has become a trade hub, the citizens are keen to know more of what lies beyond their borders. Those with money can afford to hire tutors for their children, while for most knowledge is still gained from family members, the occasional passing skald, or listening to the tales of strangers.

Along the coasts, especially Leirvik, Anari and Trader are growing in popularity. Inland, many communities speak only Saxa, with a small few still using Auld Saxa. The king desires that Trader be-

comes the *de facto* second language, but there is resistance from those who see little direct benefit from the new trading.

Several of the inland jarls fear that Angmark's Saxa culture could be lost, especially with Chalcis' Anari influence growing stronger in the coastal communities. Plans are afoot to open a school for skalds, ensuring that the Angmark way of life is never forgotten. The king, so far, has not publicly commented on this proposal, but in secret he fears a wave of Saxa fanaticism could damage trade with the Anari cultures.

RELIGION

Water plays a vital role in Angmark's religious observances and mercantile activities, and around one-third of the population lives on or near the coast. While much of Neorthe's worship is centered in these coastal communities, his influence is felt even far inland. Many communities have excavated small ponds and erected a shrine in his honor, for it is by his blessing that Angmark's trade



angmark

Population: 53,458 (84% Saxa, 10% Anari, 5% engro, 1% frostborn)
Ruler: Cyning Knui Gillingsunu
Religion: Neorthe, Freo, Thunor, Eostre
Imports: Cloth, iron, pottery
Exports: Fish, furs, salt, timber, whale oil

is strong. The cult of Var is challenging this belief, and worship of Neorthe has actually declined in recent years.

The cult of Freo, god of travel, has always been popular. It was Freo, according to local legends, who guided the Saxa to Angmark. The god has remained with Angmark, for with the population scattered far and wide, it is he who watches over merchants and travelers as they go about their business. Virtually every inn and alehouse has a shrine to Freo, prompting the joke that Angmarkers never buy new shoes, they just take them from shrines.

Located far from Royalmark and the court of the High King, Angmark has always had a strong independent streak. Its people honor Thunor as god of storms and liberty, promoting one aspect to ward off dangers to their mariners and the other because it was he who led the Saxa out of Anari slavery. Although few citizens enjoy independence, the nobility remains largely free of interference from the king.

A typical diet consists primarily of fish or mutton stew with a few root vegetables, Angmark's soil being of poor quality and suitable only for livestock. Many Angmarkers have never seen vegetables other than turnips, carrots, and potatoes. Even wheat is a luxury, most of the citizens eating a heavy, starchy potato bread. As such, Eostre Plantmother takes a secondary role to that of her Animalmother aspect. Even so, her cult is largely unknown near the coast, for here Neorthe is patron of fish.

The cult of Var is rising in popularity as trade continues to expand. Construction of a new temple-market has begun in Leirvik (only Rindal currently has one), and small shrines are cropping up along the sole trade road. As the number of merchants passing through the realm increases, the cult is set to gain more influence.

Growing trade brings wealth, and wealth attracts both cultists of Nauthiz and Vali. The former is seen only as a nuisance, while the second is a growing danger. With few granaries worth destroying, it is Vali's corruptor aspect that prospers here.

Military

As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, only the king and jarls may maintain a standing army. Lesser nobles, anything from thegns down to ridders, are permitted an absolute maximum of ten huscarls as bodyguards. Bondi are entitled to keep five huscarls.

Huscarls form the basis of Angmark's military might. These professional warriors are usually karls seeking a way of becoming bondi or ridders when their active service ends. They form the core of the armies and serve their lord as retainers. Although karls, they are given respect greater than that awarded to other common citizens.

Huscarls are not divided into ranks or companies. The most seasoned campaigner is given command as necessary. Sometimes he may lead a handful of men on a raid, while in another battle he may command an entire flank. While Knights Hrafn are often hired as strategic commanders, tactical command is left to the huscarls, native warriors who know the men they lead.

Few jarls skimp on their huscarls equipment, for to do so is viewed as a sign of weakness. Thus, huscarls wear expensive chain shirts or hauberks, gifts from their lord. Most carry a medium shield and either a long sword or battle axe, but elite huscarls often favor large shields.

Town and village militia are given lesser equipment, typically a scale hauberk in towns and leather shirts in smaller settlements. Medium shields are the norm, since they are best suited for the shieldwall. Hand axes, maces, and short swords are common melee weapons.

While cavalry is rare, King Knui maintains a force of 50 medium horsemen. They are not intended to charge enemy ranks, but rather to mop up after the enemy is routed, carry messages across the battlefield, and stall flanking maneuvers until the infantry can reform to deal with the threat.

An old law requires all able-bodied men (women can participate if they wish, but are under no compulsion) to practice with a short or long bow once a week. Thus, while Angmark boasts no specific archer companies, most men are competent. Accuracy is not deemed a vital trait; for the most part all they need to do is be able to rain arrows down upon a mass of enemies. Archery tournaments are commonplace, with the winner being awarded the honor of commanding archers in battle.

Every male citizens is expected to answer a call to arms as part of the fyrd, thus many do not when the summons clashes with the harvest or during birthing time for their livestock. Most citizens own a spear, but few own any form of armor beyond a leather cap.

Angmark has fought no major wars since its founding, and tactics have evolved little since the olden days. The bulk of the army is drawn up in a single line, though it is divided into a right flank (the Sword), the left flank (the Shield), and a center block (the Hauberk). The commander and the bulk of his bodyguard are located behind the front line, along with the archers (the Bow) and the reserves (the Steeds). Generally about half the army forms the battle line, with the rest as reserves and archers, though this depends on the enemy's strength.

Whereas as many Saxa armies soften up their foes with throwing axes or javelins, Angmark's troops unleash volleys of arrows. Typically they fire three volleys at long range, two at medium range, and one at short range, though in many instances the latter duty is carried out only by those assigned to the Bow, the Shield, Hauberk, and Sword quickly forming a shield wall as the enemy advance the last dozen yards or so.

As well as the five core divisions, individual armies may boast small contingents of boar warriors to break enemy lines and raging berserkers. Such units are known as the Tusk and the Wolf.

Trade & Tribute

While Angmark and Chalcis have always been strong trading partners, the loss of Silverdale to the mists has greatly benefited the Saxa kingdom. Beforehand, caravans from Chalcis (and Aspiria to a lesser degree) heading for the Low Winterlands would trundle through Silverdale before making a swift dash to the trade network of Heligioland. With that route now closed, and the only land alternative a huge detour through the wild Unclaimed Lands, merchants have been forced to land at Leirvik.

Angmark has strict regulations on trade, demanding that any cargos destined for markets other than its own be sold to local merchants. Angmark's merchants then transport the goods outside the country, either selling it on to merchants in the Freelands or delivering it to its final destination. This has prompted Alantaris Isle to transfer much of its business to the Magocracy.

Unfortunately, Angmark has a single trade road, running from Leirvik to join with the major north-south road that links the Magocracy with the Low Winterlands. This spur is simply known locally as the Trade Road.

The bulk of Angmark's exports come from the sea. Barrels of preserved fish, sea salt, and whale oil make their way across western Rassilon to inland markets. Furs, gathered in the foothills of the Icebarrier Mountains, and timber are lesser exports, and both trades are suffering trouble due to outside interference.

Imports comprise iron from Chalcis, a trade which has been greatly diminished since the rise of the Scavengers, and clothing and pottery from the Freelands.

The fast-growing sector of trade is actually trade itself. With the overland route to the north closed, more and more traders looking to deal with Aspiria and Chalcis are using the harbor at Leirvik. While the town's infrastructure is stretched, the king has ordered the construction of new warehouses and docks to facilitate their increasing numbers.

Despite being many leagues from Royalmark, and technically rivals with Coglelund for trade, Angmark strongly supports an extension of the trade road from the Moot Hill to Bridgewater, though it also wants a link from Moot Hill to Sanctuary; the latter would give its merchant direction access to the Crystalflow Confederacy and the eastern realms. Angmark's diplomats are playing the "Saxa" card, discretely urging the High King to form stronger trading ties with the isolated Saxa realm at the expense of Coglelund.

The jarls of Angmark are responsible for setting their own taxes. Typically, taxation devours around 40% of a citizen's income. The

king controls all trade duties, however, regardless of whose lands merchants must travel through. At present, import tax for goods being sold in Angmark runs at 3%, while for cargos destined elsewhere the rate is 5%. Local exports enjoy a low rate of just 2% in a bid to promote Angmark's wares.

ARCHITECTURE

Due to having no easy access to good quality building stone, the inhabitants of Angmark use wood. Unlike in other realms where the Anari and Saxa live side-by-side, there is little difference in cultural architecture. Outside the towns, most citizens live in steads. Though many are large enough to be counted as villages, the term stead is used locally to describe any settlement with fewer than 1,000 souls.

Except in the north, where orcs are a constant menace, settlements are seldom protected by anything other than a low fence and ditch, and these are more to keep the livestock in than act as fortifications. In the north, ramparts and palisades are the norm.

What separates the houses of Angmark from the other Marklands is their size; houses are always two stories. The lowest level is used for housing livestock, storing supplies, and servants' quarters (where such exist). The upper story is living accommodation. The hearth, which dominates the upstairs, contains a heavy iron grate placed over a chimney. Ash and other small debris falls down the chute to the ground level, where it is cleaned out at regular intervals.

While the lower story lacks windows (as do most Saxa houses in Rassilon), the upper level has numerous arrow slits. Pigskin is used to cover these, allowing some light in but keeping the wind and rain out.

Crafters use the front of the lower level of their homes as a shop, and the rear area as a workshop and storage. This two-story idea extends to temples as well. Lesser rooms and storage are downstairs, while the more important chambers are upstairs.

Aside from the mighty Scieldvollr, each jarldom and the king's personal domain contains a single ring fort. While these are constantly manned by a handful of huscarls, they are not castles in the Anari sense. Rather, they serve as regional markets, and as a retreat for the general populace should the realm be invaded.

Although size varies, each follows a set pattern, being a wide earth rampart with wooden facing on the outside to prevent tunneling, broken by reinforced gates. A palisade lines the rampart, with a timber walkway running the entire circumference. Most forts have just a single barrier. The grandest have a second, taller, rampart inside the first one, providing a two-tier fighting platform.

Standing against the inner wall of the rampart are numerous buildings to house the region's inhabitants in times of strife and merchants in times of peace. In the center of the fort is a circular rampart, beyond which is accommodation for the local nobility. It also serves as the final redoubt.

MAJOR LOCALES

While several of Angmark's major settlements have already been detailed, this section presents new areas the characters may wish to explore.

DVERGHEIM

Population: 473
Ruler: Ridder Erik Gunwulfsunu

The village of Dvergheim (Auld Saxa for "Home of the Dwarves") lies in the foothills of the Icebarrier Mountains, just south of the Scieldvollr.

During construction of the Scieldvollr, emissaries from Karad Iarn made a rare visit to the king of Angmark and offered a deal; set aside one village where the dwarves could trade with the humans, and the dwarves would ensure its safety. After much debate with the jarls, the king agreed to the terms.

The village of Vintoft was chosen as the proposed site, it lying not far from the Stone Bridge and only a short distance from the Scieldvollr. Formerly a royal village, in that it owed direct allegiance to the king, it was made an autonomous outpost, to be controlled in perpetuity by a ridder appointed from the locals by the dwarves.

Despite its small size, the village boasts a stone wall and an iron portcullis in its gatehouse, gifts from the dwarves. Amid the typical Saxa structures stand a stone barrack block which houses 20 dour dwarven huscarls, and the residence of Thegn Godwin Foesmasher's envoy, his second cousin, Lendmann Dvalinn Mead-Beard. A small stone blockhouse houses stairs leading to a temple to Ertha, something the dwarves insisted was constructed to serve their religious needs.

The dwarven huscarls form the core of the village's army, although the village can call upon 10 permanent soldiers, 30 semi-trained warriors, and a further 100 fyrd members should they be needed.

Heroes wishing to visit Karad Iarn must first visit Lendmann Dvalinn, for he has the sole authority to allow access to the fortress-city. Those granted permission, an extremely rare event, are given a rune stone engraved with the bearer's name. Should this privilege be abused or the stone lost, the bearer will never receive another one, nor will his descendants for ten generations. Dvalinn is not susceptible to flattery or bribery, and attempts to intimidate him or use magic, such as *puppet*, will be met with a severe beating at a minimum.

All trade to and from Karad Iarn is handled here, and the warehouses are usually bursting with trade goods. With Var held in low regard by the dwarves, all trade takes place in the temple of Ertha.

ENGROTON

Population: 1409
Ruler: Boera Rose Pig-Nose

A fraction of over half the total engro population of Angmark live here. Engroton isn't a true village, for there are no permanent structures. Instead, the engros live in their brightly painted caravans, which are parked up in clusters according to clan loyalties. The settlement stands on the central plains, almost equidistant from Estvik, Leirvik, and the edge of the Stone Forest.

Few residents are permanent settlers. From late spring to early fall the settlement's population is halved as the engro pack up and wander Angmark and the Freelands. As the snows threaten, so they return home with new tales and goods to sell or barter.

While engro are widely mistrusted, Angmarkers bare them no real malevolence. Most engro fall outside the social system, for they are prone to wandering, meaning they are not karls, who are tied to the land, and are reluctant to swear oaths of loyalty, making them poor bondi. As such, they are given special royal privileges, allowing them to move freely so long as they obey the laws of the land they are passing through and pay their taxes. While they nod agreement at such demands, few non-engro suspect they will ever obey these decrees.

Boera Rose Pig-Nose, a matronly engro with little tolerance for frivolity, untidiness, or laziness, governs the settlement. Her position carries great authority among her people, but is not officially recognized by Angmark. She rules with a firm but fair hand, allowing the engro to behave as is their way, but stopping them from going too far with a swift whack from her walking stick. Her nickname has nothing to do with her physical appearance, but rather her remarkable gift for sniffing out truffles (and some say some trouble, as well).

Strangers are welcome in Engroton, and many do come here, for the engro are a source of information from distant parts of the land and have a knack for "acquiring" hard to get objects. Visitors are given a warm greeting and open hospitality, though that doesn't mean the engro won't rob them blind through high prices or through crooked games of chance.

Engroton has no visible defenses, nor a noticeable standing army. Those who understand engro know that scattered among the inhabitants will be several dozen Bludgeoners, plus more than a few druids. The settlement may look like an easy target for raiders, but there are eyes and ears everywhere, even among the animals.

THE GIANTS' AVENUE

The Banishment of the Giants is one of the founding legends of Angmark. Centuries old, the tale is regularly told during the long, cold winter nights.

According to the lengthy tale, when the first Saxa settlers arrived here after the defeat of the Anari they found the northern land overrun by giants. Desiring the land for themselves, they warred against the brutes. Victorious yet magnanimous, the Saxa allowed the defeated giants to depart Angmark, but not without first constructing a monument to honor the humans' victory.

First the giants raised a colossal earth mound over the grave of the fallen Saxa warriors. Two stone circles were erected around the base. The inner circle of 13 stones honored the nobles who fell in battle that fateful day, while the outer circle of 24 stones honored all the major gods (none were left out, let the Saxa bring down a curse of their new lands).

Lined up two abreast, the giants were then escorted to the sea. In his arm each giant held a huge stone. As they walked, these were planted in the ground, one for each giant who fell to Saxa blades, the sporadically placed stones forming an avenue leading from the mound to the seashore. Once at the sea, the giants were ordered to construct ships, swear oaths never to return, and sail away. Since that day, no giants have troubled Angmark.

On the first First Death Day after his coronation, the new king leads a torch lit procession from the beach to the mound, the walkers moving along the avenue of widely spaced stones. Once at the mound, the king ascends the summit while the torchbearers form a circle around the base. In a loud voice, the monarch praises the ancestors who lost their lives fighting the giants, and vows that if the giants should dare to return, the current inhabitants of Angmark will honor their ancestors. Newly appointed huscarls sometimes come here to swear their final oaths of allegiance to their lord.

Citizens who graze their flocks near the monument claim the specters of the honored ancestors still walk Angmark, a kingdom their sacrifice helped form. During the third week of Sowanmonan (the battle traditionally took place of Sunnandaeg), spectral figures are seen walking from the mound to the sea. Locals believe the ghosts are ensuring the giants have left.

HILL OF THE ANCESTORS

In the center of the northern arm of the Draugr Hills is a particularly long, steep-sided hill, its chalk body veiled beneath a covering of short grass covered turf. The hill has been a sacred place since long before the Anari invaded the region, though its name is a recent one, given the site by the more recent Saxa colonists. The name of the local tribe who once honored their dead here is long lost, their lineages ending in death, expulsion, and inter-marriage with the more dominant Anari and Saxa bloodlines.

In rare summers, when the grass is parched, faint outlines become visible on the slopes. Careful investigation reveals these to be runes, cut through the turf to reveal the white chalk beneath. Although the runic language they are written in is as extinct as the carvers' culture, *speak language* has revealed the runes are names. Each single rune indicates both a given name and a specific title or nickname. Thus, one might find Marcatrude the Wise (female) or Clodio the Warrior (male).

Sages and scholars have theorized the names are those of kings and queens of old, cut into the hill as a form of memorial by a culture that lacked the capacity or will to erect statues. While there are barrows and cairns on nearby slopes, these all date from later periods, and thus provide no clues to the nature of the carvers.

Spirit Name: None. The Hill of the Ancestors is home to multiple spirits, collectively known simply as the Ancestors. Individual spirits are known by their given name and title/nickname.

Ambience: The hill radiates an aura of melancholy, a feeling of longing for older days now forever out of one's grasp. Anyone venturing onto the hill must make a Spirit roll or suffer a level of Fatigue brought about by depression until they leave the slopes.

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d4.

Communication: None.

Sacrifice: Activating the site's power requires carefully marking out the hidden name, cutting away the turf, and then rearranging the chalk to ensure only the whitest rock is visible. This takes one person 24 hours.

Anyone who performs a fair share of the work receives the blessing. Only one blessing can be received per month, no matter how many names are revealed.

Powers: Anyone who clears the turf from one of the names receives a minor blessing. The blessing takes the form of a single use of *boost trait*, the trait in question being directly tied to the name revealed. Thus, the nickname of someone called "the Strong" invokes *boost Strength*, while "the Merciful" relates to *boost Healing*.

Though each spell can be cast but once, it remains available for three months, after which time the name is covered by the fast-growing grass. It is cast using Spirit as the arcane skill, even if the caster has an arcane background, and is Maintained by the caster.

LEIRVIK

Radwulf's Boat Yard: Angmark has a thriving shipbuilding industry, but all shipwrights acknowledge Radwulf Espensunu as the true master of the craft. Radwulf produces the best ships on the continent, but his services are hard to acquire—he decides for whom he builds a ship on a case-by-case basis after conducting a lengthy interview. No threat or bribe can sway him from his decision, and he is just as likely to honor a humble mariner as he is a mighty noble.

Radwulf always works alone save for a single apprentice, who helps with the basic chores such as sharpening his tools, but it is said Neorthe has blessed the shipwright. Despite a lack of workers, typically it takes him just one month per point of base Toughness to build a ship from selecting suitable timber to hammering home the last rivet. What makes Radwulf's feat even more impressive is that he is blind. His vessels cost 20% more than normal, but they are easy to handle (+1 Handling) and more durable (+1 base Toughness).

It is said that if the owner of a Radwulf ship ever loses possession of the vessel, it sinks within a month if not returned to his care. Owning one of his vessels bestows the owner +5 Glory so long as the ship remains in his possession.

THE NEW BARROWS

Despite the black storm that awoke the slumbering dead of the Draugr Hills, the distant threat from the Withered Lands, and the influence of Neorthe's cult, the kings and jarls of Angmark are, except when they worship Neorthe, buried in barrows. To ensure Angmark's patron is honored, corpses and grave goods are placed inside small ships, around which the barrow is constructed. The new barrows stand at the western extreme of the Draugr Hills, overlooking Leirvik.

When the dead are interred, clerics of both Neorthe and Scaetha are present. Prayers found only in Angmark are offered, asking the spirit of the dead to return if the land is ever threatened. Although this has never occurred, it is widely believed that Scaetha would permit this, while Neorthe would unleash nobles buried at sea.

Unbeknownst to the Angmarkers, necromancers have already worked their fell out amid the barrows. Within the grassy knolls, hagbui and draugr patiently await the signal to burst forth and terrorize the living.

TORVIK

Population: 419

Ruler: Thunderdaughter Karla Hadriksunu

An independent village under the control of the cult of Thunor, Torvik lies ten miles south of Leirvik. Despite being a coastal settlement, its inhabitants do not farm the sea, nor do they welcome ships into the small bay their steads surround. Instead, they harvest sea salt from the wetlands behind the dunes and raise salt lamb

(sheep raised on the tough, salt-loving grass that dominates the boggy ground). This limits their prosperity, but the villagers would have it no other way.

The villagers' hatred of the sea, for it cannot be described as anything less, dates back to shortly after the founding of Angmark. The first family to settle here had a divination performed, being keen to know if the spot would be prosperous for their descendants. The results were not what they were expecting—Torvik would prosper, but a stranger would one day come from the sea so heralding the death of Angmark.

Given that Angmark was founded not long after the Saxa had thrown off Anari rule, the prophecy may simply have been a warning that the Anari might one day return. However, immediately grasping the wrong end of the stick, the villagers became paranoid about all who plied the vast ocean or worshipped Neorthe. Fearful they would be forced to accept Neorthe, whose faith was quickly becoming the state religion, the ruling family erected a simple wind sock atop a nearby hill, declared it a temple, and swore fealty to the cult of Thunor, handing over control of Torvik to a young, bewildered priest.

Such is their animosity toward the sea and all who sail it, the clerics of Thunor who have ruled the village down the age use their spells to drive vessels back out to sea. Followers of Neorthe are permitted to live in Torvik, though not to work the sea in any manner or raise a place of worship. Clerics of Neorthe, though, are automatically placed under a death sentence, for the villagers now firmly believe that due to their faith they all "come from the sea." Shipwrecked mariners are attacked before they can leave the breakers.

Numerous kings have spoken out against these barbaric and misguided practices, but in Angmark temples and their settlements are not answerable to any temporal authority.

WOOLACOMBE

Population: 1,835
Ruler: Hauld Osric Gunnarsunu

The village of Woolacombe ("Woola's Valley") lies in the northern Draugr Hills. An unimpressive collection of buildings, its inhabitants scrape a living by raising goats and sheep among the empty barrows and cairns.

Many locals believe Hauld Osric has suffered a brain fever, for in recent months he has grown more and more adamant that a great and terrible evil lurks in the hills. Messengers carried word far and wide, calling on clerics of Scaetha to flock to his banner, but so far he has attracted only charlatans who proclaim to honor Scaetha, and men whose arms are strong only because of the ale flagons they raise each night at the nobleman's expense.

Osric recently outlawed all religions in the village except for Scaetha, who he taken as his patron. The local clerics of Animal Animalmother, who have a small temple here, have refused to leave, claiming *bondi* privileges. Now convinced the peaceful clerics are working for the evil that haunts his dreams, Osric has declared them outlaws.

While they are in their temple they remain safe, for Osric is not yet mad enough to defy holy ground, but should they leave the sanctuary there are standing orders for them to be arrested and escorted off his lands. The villagers have been warned that anyone giving comfort to the "outlaws" will be charged with sedition.

While many citizens agree Osric is likely insane, there are those who are beginning to wonder if his madness conceals a vein of truth, for there has been much trouble along the Trade Road in recent months, and no one can say for sure whether the Draugr Hills really were cleansed of all their restless inhabitants.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Many of Angmark's important citizens, such as its jarls, have either been briefly described in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* or are left for the GM to sculpt as he desires. The persons described below are citizens with whom heroes visiting Angmark might cross paths.

HAULD GRIFU SVIPSUNU

Although Grifu is the nominated heir of his father, Jarl Svip Bildsunu, he was born the second child. His older brother, Fyri Deep-Minded, was born an idiot child, incapable of doing anything other than constantly drooling and whimpering loudly at random intervals. Despite this, Fyri carries the title of thegn, as is custom, something his brother deeply resents.

Grifu is an impatient man, and a greedy one. Every day merchants bring greater wealth to Angmark, yet his father imposes only the king's excise duties, failing to see the greater potential in front of his eyes.

Keen to have his father removed, yet unwilling to commit murder or open treachery, Grifu has made a deal with a group of bandits. Using orc arrows, they have been raiding caravans along the Trade Road. Each attack tarnishes the jarl's reputation, and some of his peers are already murmuring that he should step down in favor of someone capable of halting the raids and securing the trade route.

Grifu, in an act of public generosity, has vowed to hunt down those responsible for the attacks at his own expense. In doing so he has won popular support and the begrudging acknowledgement of the king. Grifu's plan is to allow the bandits to continue largely unmolested for a few more months, just until Svip is a broken man politically, and then crush his unsuspecting minions in one very brutal and very public display of force.

THE JARL OF NAUTHIZ

The cult of Nauthiz is on the rise across Angmark, and at its head is the self-appointed Jarl of Nauthiz. No one knows who the "jarl" is, though everyone has an opinion, and to be honest, no one is actually sure he exists. Rumors abound that the title is an invention, despite widespread claims the jarl has his hand in every crime in Angmark. The king and jarls are taking no chances, though, for any bad publicity could adversely affect trade, and a bounty of 500 gs has been offered for information leading to his capture. If the jarl does exist, he is a powerful person, for the cult of Nauthiz discourages mass gatherings.

RIDDER KURN WIGWULFSUNU

Angmark's greatest skald has largely retired from public service, though he still performs on special occasions at the king's request. Despite being retired, Kurn is constantly pestered by would-be heroes who wish him to write up their adventures into song or poem for generations to come, for such is his reputation and following that a single word in the right ear can make (or break) reputations. A shrewd judge of character, Kurn can spot a fake a mile off. Those who desire fame had best be prepared to deal with him openly, or face the consequences for their deception. Kurn's title is a reward from the king for services rendered to Saxa culture.

WALTER AP-CUTHBERT

Walter lives in Leirvik, where he runs a small bookshop. While Angmarkers aren't renowned for their love of the written word, preferring their oral tradition of storytelling, the growing number of merchants provides him with a modest income. He spends much of his time collecting maps and stories about Angmark, intending, he claims, to publish a book on his adopted nation.

Born in Chalcis, Walter is a member of a small but growing number of influential Chalcians who believe their nation is doomed to be consumed by Witchwood, due to Duke Howel's inaction. Sooner or later the Chalcians will need a new home, and the ideal place for resettlement is Angmark. Too proud to ever bow to lowly Saxa barbarians, the group intends to conquer Angmark the old-fashioned way.

In order to do that, they need reliable information on Angmark's infrastructure, defenses, and troop strengths. While proclaiming it is research material, Walter is secretly gathering the information his comrades need, using patsies to act as his eyes and ears. When the time is right, the Duke of Chalcis will be overthrown, and the invasion begun.

ASPIRIA

The second most populated country in Rassilon, Aspiria is renowned for its fine wines and steadfast attitude against invaders. But times have changed, and Aspiria is threatened by orc marauders and the deadly, relentless Scavengers. While the king hunts and dances, seemingly oblivious to the current events, the great nation slips steadily toward destruction.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Aspiria.

* **Justice for All:** The courts of Aspiria are run by the cult of Hothar. In their eyes, all men are equal. As such, nobles do not gain the usual +2 Charisma bonus awarded them by dint of their social station when involved in court cases.

* **Nobility:** Typical Aspirian player character nobles can hold a maximum rank of baron. Only those born to a count, or who marry into the family, can ever achieve that station. The GM may allow noble heroes to be of royal birth. Since the current king has no heirs, any royal heroes would be the children of the king's siblings, thus making them dukes.

Heroes (except those related to the royal family) may become count-barons regardless of social status, though such awards are extremely rare. We recommend a maximum of one hero per campaign be granted such an honor, and then only once he reaches a minimum of 100 Glory or rules a Resource with a Population in excess of 20 (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*).

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Whereas neighboring Chalcis has been ruled by a duke since gaining independence from the Anari Empire, a hereditary monarch governs Aspiria. By tradition, the eldest child, male or female, inherits the throne. The eldest child of the reigning monarch holds the title of Crown Prince or Princess, while siblings are Archdukes or Archduchesses. Their children in turn take the titles of prince or duke, lacking the greater honorific. Although members of the royal family, they have little true political power, for that lies in the hands of the Noble Council.

Ranking below the royalty are the high nobility, the seven hereditary counts and their children. Between them, the counts own around 70% of Aspiria, though they are bound to the monarch by oaths of allegiance. By law, no monarch can ever be a count at the same time as he rules Aspiria. Thus, if a marriage occurs between royalty and high nobility, one party must give up their claim to the appropriate seat. Which claim is forfeited depends largely on the likelihood of achieving power. Hence, the third daughter of the king has little chance of becoming queen and achieving any true degree of power, but by marrying a count's eldest son she may someday be a countess. A similar law prevents the families of counts marrying to create a great county.

Below the counts are the count-barons, all of whom are members of the Noble Council. While some are true nobles elevated to the Council by dint of their extensive lands, influence, wealth, or loyalty, many are merchants, clerics, and mages. Although the title is purely honorific, they are influential citizens in their own right, and thus awarded greater respect than the lesser nobility. Both the monarch and counts may appoint lesser titles of baron, banneret, and knight as they see fit, though any land they grant the title holder must come from their own domains. Together these three form the lesser nobility. Each noble is beholden to whomever granted him his title.

The upper classes comprise rich merchants, important vintners, high clerics, and senior mages, such as arkhwisards, as well as senior military commanders in the king's household and members of court. Merchants, master crafters, senior clerics, and many mages are deemed middle class, along with scribes, guildmasters, and the like. Finally there are the peasants, the bulk of whom are farmers and laborers.

THE NOBLE COUNCIL

The Noble Council is a check to the authority of the monarch. While the king, in theory, has great power, any decision that affects Aspiria, such as taxation or summoning the army to war, must be approved by the Council as a whole.

The Council comprises an Inner Chamber, in which sit the seven counts, and an Outer Chamber, to which all members automatically belong.

The Inner Chamber serves only to settle disputes of birthright should the monarch die without issue, and to elect new members to the Noble Council. The latter requires the unanimous vote of all seven counts. Since appointments are often politically motivated, reaching any sort of decision is rare, and thus new members are rarely elected. In recent centuries it has become tradition for a new monarch to appoint one new member to the Outer Chamber. Seats in the Outer Chamber are not hereditary. When the incumbent resigns or dies, his seat becomes vacant.

When the original Council was formed, all seven counts had an equal vote. With abstention prohibited by law, no deadlock was possible. Today, the counts receive two votes in honor of their greater station and the count-barons just a single vote. Should a matter be tied, the Inner Chamber votes on the matter to ensure the motion is either passed or rejected.

No member of the royal family may ever sit on the Noble Council. Those who have rejected their birthright are exempt from this law, since they can never again reclaim their royal title. No member of the royal family may enter the chamber unless invited by majority vote of the Inner Chamber, and even then he must enter without bodyguards or armaments.

Traditionally, the Council meets twice a year. With no one wishing to travel far in winter, gatherings are held in late spring and early fall. The Council's chambers are part of the Royal Palace.

EDUCATION

Aspiria boasts just two formal schools. The first is within the Elemental Towers and is restricted to trainee elementalists. The second is the Royal Academy, so named because it was founded by an earlier king. Technically it caters to all citizens, though the tuition fees make access unobtainable to all but the wealthiest inhabitants. As such, it caters only to the upper classes and nobility.

Children are taken from the age of five upward and complete their basic training at the age of 14 (the age of adulthood). Thereafter the pupil may enlist for advanced courses or leave to begin his adult life.

Elsewhere, citizens learn as they do in other realms, with clerics and family members providing instruction based on their faith or occupation. While most citizens are well-versed in Common Knowledge topics, some are fortunate enough to learn more esoteric subjects or expand their knowledge to cover other lands.

The Guild of Alchemists in Glassport provides apprenticeships,

though only to mages and clerics. Courses last for three years, after which time the student should have achieved basic competency in the art. In game terms, any mage or cleric with the Alchemy Edge is likely to have studied here.

RELIGION

The four major deities of Aspiria are Eostre (Plantmother and then Animalmother), Ertha, Hothar, and Sigel, though all the gods, good and evil, receive some degree of worship.

Eostre Plantmother's worship is strongest in the Southern Marches, where the vintners hold her in high regard. Since wine makes up the bulk of the area's income, the general populace also offers her plentiful worship. Elsewhere, she is honored for her role as patron of cereals and vegetables. Regardless of where she is worshipped, services always involve the drinking of wine.

Whereas Chalcis strips the Granite Mountains for metal ore, Aspiria is rich in semi-precious and precious gems. Ertha has long been worshipped in the settlements of the foothills and along the trade roads down which the gems travel, though elsewhere she is very much a lesser deity. All her halls are richly adorned with precious stones of exquisite quality and workmanship.

Since suffering under the yoke of Anari oppression, the Aspirians have come to hold justice in high regard. They believe that while not all men are born equal, all men have the gods-given right to live equally. No man is above the law in Aspiria, for even the king is subject to the Noble Council's rulings. Whereas in many countries the nobility hold court, in Aspiria all trials are conducted by the cult of Hothar.

Such is the Aspirians' regard for justice that every county capital has a temple to Hothar, while every settlement of more than 500 people has a shrine. Across the land, the temples of Hothar use the same system of justice—lesser cases are heard by a lone cleric and serious cases by a panel of three clerics. In military and religious trials, the clerics are assisted by either a high-ranking officer or a cleric of the faith that has been wronged, who can advise on appropriate matters.

With Hothar so important, it is not surprising that oaths are held in high regard, and those who break their sacred word are treated with great contempt.

Sigel rose to prominence during the Demongate War and never lost his place as one of the more popular gods. During the Blizzard War he ranked as the primary deity of Aspiria, replacing Tiw as god of war. Though worship has declined slightly since those distant days, the constant threat of orcs and giants, the hardening winters, and the growth of Witchwood have ensured he retains a place in the heart of all Aspirians.



MILITARY

The monarch maintains a personal bodyguard of 2,000 soldiers, collectively known as the King's Guard.

Of these, 250 are "war knights." They are divided into five equal strength companies known as lances. The 1st Lance comprises actual nobles, typically second or third sons with little hope of inheriting greater titles. The remaining four lances are primarily common men, though the captain and his sergeant are always nobles. The 5th Lance is actually a training company, its members largely untested in combat.

Service length and acts of valor see knights promoted through the lances. Eventually, a soldier may be knighted by the king and awarded a place in the 1st Lance, the king's elite bodyguard.

The bulk of the army comprises 1,500 heavy infantry. They are divided into five battalions, each in turn sub-divided into five companies of 100 men. Battalions are commanded by a Knight-Captain (who is always a noble) and companies by a Captain of Infantry. Each captain is aided by a Sergeant of Infantry. Three companies wield long swords and medium shields, one company battle axes and large shields, and one company carry halberds. All are clad in chain hauberks.

Lastly, there are two companies of leather-clad crossbowmen, each with a strength of 125 men. They are commanded by a Captain of Archers, with a Sergeant of Archers acting as his second-in-command.

Although the Noble Council currently stands at 26 members, only the seven hereditary counts are allowed to maintain a private army in excess of more than a few dozen soldiers. Troops are listed below by company strength. Heavy cavalry are formed into companies of 50 men, and all other troops into companies of 100 men.

Count Andamar: Andamar holds lands between the Eastern Marches and the central trade road. His forces are currently divided between aiding Count Lux to the north, reinforcing the border along the Granite Mountains in the east, and safeguarding the trade road.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (6), heavy infantry (4), crossbowmen (1).

Count Einhard: Lord of Asper and Protector of the Western Marches, Einhard's lands are troubled by marsh dragons, trolls, and bufomi, though not to any great degree. A full half the army is stationed in forts overlooking the dank waters of Drake Marsh.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (1), heavy infantry (3), crossbowmen (2).

Count Lux: Lord of the Eastern Marches, Lux has been forced to increase the strength of his army in the face of renewed orc attacks. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the bulk of his forces comprising raw recruits. Despite his tactical prowess and the fervor of his men, the orcs are steadily capturing more and more territory.




Plains of Verso
Goldfield
Verso
Aspley
The drowned Tower
Alantaris Isle
Oakwood
Seolforton
Tombs of the Emperors
The Fey Castle
Three Peaks


Asper Downs
Ria
Three Way Bridge
Chepwyke
Silverleaf Forestt
Dulcester
Bitterstream
Marches
River Asper
Parisi
Wese Woods
R. Axe
Opur Hills
R. Opur
Silverleaf Fell
Glassport
Port/Glasport
Crushing Claw Island

ICE WINE

With the winters growing longer and the summers increasingly colder, the vintners of Aspiria have begun experimenting with ice wine.

Ice wine is fermented from grapes which have been subjected to intense frost while on the vine. While the water in the grape freezes, the sugar does not. This produces a very concentrated juice, which is both strongly acidic and very sweet. Producing ice wine requires a modicum of luck and the blessing of the gods. If the frost comes too late, the grapes will rot on the vine. Too early and the grapes will not have reached maturity, and too intense a frost makes it impossible to extract any juice (this must be done while the grape is frozen). The smaller juice yields, combined with a fermentation process that takes months rather than days or weeks, means ice wine is very expensive—30 gs a bottle for even a moderate quality wine. Alcohol percentage varies between 6% and the more standard 13%.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (4), heavy infantry (4), crossbowmen (3). Lux also maintains a company of irregulars known as the East March Runners, a mixture of clerics, mages, skirmishers, and adventurers working to short-term contracts. They perform dangerous work, but are well paid for their skills and services. Also serving him are the East March Wardens (see Appendix).

Count Noisiu: Lord of Kingsmead, Noisiu faces constant attack by small bands of orc marauders and an increasing threat from the Scavengers. Two hundred men are garrisoned in the town, with the rest protecting the prosperous gem mines and small farming communities that make up the count's domain.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (4), heavy infantry (2), skirmishers (1), and crossbowmen (3).

Count Uryen: The town of Vergo has suffered continual economic decline over the centuries, so much so that not even pirates bother to raid it any more. The army has withered in size and morale is at an all-time low.

Troops: Heavy infantry (1), crossbowmen (2). Count Uryen has three drakkar (240 men), which are used to combat the growing number of smugglers using Vergo as a base.

Countess Envita: Protector of the Southern Marches, Envita is both a countess and a "wine-baron." Much of her army is dedicated to protecting the vineyards that dot the hills and the merchant caravans that wind through the land.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (2), heavy infantry (3), crossbowmen (2).

Countess Erolwyn: Countess of Glassport, Erolwyn's domain is untroubled by orcs and giants. Half the army is stationed in Glassport, Aspiria's largest port, with the rest being divided among small motte-and-bailey forts stretching up the trade road as far as the Silverleaf Forest. Merchants may pay a small fee to camp within the forts overnight.

Troops: Heavy infantry (2), crossbowmen (2). The countess has three snekkes (300 men) at her disposal for anti-pirate duties.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Aspiria is part of a trade network that extends into the western Low Winterlands and across the turbulent ocean to Alantaris Isle and the Magocracy. The Granite Mountains block overland passage except to the west, while in the east the Bitterstream and Granite Run, combined with the Middle Hills, restrict trade.

All the trade roads save one pass through New Asper. The Winter Road heads into the Borderlands, the West Road carries trade between the capital and Asper, the Fish Road links the city with Vergo, and the Glass Road cuts across the land to Glassport. The other trade route, which extends from Kingsmead to Three Way Bridge, is known as the Glittering Road.

Gems, both cut and uncut, are exported to Ludogov in the Borderlands, where merchants compete with those of the northern Battlelands to sell their valuable wares, to the Magocracy, where they are in great demand among the nobility, and to neighboring Chalcis.

Olive oil, a commodity once in steady supply but now failing year by year, fetches high prices in the Magocracy. Unfortunately, it is also highly prized by pirates.

Great quantities of wine, both expensive, rare fermentations and common table wines, are exported primarily to Alantaris Isle and the Magocracy, though merchants are constantly seeking new trade routes through to the Marklands and the eastern Low Winterlands. Although the wine travels well, the distances involved, combined with various import duties, mean the fermentations are extremely expensive, placing even poor wines outside the grasp of all but the nobility.

In terms of imports, Aspirians buy horses from the Drachenlands. The local breeds are surly creatures, ill-suited for riding or using as beasts of burden, though they make fine eating. Chalcis provides metal ore and ingots, though due to a lack of overland trade routes all shipments to and from the nation must travel by sea.

Taxation policies are set by the king, though must be ratified by the Noble Council.

Alchemical Tax: All alchemical devices except those sold by the Alchemists' Guild are subject to a 10% sales tax. This raises the cost of alchemical devices in Aspiria by a similar amount.

The king's decision to tax alchemical devices yet exempt the Alchemists' Guild (essentially part of the Convocation) has not gone down well with the cults. Unable to persuade the monarch to exempt them as well, the four major cults have taken matters into their own hands. Instead of selling alchemical wares, they give them away in return for a donation. Naturally, the minimum donation is exactly equal to the standard price of the device. So as not to be seen to be snubbing the law, the cults only offer this service to those who have their deity as patron—other buyers must pay the inflated price.

Customs Duties: Imports are taxed at 4%, except beer and spirits, which are taxed at 10%. Exports tax is set at 3%, except on wine, which is taxed at 1%.

Hearth Tax: All households pay 1 gs per annum for each fireplace in the home.

Income Tax: Citizens pay 10% tax based on their annual income to their feudal superior and 10% directly to the king's treasury. The counts, whose only superior is the king, pay 20% to the monarch.

Sales Tax: A fee of 3% is paid on each transaction.

Scutage: Males between the ages of 15 and 50 who do not join their local militia or an army are taxed 10 gs per year to help maintain the army. This is paid to the local count or king, depending on where the citizen's allegiance lies.

MAJOR LOCALES

Presented below are new places for your heroes to explore while adventuring in Aspiria.

ASPLEY

Population: 404

Ruler: Countess-Baroness Bethan ap-Merovig

Although the locals grow grapes on the slopes behind the beach and produce middling quantities of wine, their produce is very much of table quality, ideal for guzzling, but not suitable for refined palates. Located on the storm-battered Southern March coast, Aspley's main export is fish. While fresh fish is available locally, much of its exports are smoked or salted. Small but industrious, the populace sells most of its catch to the wine-barons and their workers, with only a little leaving the county.

As one might expect, Aspley's residents are followers of Neorthe. A temple of Neorthe stands upon the beach, its three priests serving the spiritual needs not just of the locals, but of neighboring villages as well. With a large parish to watch over, two are usually away from the temple at any given time. Built from driftwood and decorated with material scavenged from the beach, the main temple is little different from scores found along Rassilon's coasts. The only thing it is noted for is its tall, rickety tower, also built of driftwood. During bad weather, one of the priests maintains a vigil at the top to ensure the large lantern housed there is not extinguished.

On the slopes overlooking the village stands a wooden statue of Neorthe, his trident pointing out to sea. Constructed five generations ago by the then-high priest, it stands twice as tall as a man. Strangely, the trident is normal sized. Why this should be is long-forgotten, but popular point to the priest, on discovering he was short of wood, focusing his attention on the god's person rather than his weapon. At the base of the slope is the village cemetery. Very few citizens are actually buried here, preferring to be consigned to the ocean, and the marker stones are memorials rather than grave markers.

The residents are currently gripped by fear. Several fishermen have failed to return in recent weeks, despite there being no bad weather or pirate activities. Strange footprints have been discovered on the beaches close to the temple, their origin apparently the cold waters of the Foaming Sea.

Unbeknownst to the locals, the statue of Neorthe conceals a relic. In his younger days, the priest responsible for its construction was part of a short-lived crusade against a kreana community lying some ten miles offshore. After a fearsome underwater battle the colony was destroyed and its sacred relic, a coral trident, taken as plunder. Unwilling to destroy the relic, which had powers related to the ocean, the priest hid it inside a wooden shell. His intention was to wait a few years, just in case the kreana came hunting for it, then retrieve it and put it to good use. Alas, he died of illness and his secret went with him to the ocean floor.

Although it has taken the best part of 100 years, the kreana have reclaimed the site and now seek the return of their relic. Through diligence and torture of captured fishermen, the shark-men have narrowed their search down to Aspley. Wary of suffering another heavy defeat, yet driven by their bloodlust, the priests have sent scouts to locate possible hiding places. When the trident is found, Aspley's citizens will be the victims of a massive assault, in which no mercy will be spared.

Balauchterafon

Population: 269
Ruler: Elected council and mayor

Where the Bladerun and Westflow Rivers meet, the waters form a wide, shallow lake before continuing their joint journey south through Drake Marsh to the sea. One of the strangest settlements along either river lies not upon their banks, but in the middle of the lake, several miles from either shore.

Tuomi oral tradition claims the village was built as a refuge for a powerful tribe living along the edge of the marsh. When invaders threatened, they abandoned their homes and retreated to the lake village. Abandoned as a refuge after the Aspirians' ancestors rose to dominance and drove the "barbaric" Tuomi north, the village eventually became home to fishermen, reed gatherers, and peat cutters, a role it continues to play to this day.

Pronounced "bal-ock-fon," the name is Tuomi, and literally translates as the "village on top of the river." Despite being part of Aspiria for centuries, the old name remains in use. Constructed by the ancestors of the Tuomi tribes now residing in the Borderlands centuries before the Anari arrived, Balauchterafon sits 10 feet above from the waters, held aloft by hundreds of thick wooden piles driven deep into the thick mud. Wooden decking covering the piles provides a flat, stable surface.

The densely packed piles make it impossible for even rowboats to maneuver beneath the village. Dotted around the perimeter are numerous rope ladders. Locals and visitors alike tether their boats to the nearest pile, then clamber up the ladders to reach the village proper. Any cargo is hauled up by means of pulleys. When the mists rise above the lake, which is frequent in late fall through early spring, the village appears to float above the nebulous vapors, giving it an unearthly quality. Particularly dense mists can roll into the village, making movement treacherous for those not used to the elevated position—a single wrong step can lead to the unwary plunging into the water below (there is no railing or palisade to prevent this). Visitors are advised to stay close to buildings, from which lanterns are hung.

Dominating the low skyline is a single two-story structure. This serves as both a small temple of Neorthe and the council chambers. It is also home to a single priest of the god of water, as well as being the mayor's official residence.

Although it stands within the domain of Count Einhard of New Asper, a council made up of ten prominent citizens rather than a nobleman governs Balauchterafon. One of these is in turn elected mayor, serving as council chairman for a three-year term. He is granted the status of a baron by Aspiria's nobility. A recent addition to the mayor's permanent advisors, who have no voting power, is an emissary from Scayle. A member of the elite Dragon Guard, he is responsible for training the small militia (20 citizens, all part-time) in how to deal with marsh dragon attacks.

Cave of Rending

Named for the deadly cave trolls that live in the dark depths, the Cave of Rending lies in the foothills of the Granite Mountains close to the border with Chalcis. A filthy, stinking network of sunless tunnels and chambers littered with bones and decaying flesh, the cave is supposed to hold a temple to a troll deity.

Few adventuring parties have ever returned from exploring the cave, and those who did came back nursing grievous wounds and recounting stories of waves of trolls willing to lay down their lives in the defense of the cave system. Worse still are the tales of an intelligent, spellcasting troll, something never encountered before.

For now the king, in whose lands the cave lies, has forbidden any large-scale military action against the trolls, fearing that any provocation would awaken a sleeping giant, figuratively speaking. The monarch may, however, be forced to act sooner than he would like, for orc emissaries have approached the trolls with the aim of forming an alliance. Should the orcs succeed, they would gain powerful allies, threatening both Aspiria and Chalcis.

Chepwyke

Population: 950
Ruler: Countess-Baroness Ethaine ap-Gui

The small town of Chepwyke (from the Classical Anari "cheap wick," meaning "market settlement") has often been described as the most ideally placed settlement in Aspiria. Located in the fertile central basin just ten miles west of Three Way Bridge, it benefits from good soil, a constant flow of trade caravans (greatly increased since glass shipments began), and no serious threats. Never troubled by any invaders, the rulers never bothered erecting any fortifications.

The town is divided into three districts. Immediately north and south of the trade road, which cuts through the town's heart, is a mercantile district. Inns offering travelers a comfortable bed and hot meals, corrals where caravans can park up overnight, warehouses for those who wish to sell their wares to local merchants, and workshops dedicated to the needs of the caravans are packed along the main thoroughfare. Beyond these, both north and south, is the main town, with its houses and workshops and granaries.

A rivalry has developed between the inhabitants of the mercantile belt and the rest of the citizens. Those living and working along the trade road consider themselves better educated and worldlier than those who tend the fields and livestock. For their part, the farmers and herders consider their neighbors to be arrogant, materialistic, and riddled with vice.

The feelings are not helped by the cults of Eostre (both aspects) and Var, who are competing for hearts and minds. The god of trade has a smaller following, but his cult is most definitely richer and more influential in local politics. Its clerics are pushing for caravanserais and warehouses to be erected on farmland on the town's perimeter. The cult of Eostre objects to this desecration of the land, reminding those who care to listen that Aspirians have always farmed the soil for their livelihood and that those who seek wealth for wealth's sake are victims of Vali's insidious teachings.

Count Andamar, in whose county Chepwyke lies, is currently distracted by events in the Eastern Marches. He has ordered Countess-Baroness Ethaine to sort out the problem. Having held the title for only six years, and fearful Andamar will strip her of it if she

fails him, she has no desire to make a hasty decision on such an important matter. While she listens to depositions from both sides, the rivalry is beginning to turn ugly.

COXLEY

Population: 665
Ruler: Baron Corneus ap-Aalard

The village of Coxley sits on the northern slopes of the Western Marches, close to an area of peat bog bordering the Westflow. Here the locals raise sheep and goats and harvest peat, the primary source of hearth fuel in Aspiria. Despite the presence of bufomi and marsh trolls, the village is protected only by a deep ditch and earthen rampart.

Over the last year the villagers have dug deeper into the peat, uncovering numerous corpses. The corpses are a ghastly sight, their skin and flesh preserved and stained black by the oxygen-starved, highly acidic environment. Rightfully fearful, the villagers had the corpses blessed and then burned.

Events have taken a more sinister turn in recent weeks, for several villagers have disappeared while in the bog. Search parties found no trace of the missing citizens, but they did uncover areas of peat that appear to have been pushed upward, as if something tunneled out from below the ground.

Sages have revealed the peat bogs mark one of the battlegrounds in which the brave defenders of Aspiria clashed with the Liche-Priest's army. Fearful that some sort of undead has been disturbed, Baron Corneus has requested the cult of Scaetha investigate. They have yet to reply, and the nobleman grows more impatient and worried as the days pass.

GLASSPORT

Docks: As Aspiria's largest port, Glassport boasts extensive wharves and warehouses, not to mention industries related to shipping and shipbuilding. Ships from Alantaris Isle, Chalcis, and the Magocracy regularly call here, and the dock area is awash with foreign sailors. On rare occasions, a ship from Al-Shirkuh, the desert realm south of Rassilon, berths here with a cargo of rare goods. When it does, folk gather from far afield to see the dusky-skinned sailors and listen to their tales of endless burning sands, strange beasts, and alien forms of magic.

The Glass House: The great market and temple of Var in Glassport is a vast stone hall with many brilliantly painted stained glass windows, a gift from the Guild of Glaziers, whose recent wealth has benefited the entire town. While the main market is held weekly (on Marketdaeg), the Glass Merchants have a concession allowing them to trade daily. An accommodation block and tavern caters for merchants wishing to engage in trade deals, as well as visiting clerics of Var.

The Sand Dweller: An inn located near the docks, the Sandpit, as the establishment is better known locally, caters for visiting merchants from Al-Shirkuh and those who wish to trade with the Free Emirates of the western coast. The decor is thoroughly southern in style, as is the cuisine, which uses a lot of unusual spices.

The innkeeper, Omid ibn-Hazid, is an ex-patriot who has taken Aspirian citizenship. Although Omid is fluent in both Anari and Trader, he permits only Sandspeech, the trade language of Al-Shirkuh, to be spoken in the Sandpit. Patrons who cannot speak the language are shown the door. Customers may pay in scields or dinars.

GOLDFIELD

Population: 760
Ruler: Sower Baron Tregor ap-Bovis

Aspirians may drink copious quantities of wine, but it is bread that fills their bellies. The village of Goldfield is one of many that sits on the fertile Plains of Vergo. Over time it has become renowned for two things.

First is its rich fields. Goldfield grows some of the best wheat in the land and mills the finest flour. Goldfield has long supplied flour to the royal court. In recognition, the then-king bestowed the noble title of baron on the high priest of Eostre Plantmother, elevating them to ruler of the village as well as spiritual guardian.

When the incumbent priest leaves his post, either through retirement of death, his successor is appointed by a council made up of the wealthiest landowners and the temple clergy. Such is the reputation of this small settlement that candidates come from across Aspiria in the hope of swaying the council with their piety and stewardship skills.

Residents argue that Goldfield's bread and cakes are also worthy of high praise. No one who tasted the many bakers' fine ware would argue otherwise, but these goods are not exported and thus rarely enter the mouths of others.

Goldfield's second noticeable feature is the grandeur of its graveyards, within which stand myriad statues and mausoleums. At some point in the distant past its residents became fixated with death, though not in a morbid fashion. Rather, they prepare for their inevitable end by scrimping and scraping to save enough money to ensure they can afford a lavish tomb and plentiful grave goods. Fine furniture, quality clothes, and expensive jewelry are disdained in favor of cheap goods. For all its prosperity, Goldfield looks like a settlement on the edge of economic collapse.

With the tombs stuffed full of grave goods (an odd trait among Anari), the living had to take precautions against thieves. In place of hiring mercenaries of Thieftakers, who might be tempted by the fabulous riches lying just feet away, the villagers opted to pay the cult of Scaetha. Not only would they never rob a tomb, but the clerics would also sing litanies and recite prayers.

Business is booming. A handful of clerics are paid out of local taxes to patrol the greater cemetery, while those with more money pay for guardians to pay closer attention to their future tomb. The cult maintains a very detailed ledger of who has paid what amount and how long the cult's services can be retained.

The cult does not divulge its accounts to outsiders, but folklore has it that the cult has been watching over the granite mausoleum of one wealthy grain merchant for over a century.

GOLEM WORKSHOP

Before the Golem Uprising, Aspiria was a major center of golem production. While they were expensive, many rich citizens had golems in their service, for they were a ready supply of tireless, servile labor. (The Aspirians did not use human slaves to any great degree.) Little wonder that Aspiria was the worst affected nation when the golems rebelled. Although the authorities, backed by mages and clerics of the Norns, were swift to destroy all the known workshops, legends persist that one escaped their attention.

Rumors vary as to its location, but all agree that the workshop contained dozens of rooms devoted to golem manufacture. Wild stories that the mages who once operated from here had constructed a fantastical machine in order to mass-produce golems at great speeds are unfounded but popular.

While creation of golems is now outlawed across Rassilon, many parties are interested in the process, not least the Awakeners. If ancient texts detailing the lost art are to be found anywhere, it is in the fabled workshop. Of course, the same storytellers who claim the workshop exists are quick to add that it is heavily guarded by golems who did not join the rebellion, and that they are following their original orders in killing all who come across the site without the proper authorization. Thus, the site has remained unexplored for over 150 years.

HARINGAARD

Population: 9,750
Ruler: Count Lux ap-Gwaer

Located in the western portion of the Eastern Marches, Haringaard is Count Lux's county seat. Before King Halgroth IV's violent cleansing of the Marches, the town was little more than a large village. It quickly prospered as new settlers flocked to the land, which, though largely unsuitable for agriculture, proved ideal for raising flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. Like most settlements in

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1. Foilan and Namus
2. The Golden Fleece
3. The Hide Market
4. The Hospice
5. The Kennel
6. Runners Recruitment Office
7. The Severed Hand
8. Temple of Horns
9. Threeps

population: 9750

Ruler: Count Lux ap-Twaer



the region, the town sits on a hilltop and is protected by a palisade and ditch. For all his wealth, Lux lives in a modest fortified manor.

The population of Haringaard has trebled in recent months due to an influx of refugees fleeing before the latest orc advance. Unwilling to flee the Marches due to their oaths of fealty to the count, and calling on the count to fulfill his feudal obligations to protect them, some 4,000 souls are currently camped outside the defenses (the lucky ones found accommodation with relatives inside the walls before the gates were closed).

Knowing the refugees would be easy pickings for orcs, Lux has ordered the palisade be extended with all haste to encompass the shanty town. A small army of laborers and carpenters are busily fulfilling the noble's request, while the count's captains hastily train a new militia to provide additional security.

Foilan & Namus: This business is named after its owners, two enterprising Anari brothers. A sign on the door marked with the count's seal proudly proclaims they are the official equipment suppliers to the East March Runners.

The recent spate of orc attacks in the Eastern Marches has led to an influx of adventurers seeking fame and fortune. Few adventurers have detailed knowledge of Haringaard, however, and purchasing equipment can be a time-consuming process.

The pair offers a handy service for those keen to get on with orc slaying or who are just passing through and do not have time to visit every shop—adventurers hand them a list of the items they need and the merchants arrange for the goods to be delivered to their office. The service is quick, with deliveries ranging from one to 12 hours depending on the length of the list and the availability of the items. Foilan & Namus charge clients 10% commission on each order. Being regular customers of certain shops, they also buy goods at 80% of retail, giving them a far higher income than most customers realize.

The Golden Fleece: Haringaard has a thriving wool trade, though recent troubles have caused trade to slow. The Golden Fleece specializes in thick, hardwearing woolen garments. These provide the same benefit as furs or winter clothing, depending on the thickness, but weigh only 3 lbs. and 7 lbs. respectively. They cost more, however—the equivalent of furs costs 65 gs and winter clothing is priced at 125 gs.

The Hide Market: As well as wool, the town boasts many skilled leatherworkers. The traders in the Hide Market sell only leather goods. Buyers can pick up leather armor and barding, slings, backpacks, bandoliers, pouches, satchels, scroll cases, tents, and waterskins for 80% of the standard price. The market is open from dawn until dusk on Marketdaeg and during the morning on Milcdaeg. The items listed above are available from shops at other times of the week, but their price is that listed in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*.

The Hospice: While stocks of food are still at a healthy level, the makeshift slum, which houses more people than the normal population of the town, is a prime breeding ground for disease. A small group of Eira's clerics have set up a hospice among the refugees, dispensing herbal remedies and tending to the general health of the displaced citizens.

Lacking a strong base of worshippers in Aspiria and no temples with gardens, the healers are desperately short of money and medicine. Count Lux is doing his best to help, but he has many problems and not enough money to go around.

The Kennel: The Eastern Marches have long been plagued by orcs. Most herdsmen own at least one war dog to help protect their cattle and sheep, and orc hounds (see Foe Hound in *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*) have long been used by the military.

Located close to the temple of Eostre Animlamother, the engro family has run the business since the days of Count Lux's great-grandfather. Customers are often surprised to see the current proprietor and lead trainer, Bartleby, leading out a hound almost his height (and certainly many times stronger), but the engro has a natural gift with animals.

Since the orcs' return, most of the dogs he had in stock have been sold to the East March Runners and, more recently, the cult of Bolverk. Bartleby is still prepared to sell the few adults he has left to other customers, but he has raised his prices to 300 gs for a war dog and 750 gs for an orc hound. Runners and adventurers signed up to assist the cult pay the normal price. Under no circumstances will he haggle or agree to sell one of the puppies currently being trained.

Runners Recruitment Office: The East March Runners are an irregular mercenary company in the direct employ of Count Lux. Rather than dealing with adventurers in person, Lux has set up a recruitment office manned by hardy veterans.

Adventurers seeking work can always find short-term employment. Typically the work involves tasks such as defeating an orc warband terrorizing the region, escorting refugees out of the Marches, or assassinating senior orcs. Contracts range in duration from a few days to a few weeks, depending on the distances involved and the nature of the assignment. The Runners perform only the most dangerous tasks—less risky tasks are carried out by the count's regular army.

Payment is a flat 15 gs per day regardless of whether one is a mage or an archer, but the count expects results and he does not pay the Runners to sit in taverns. As an added bonus, the Runners make keep any spoils of war from their mission.

The Severed Hand: Formerly known as the Herdsman's Rest, this inn changed its name shortly after the return of the orcs. The innkeeper, Varocher ap-Beauve, a retired soldier, offers 5 gs for each orc right hand brought to him. These are then pickled in wine vinegar and nailed to the inn's wall. The patrons, many of whom have lost family and friends in the attacks, cover much of Varocher's reward from their own pockets.

A staunch supporter of Count Lux, whom he served, and outspoken critic of King Halgroth, Varocher has placed a collection jar on the counter. Any coins are used to help wounded veterans and the families of those slain by the orcs. As a result, the inn is popular with off-duty soldiers and those recovering from injuries. Such patronage assures the thieves' guild leaves Varocher well alone.

Temple of Horns: Most of the inhabitants of the Eastern Marches raise sheep and cows, and thus honor Eostre Animalmother above all others. Her county temple is located in the town. Sheep and bull skulls mounted on stakes border the avenue leading to the temple compound. Above the main door is the horned skull of a huge aurochs.

Among the outbuildings there is a veterinary practice (catering to all types of animals), as well as workshops for butchers, wool spinners and dyers, leatherworkers, tanners, and horners, and storage sheds. A large fenced paddock surrounded by long sheds serves as the livestock market. The market runs from the first Milcdaeg to the second Marketdaeg each month from Plohmonan until Huntianmonan.

Despite being the most important temple in the region, only 20 clerics—12 priests and eight paladins—used to reside here. The high priestess, Oriabel Wool-Hair, has authority over five times that number, but until recently they were scattered far and wide throughout the remote herding communities. Due to displaced clerics flocking here, the current population stands at 36 priests and 22 paladins. The paladins have recently been assigned to aid the cult of Bolverk.

Shrine of Bolverk: The law-abiding citizens of Aspiria have never had much love for Bolverk's cult and its cattle stealing clerics. The return of the orcs has changed opinion, at least in the Eastern Marches. While the raiders slaughtered the inhabitants of many villages out of hand, they avoided unnecessarily killing their herds of cattle—even orcs need to eat.

Count Lux had the foresight to deduce the orcs, silent for so long, were commencing a full offensive. The nobleman dispatched fast messengers into the Battlelands, Borderlands, and Marklands to recruit clerics within days of the first reports of attacks reaching him. He has granted the cult permission to erect a shrine in the grounds of his grandmother's temple and pays a bounty for each cow (and a smaller one for each sheep) liberated from the orcs and brought to his county seat.

It is early days, and so far just five clerics have answered the call. Lux has received word that more are coming, but each day risks another community and its herds being lost. Those already in Aspiria cannot cope with the enormity of the task. To help lessen their workload, and increase their odds of success, they are preparing to hire suitably skilled adventurers. Only the Norns know whether

or not the cult will continue to enjoy Lux's favor after the orcs are driven back into the mountains.

The local high priestess of Eostre Animalmother and high priest of Ullr have jointly decreed that recovering cattle from orcs is not subject to the same rules as a conventional cattle raid. As such, Bolverk's clergy operating in the Eastern Marches suffer no sin for harming orcs defending the beasts.

Threeps: Within a week of its opening people were referring to Potions, Pills, and Poultices as "the three P's." It didn't take much longer for this to be shortened simply to "Threeps," the name the current owner, Olive, an engro herbalist, displays on the door.

Business isn't as good as it used to be. While there is increased demand for herbal remedies, many of Olive's herb suppliers have been forced out of the Eastern Marches, a treasure trove for those who know medicinal plants. Heroes venturing into the Marches can make a little money by bringing back preserved herbs—Olive is prepared to pay 10 gs per batch. She no longer sells dried herbs.

THE KINGS' BARROWS

Overlooking Drake Marsh are a cluster of burial mounds. No path leads to the mounds and few ever have reason to venture that far into the rugged hills. The northernmost barrows are visible from Balauchterafon (p. xxx) as faint bumps on the hilltop except in summer, when tendrils of mist creep up the slopes from the marsh to engulf the homes to the dead.

Exactly who might be interred in them is open to debate. Folklore records them as the Kings' Barrows, but this is only because of their impressive size and relative proximity to Asper, the old capital. That they predate the arrival of the Anari is rarely questioned—neither the Anari conquerors nor modern Aspirians ever constructed tombs in such fashion. As for kings, the Anari had none and Aspirian monarchs were buried beneath the royal palace in Asper. The truth may once have lain in the royal library in Asper, but much of that was destroyed during the Golem Uprising. Official surviving maps of the region simply list them as barrows.

In the void created by lack of hard facts have sprung up countless stories. Some theories point to them being the ancient tombs of marsh drakes worshipped by the primitive tribes who ruled Aspiria in ages long past, or the burial places of a breed of dragon-men long since vanished. As wild as these might seem, the region was once part of the gatormen's colossal empire. While the ferocious gatormen preferred to build in stone, they were thrown into a more primitive state as the ground dried, their slaves revolted, and their empire collapsed around them.

One obscure legend, known these days only to Aspirian skalds and the most knowledgeable sages speaks of men who came from across the western seas and who made the Western Marches their home. If the story is to believed, these mariners buried their dead in boats. Such a practise would certainly account for the large size of the barrows.

In some stories they are the tombs of mighty heroes whose spirits still protect Aspiria from the deadly denizens of the marsh. If this is true, the spirits demand nothing from the living as reward for their eternal vigil, nor have they ever made an appearance.

This is not to say the barrows are not considered haunted, however. Ever since the time of the Liche-Priest, whose armies threatened but never invaded Aspiria, all places associated with burial have been viewed with suspicion. It is for this reason that no treasure hunters have dug into the mounds or pried open the stone doorways that separate the living and the dead.

KINGSMEAD

Girard's Gems: Coins don't weigh much individually, but the weight soon mounts when you have to carry around a sack full. Girard ap-Picolet exchanges coins for gems of equal value and vice versa. He charges a 5% fee on each transaction.

Girard is licensed both by Count Noisiu and the cult of Ertha. Each of his gems, which range in value from 10 to 1000 gs, is accurately appraised, and comes with a certificate of authenticity.

Girard is paranoid, but he has every right to be—his vault contains gems worth many tens of thousands of gold scields, plus coins worth at least as much. His small office is heavily fortified. The walls are six feet thick, the few windows are narrow and barred, the locks are extremely complex (–4 to Lockpicking rolls), and there are several *glyphs* and mundane traps. As further protection he has hired three Thieftakers (through the Watchful Eye; see below) and six Iron Guild mercenaries on long-term contracts.

Girard is currently fuming and perplexed in equal measure. A thief somehow defeated his security without activating a single trap and stole from his vault. What has the moneychanger perplexed is that the thief stole only a single gem, a moonstone (see *Rassion Expansion 2* for its special properties) valued at a mere 50 gs. Angry at both the cult of Var and Iron Guild for their failures, he plans on hiring adventurers to track down the culprit and return his property.

Iron Guild Guildhouse: Caravans transporting gems are prime targets for bandits and orcs. While the mine owners have their own guards on their payroll, only the poorest or most tight-fisted dispatch a caravan without added Iron Guild protection. The Iron Guild has had a greater guildhouse in Kingsmead since 135 IR.

The Guild maintains a force of 135 Guildsmen and 45 Guild-Sergeants, plus a handful of non-combatant accountants. Life for the Guildsmen is extremely busy—few of the mercenaries ever stay in town for longer than three days at a time. With no time to spend their wages, they are among the wealthiest in the organization, making it a much-desired posting. The guildhouse also operates a number of fortified caravanserais on the road from Kingsmead to Three-Way Bridge. Though the services they offer are basic and cost more than using a roadside inn, they offer much greater protection.

The guildhouse is run by Gauntlet-General Foulque ap-Milon, a man whose 30,000 gs franchise investment has been repaid many times over down the 25 years of his tenure.

The Vault: As the heartland of gem mining, Kingsmead rightly has the largest number of Ertha worshippers, and thus the largest temple to the goddess.

Known simply as the Vault, it is a place of worship and work. The sprawling subterranean network is dominated by the Grand Cavern, a natural feature that could, in an emergency, accommodate most of the town's population. Dominating it is the statue of Ertha, a colossal image studded with precious stones. The emeralds that form her eyes are the size of a man's fist.

Connected to the main temple by a natural tunnel that descends 200 feet into the earth is a large cave dedicated to the worship of Foldardróttann, minor goddess of underground exploration. She is considered the second most important deity in Kingsmead, eclipsing even the other major deities. Ertha's other associated deities, Farmaguth (boundaries), Gerðr (walls and fences), Hagvirkr (forging weapons), and Landskjalpti (earthquakes) have dedicated shrines in a shared hall adjoining that of Ertha.

Workshops and storerooms dominate the second level. While there are several independent appraisers and jewelers in town, most mine owners use the temple's services, considering them the best available. Here gems are appraised, cut, and polished (all for a fee) before being returned to their owners for sale. There are also gold and silversmiths, talented craftsmen who produce elaborate pieces of jewelry. Most of these are destined for markets in Aspiria, though small quantities are exported (Aspiria lacks the raw precious metals necessary to make jewelry a major export).

Deeper down are the areas reserved for the clerics—their homes, alchemical workshops, the armory, and the treasury. The cult boasts 200 clerics—180 honoring Ertha and 20 honoring Foldardróttann. Of the former, 113 priests serve in the temple's workshops, while 67 paladins help protect the various mines. Foldardróttann's clergy hire themselves out to the mines, exploring previously unmapped areas for rich veins.

The Watchful Eye: Given the riches that pour into the town are very attractive to thieves, Count Noisiu employs a 150-man watch to police the streets. Ideal for breaking up fights and nabbing opportunists, they are of little use in catching real thieves (or investigating other crimes). Sensing a gap in the market, an enterprising paladin of Var opened a security service.

The Watchful Eye is owned and managed by High Thieftaker Alais Irongrip, a paladin of both Var and Forseti, minor deity of thieftak-

ers. Of the dozen clerics answerable to her, four are priests and eight are paladins. All worship Forseti as their sole deity, making them dedicated law enforcement officials. They are not part of the watch—they guard property and investigate crimes only when paid to do so. To deflect any claims of impropriety, crimes committed in buildings the paladins are protecting is investigated by the priests free of charge.

NEW ASPER

Assassins' Guild: Aspiria's laws on assassination date back to the days of the Anari Empire. It is neither illegal to wish for someone's death, nor to hire an assassin, though it is illegal to commit murder (whether for payment or not). However, ancient laws require that the Assassins' Guild send the intended victim warning that his life is in danger, giving him a minimum of 24 hours notice.

Hirer and assassin negotiate payment terms and deadlines, with the full fee handed over once an agreement is reached. Should the assassin fail to live up to his end of the bargain, the fee must be repaid. In many cases, the knowledge that an assassin has been hired is enough to cause the victim to make amends for any crime.

As one might expect, the cult of Niht has a strong grip on the Assassins' Guild, though membership is not compulsory. Captured assassins are tortured before being handed to the local temple of Sigel for execution.

Drago Hall: The decrepit ruin of Drago Hall, the home of Baron Drago ap-Rabel until his mysterious disappearance three years ago, sits 11 miles from the capital. Locales avoid the crumbling structure, believing it to be haunted by the baron's ghost. Everyone agrees the baron was a vile man. He was reputed to have strangled his wife and concealed her body, though no charges were ever brought against him. One story claims the baron cannot rest until his wife's remains are found and buried.

Garden of Heroes: Formerly located in Asper, this memorial honored Aspiria's heroes of the Demongate, Liche-Priest, and Blizzard Wars. Transplanted to New Aspiria after the Golem Uprising, along with the bones and grave goods beneath them, they line the edge of a grand park.

The original garden had hundreds of statues, each marking the grave of a named hero. Such was the devastation the golems wrought that only 25 statues remained recognizable. Added to their number are ten raised to honor heroes of the Golem Uprising. Dominating the center is a huge granite statue of a warrior wearing a full helmet. His face concealed, he marks the resting place of the heroes whose monuments were destroyed and whose remains could not be officially identified. Known simply as the Tomb of the Unknown Heroes, it is the focal point of celebrations on Battle Dance Day, Standards Day, and Victory Day.

The Golem Museum: Located in an old warehouse, the Golem Museum tells the story of the Golem Uprising. It is the brainchild of Lusiane ap-Jourdain, a female Anari with what many locals call an unhealthy fixation on golems.

After paying a 1 gs entrance fee, visitors can peruse the collection of texts and artifacts relating to the bloody conflict. A long tapestry tells the story of the devastating war from Aspiria's point of view and a large table depicting the final encounter is set out with painted miniatures. Lusiane has created a set of "rules of war," allowing visitors to play the part of the Aspirians or golems in a tabletop battle.

As well as manikins dressed as Aspirian warriors, there are numerous golem fragments gathered from the ruins of Asper and the Battlefield and a small number of life-sized golem models. The various texts, primarily military accounts and firsthand stories, count as a small and very specialized library.

Specialties: Golems, the Golem Uprising in Aspiria.

Investigation Rolls: +2 for specialties only (no rolls concerning other topics are allowed).

Keen to expand her collection, Lusiane pays for golem parts. She doesn't actually care where they are unearthed. Word has reached her that the people of Al-Shirkuh still make use of golems. Although she has no idea how much one might cost, Lusiane hopes to raise enough money to buy one as the centerpiece of her collection (creating golems is banned, but owning them is not). She is also keen to explore the Golem Workshop, the location of which she believes she has discovered from piecing together various clues. To date, she has not been able to find adventurers foolishly enough to act as her bodyguards.

Lusiane has no idea that one of her employees is an agent for the Awakeners. He passes back information on her activities, paying special attention to anything to do with the Golem Workshop. Should Lusiane manage to gain entry, a party of Awakeners would be dispatched with all haste to plunder its secrets.

The Hall of Justice: The largest temple to Hothar, this edifice is both a holy place and the supreme court. Under Aspirian law, trials are conducted in the capital of the county where the crime was committed. Those found guilty are entitled to one appeal, which is always heard in the Hall of Justice. It is also the capital's law court.

Traditionally, Oath Renewal Day lasts the whole of Eostremonan. In Aspiria, the counts, along with nobles directly behold to the king, renew their oaths on the second Sunnandaeg on Werremonan, just before the spring gathering of the Noble Council. (Nobles beholden to the counts perform their Oath Renewal Day in Eostremonan as normal.) The king takes the nobles' oaths on the steps of the Hall of Justice, a spectacle that draws a huge crowd. The Marketdeag immediately before the ceremony is a great market.

The Noble Council meets in a lavishly decorated chamber located in an annex of the main temple building. While access can be gained without having to pass through the temple, so allowing messengers, servants, and guards to come and go without disrupting services, the councilors are expected to enter through the main temple. Here they pause to gaze briefly on the statue of Hothar as a reminder of their responsibility to serve the people of Aspiria to the best of their ability and not to abuse their position of power. For most, the gesture us purely symbolic, a tradition they maintain for the benefit of the masses.

The Lance & Sword: A well-known inn, the Lance & Sword caters for mercenary captains seeking employment, as well as small bands of heroes looking for adventure. Fights are common, though most are good-natured brawls rather than deadly combats.

Potential hirers inform the innkeeper, Milom ap-Aubri, a retired Sword of Tiw and former sellsword, of the services they require and then take a seat at a numbered booth. Captains and heroes entering or staying at the inn then talk to Milom, being directed to patrons whose needs meet their particular talents.

While mercenaries use their names, playing on their reputation, hirers are referred to only by their booth number to ensure anonymity. Given that many dignitaries are easily recognized, most act through intermediaries. Once a deal is struck and oaths sworn, the patron may reveal his name if he so chooses.

The Temple of Light: Constructed from highly polished yellow granite and topped by a magnificent dome paneled in beaten gold, the Temple of Purity is the seat of Sigel's cult in Aspiria. Though the cult is always short of money, its assets are beyond calculation.

Every inch of the temple interior open to laity is covered in panels of beaten gold inscribed with prayers, stories, and imagery devoted to Sigel. (The places reserved solely for the clergy have bare yellow marble surfaces.) During the temple's construction after the Golem Uprising, the people were taxed heavily to provide the vast amount of precious metal required. Though their ancestors nearly revolted at the burden placed on them, their modern descendants admire their "generosity," for the holy place is truly wondrous to behold.

Thrust into the top of the altar, which is said to be solid gold but is actually a block of white marble covered in a thick layer of beaten metal, is a greatsword. Inscribed on the blade in Draconic runes is a single word—Sunblade. According to ancient temple records, Sun Knight Anselm the Pure, a paladin-hero popular in stories even today, placed the sword here after the war against the Liche-Priest. Inscribed around the sword in Classical Anari are the words "Sunblade shall be drawn by the righteous hand when Darkness threatens Aspiria." Paladins touch their weapons against Sunblade as a symbolic gesture during their final vows of ordination.

Studied many times down the centuries, the Sunblade is a true relic. It sole power is the ability to create a burst of blazing light that burns demons and undead. No one can attune themselves to the

relic while it remains in the stone. The Reliquary knows the sword's existence, but can do little to remove it—the altar weighs many tons and has proven resistant to damage.

Atop the great dome that sits directly over the hall of worship is a 30 feet high statue of Sigel. His halo is a disc of pure gold, his right hand clutches his sword, and his left palm is open and raised to face the sky. A flickering flame dances in his palm, its light visible for many miles after sunset. Known as the Flame of Righteousness, local folklore holds that Aspiria will never fall so long as the flame burns.

Crafted by frost dwarf artisans, the statue is a marvelous feat of engineering. The figure is actually hollow and can be accessed from a hidden walkway near the top of the dome. Unseen from the ground, a wick as thick as a man's arm emerges from the god's left palm. The wick is fed by an oil reserve in the lower torso.

THE NORTHERN MARCHES

A term with no meaning in Aspirian law and never mentioned on official maps, the Northern Marches encompasses all the land within Aspiria north of the Westflow. The entire region belongs to the crown, as it has done since it was seized during the war against the Liche-Priest, though Halgroth V has little interest in its welfare.

The Marches are home to 7,000 people. Farmers and herders for the most part, they eke out a simple existence on the frontier. Most settlements are small, with only a scant handful having more than 150 souls. The highest-ranking nobles are knights and bannerets, beholden to the king by oaths of fealty but left to rule as they see fit. Most of the settlements are in the east, within a day or two's march of the busy trade road.

Orcs have made their presence felt in recent months, though not in any great strength. Aspiria's army does not patrol here, forcing the villagers to rely on themselves, their neighbors, and whatever adventurers they can hire for protection. With the king trying his best to deny anything is amiss and refusing to dispatch soldiers to the frontier, the settlers are desperately rushing to erect better fortifications. A pragmatic people, they have grasped what Halgroth has not—if the orcs conquer the Northern Marches, Aspiria's only trade road, the source of its great wealth, will be severed. Worse still, if the orcs in the eastern Granite Mountains capture the land on the border with Chalcis, Aspiria will effectively be besieged.

Count Lux, who has also seen the larger picture, is unable to act openly. The Northern Marches are the king's domain, and to send household troops north of the river would be treated as an act of rebellion. For now, Lux can do little but have his heralds try to convince the king of the danger and send hired adventurers to bolster the defenses of the eastern most settlements.

PARISI

Population: 4,463
Ruler: Countess Envita ap-Ancelyn

County seat of the Southern Marches, Parisi is renowned for being the center of Aspirian wine production. Much of Parisi's industry is dedicated to wine production, with glassblowers, cork makers, potters, carpenters, and coopers serving the local vineyards. As well as Countess Envita's estates, there are half a dozen other wine-barons with lands close to the town.

Parisi holds several regional festivals to Eostre. These include Grape Dance Day (held the first day grape pressing begins at the temple to Eostre), Bottling Day (when the first of the temple's wine is bottled), and Wine Day (held the first day the latest table wine from the cult's summer crop is ready for drinking). Other festivals to Eostre, such as Apple Day, always center on grapes and are renamed accordingly. While they are religious observations, these ceremonies are also excuses to drink heavily.

The House of Vines: With Parisi being the capital of Aspiria's wine-producing region, it is little surprise the largest temple to Eostre Plantmother can be found here. Such is its size, the temple is considered an entire ward within Parisi.

The main temple, a grand wooden structure supported by pillars carved to resemble climbing grape vines, is large enough to hold 2,000 worshippers at a squeeze. Instead of monetary tithes, all vintners in the Southern Marches are required to donate 10% of their grape harvest, which the clerics ferment into a variety of wines, which they in turn sell in local markets. Numerous wings dedicated solely to the fermentation of wine extend from the central hall.

Clustered around the main temple are the homes of the 150 clerics who live and work here (104 priests and 46 paladins), the temple's herbal remedy, and alchemical workshops, herb and plant gardens, orchards of fruit-bearing trees and bushes, storerooms and granaries, and numerous lesser buildings.

The walls of the main worship area are covered in living vines, kept sustained in the dark interior by the power of the goddess. The focus of worship is a statue of Eostre. It takes the usual form, but with the addition of a necklace of grapes.

As well as worship of Eostre Plantmother, there are two major shrines. The largest honors Gullveig, minor deity of brewing. Aspirians believe he is Eostre's son and worship him solely as the god of winemaking. Resident here are 12 priests (known as Wine-Lords) and 15 paladins (Vine-Lords). The Wine-Lords ferment wine, while the Vine-Lords help protect the remote vineyards. The smaller shrine is dedicated to Veth, protector of granaries (and wineries in Aspiria) and slayer of vermin. Her cult has two priests and ten paladins. These numbers are included in the 150 clerics mentioned above.

As well as producing wine for general sale, the cult of Gullveig produces a potent sacred wine. Worshippers attending major ceremonies are given a single sip. Clerics of Eostre Plantmother or Gullveig can purchase glass bottles holding a flagon's worth for 50 gs. Consuming an entire bottle's contents boosts the cleric's Faith rolls by +1 by lowers all other Trait rolls by a similar amount.

In recent months the temple has been at the center of a scandal. Several citizens have gone mad after drinking the cult's wine, leading to a fall in sales. Investigations have found nothing untoward so far, but the clerics suspect foul play.

Winter Wine Vintners: Having made his name working for various nobles, master vintner Bron ap-Peredur decided to go into business for himself. His business produces only a few hundred bottles of wine each year, but the quality is exceptional and highly sought after by wealthy citizens. This has not gone down well with his rivals, of which he has many.

His wagons bring in grapes have been attacked, his vats twice destroyed, and his workers threatened. Having had to pay for repairs and offers his staff higher wages, Bron is close to bankruptcy. Anyone who can stop the attacks would be well rewarded with a steady supply of his wine.

PURPLE HEATHER HILL

On a single hill in the Southern Marches, the center of Aspiria's winemaking industry, grows a fragrant purple heather. Found nowhere else in Aspiria (the nearest other area it can be found is the Purple Hills in the Borderlands), and refusing all attempts to cultivate it on other hills, the heather has become a key ingredient in many expensive wines. Although a seemingly natural plant, its flowers produce the best results if harvested on Reaping Day. So much as a day later and their potency is greatly diminished, requiring more to be used to achieve the same results.

To ensure no vineyard could monopolize the rare flowers, the king long ago decreed the hill could never be owned, for the blooms were a sacred gift from Eostre Plantmother. Instead, each year, when the flowers were ripe for picking, the local vintners would have to compete in gathering as much as they could before sunset. Some decades later the law was changed. Now, whoever held the summit (marked by a stone engraved with runes sacred to Eostre Plantmother) at the break of dawn on Reaping Day would have sole harvesting rights for that year. Determining the victor was placed in the hands of the cult of Eostre Plantmother.

Originally the vintners would begin at the bottom of the hill and, just before dawn, race up the hill. In order to induce humility, the king demanded that the head of the vineyard participate in the race, thus preventing lazy or elderly nobles from hiring young, fit runners (or clerics of Freo) to claim the right on their behalf.

With trade once again flowing and Aspiria' wine in high demand, the hill has become the scene of an annual battle in recent years. On the day before the picking begins, gangs of warriors contest the hilltop. Most are hired by the rich vintners. The king permits this since it forces the landowners to spend money, and because the mercenaries must pay tax on their earnings. By law, only blunt weapons (including hammers, maces, and staves) may be used in the fight. Spilling blood (defined as causing an injury through an edged or piercing weapon) results in a double weregild fine—one payment goes to the injured party, and the other to the temple of Eostre Plantmother that stands on a nearby hilltop.

The battle was become something of a public spectacle. While the workers gather at the base of the hill, awaiting orders to begin loading their baskets or to head home at the crack of dawn, local villagers flock here to place bets and to enjoy the fracas.

VERGO

The coastal town of Vergo is divided into Uptown, the prosperous part lying atop the bluffs, and Downtown, the mostly abandoned slum at the bottom of the cliffs.

The Docksy: While the innkeeper of the Docksy, Paufris ap-Dagobert, claims the tavern's name is a play on words given its location in Downtown and its clientele of working girls, most locals believe the owner is just poorly schooled.

The Docksy is the only tavern in Downtown, and is rarely frequented by Uptowners. The food is almost dangerous, the wine is vinegary, and the clientele has killed a visitor for his fine clothes more than once. Count Uryen has considered closing the place down, but doing so would only force the patrons to relocate to Uptown a move that would be far from popular.

What Uryen doesn't know is that the Docksy is the headquarters for the local thieves' guild, known as the Sharks. A network of secret tunnels runs from the basement up the inside of the cliff to the Ship and Anchor, a seemingly middle class inn catering for a polite and well-mannered clientele. Goods are smuggled ashore at night, divided into smaller consignments, and hauled up the steep steps to the Ship and Anchor, from where they are sold to those with the right contacts.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Below are a handful of NPCs the heroes may encounter on their journeys through Aspiria.

ARKHWISARD CASPAR AP-BREBO

Arkhwisard Caspar quit his position as head of the Alchemists' Guild in Glassport two years ago, citing ill health. While it is true that Caspar is of advanced years and has suffered from numerous minor ailments in recent years, his decision to vacate the post he had held for five decades was not entirely for the reasons stated.

Rummaging through alchemical texts "salvaged" from an ancient tomb, Caspar stumbled across a slim tome. Written in blood on human skin, the work was written in an esoteric code. Five years of secret work later, Caspar decoded the manuscript and discovered it to be a powerful and complex ritual capable of turning one into a liche. Although the elderly mage had no fear of death, he enjoyed living too much to give up his mortal form.

For several years he wrestled with his conscience, unsure as to whether to walk the dark path or accept his ultimate fate. In the end his lust for life won out, and Caspar began the unholy ritual.

The ritual requires many rare and complex ingredients. Being too infirm to travel far, the mage has taken to hiring small bands of adventurers to do his dirty work for him, guiding them to the likely resting places of the materials he needs. None are aware of his true goal, being told they are spell components necessary for his research into more powerful varieties of alchemical devices, and he pays well for secrecy, claiming that others would kill for the knowledge he is close to uncovering.

Should any of his hired helpers discover his true goal, Caspar, who has grown steadily more depraved and corrupt as he enacts the stages of the ritual, would have no compulsion about having them killed.

COUNT ANDAMAR AP-TREBERT

Andamar's lands begin at the southern edge of the Eastern Marches. They extend down the River Asper and west along the Glass Road, before heading north again some 50 miles east of the capital.

Now in his late fifties, Andamar fought at his father's side in the anti-orc crusade led by King Halgroth IV, earning the many scars that cover his body. He has been count for 27 years and has ensured the continuation of his line by siring four sons and five daughters.

His family has been allied with that of Count Lux for centuries, the two counties bonded by marriages and oaths of friendship. With orcs again extending their reach deep in the Eastern Marches, Andamar has honored his ancestral pledges by sending troops to aid Count Lux.

Andamar is a stern man with close-cropped hair and a no-nonsense attitude. He has no time for small talk, dislikes gossip, and quickly grows impatient with those who take up his time with trivial matters. Those who understand the life of a warrior and the nature of strategy and tactics may win his favor, as well as a place leading his troops against the rampaging orcs.

Anyone who displays exceptional valor in his service may find themselves being offered the hand of one of his youngest two daughters (Martha, aged 15 and Matilda, 16). They are extremely unlikely to inherit his title, especially since all his older children are married with their own children, and thus Andamar has no illusion they will ever be an attractive wife for an Aspirian noble.

COUNTESS ENVITA AP-ANCELYN

Protector of the Southern Marches, Countess Envita governs the grape-yielding hills that produce 90% of Aspiria's famous wines. Although she is a wine-baron in her own right, she maintains a fair trade policy, ensuring that all vintners have ample opportunity to produce the best wines they can. Given that she collects export taxes on wine sales, she has little reason to act otherwise.

Gossip says Envita is a woman with certain appetites. It is said two of her three husbands died of exhaustion, and one was dismissed after being stricken with an illness that left him unable to fulfill his marital duties. Loose tongues further claim that having decided that long-term relationships are a waste of time and effort, she is constantly seeking new bed companions.

Those with a more malicious tongue hint that Envita might be a demon or vampire, and that her husbands' exhaustion is simply a cover story for her unholy lusts. Strangely, the countess has never bothered to answer any of these claims, except with a wry smile and a sly wink.

Although now in her mid-forties, she remains an attractive woman (albeit with the help of alchemical devices) and is physically active.

THE GREEN MAN

A mysterious figure who has existed in folk tales for centuries, the Green Man is said to be a hearth elf or fey, depending on who one asks. The cult of Eostre suspects he might be a divine servant of the goddess.

Many strange powers are attributed to him. Some say he has leaves growing in place of his hair and beard. Others claim he can step into a tree and reappear a great distance away from another one. Yet other tales grant him the ability to cause vegetation to sprout at accelerated rates, to animate war trees with a touch, and cause forests to swallow invading armies without trace.

Whatever his origin, the Green Man appears at random, curing blight with a wave of his hand, singing songs that cause plants to yield more crops, and asking for nothing in return save those he aids sing prayers to Eostre and gift him a glass or two of wine. Those who have offended Eostre Plantmother find the Green Man altogether more malevolent, for he can wither crops and cause blight as easily as he blesses them.

BATTLELANDS, THE

The fierce tribes of the Battlelands have earned their continued freedom in blood. No conqueror has ever subdued this realm, and while the Tuomi hold power, it is unlikely they ever will. Beset by frequent frost giant and orc raids, the Battlelands continue to live up to their name.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in The Battlelands.

* **Tribal Alliances:** The Tuomi of the Battlelands are bound together in a complex pattern of ever-shifting tribal alliances, neutrality, and hostility. Attitudes change as rapidly as the wind, and keeping track of them all is certainly no fun for the GM.

Any time a Battlelander character interacts with a different tribe (regardless of race), draw a card from the action deck. (Don't bother rolling on the Reaction Table—tribal alliances and feuds go far beyond the individual.) Naturally, the GM can ignore this and simply pick a result—if he needs the tribe to be friendly, then they are friendly.

A red face card means the tribe is friendly to the hero. They have a reaction of Friendly on the Reaction Table. A black face card means the tribe is less welcoming, and has a reaction of Uncooperative. A numbered card indicates neutrality—whether the tribe aids or hinders the hero depends on his actions. If a Joker is drawn, draw again. If the next card (redraw again if you get a second Joker) is a numbered card, the tribe remains neutral. A red face card now indicates Helpful, and a black face card Hostile.

If you have multiple Battlelander heroes in the party, you should draw one card for each player. A tribe may be friendly to one hero's tribe, yet hostile to another.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

While the Battlelands have Anari, frostborn, and Saxa populations, Tuomi culture dominates. The Anari and Saxa are most populous in the southern regions, below the trade road to Calivar, for it was here the Anari held sway in olden times. The Saxa are largely the descendants of slaves shipped here by the empire, but now free citizens.

The Battlelands is divided into a patchwork of tribal regions. Each tribe is led by a mormaer. Mormaers rule only those who wish to be ruled by them, the feudal systems as practiced by the Anari and Saxa being unknown in the Battlelands.

Although the position is hereditary, any family member separated by no more than five generations may be chosen as heir. Furthermore, birthright alone does not make one fit to rule. The Tuomi expect their leaders to lead the tribe to war when violence is necessary, to make alliances that benefit the entire tribe, to punish those who harm the tribe, and to settle disputes without being arbitrary. If a leader fails his obligations to his followers, he loses face among his tribe and peers; alliances may be broken, leaving the tribe isolated militarily, politically, and financially, and rivals may offer his people positions in their tribe or invade, safe in the knowledge the people will not follow a poor leader.

Each year the mormaer must go before an assembly of the clan leaders, clerics, mages, warriors, rich landowners, and master crafters, those considered the most able to pass judgment on behalf of the people. There the mormaer must speak of the tribe's status in the Battlelands, its gains and losses, and future problems that may arise as a result of his decisions. If the council is not happy, it may remove the mormaer from office by a simple majority vote. The mormaer may refuse to abdicate, of course, but his position is untenable without popular support, for what power has a leader none will follow? When faced with the loss of support, most mormaers do right by the tribe and step down, naming their successor as their last act. In these circumstances, the council may refuse to accept the heir, leaving the position to be filled by a candidate of their choice.

Each tribe comprises a number of clans bonded together because the mormaer has promised to protect them and increase their wealth. Whereas tribes are political entities, clans are formed from families sharing common ancestry and are thus bound by blood. Each clan is led by a comes. Unlike the mormaer, the comes can be removed from power by the will of his extended family. The clan's mormaer has no right to interfere in clan affairs unless discord threatens the tribal unity.

While the children of tribe and clan nobility use the title ruiri, in the Battlelands the pronunciation varies on the child's parentage.

Ranking below the nobility are the clergy. Both mormaer and comes are expected to be warriors first and foremost, regardless of sex. Diplomacy is a necessary evil to the Tuomi, and is left in the hands of the clergy, who are deemed to understand the balance of nature. It is a great insult to send a foreigner (that is a non-Tuomi) to negotiate on a tribe or clan's behalf, regardless of his social rank. Clerics of Tiw, Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor rank higher than those of the other gods.

Ranking just below the clerics are mages. Tuomi wizards favor elementalism, though few join the Convocation. Although druids are non-human, it is considered a great boon for one to ally himself with a clan or tribe. Such events have been rare, and to date have only occurred shortly before times of great upheaval and bloodshed. The last time this occurred was in 381 IR, mere months before Canual Murtholoic led the Battlelanders to victory against an army of marauding frost giants.

Permanent warriors are next on the social ladder, followed by rich landowners, crafters, and then the rest of the population.

EDUCATION

While the Battlelands has no schools, academies, or institutions, the citizens are not uneducated. Children are taught by clerics, though what they learn and who tutors them depends on their parentage. For instance, the children of warriors, male and female, learn from the clergy of Tiw, while those of farming or herding families receive instruction from Eostre's clerics.

Instruction in culture, law, history, and such like is left to the clan members, for every clan has slightly different laws, traditions, and beliefs. Education generally continues until the age of 12, when the child begins learning the practical side of his future profession. By the age of 14, he or she is expected to be proficient enough to fulfill his role and be an active member of society.

RELIGION

Fiercely independent and prone to settling disputes through violence, the Tuomi of the Battlelands have held Tiw in high esteem since before recorded history began. While the Anari settled the south and proclaimed they had conquered the natives, lines on a map do not equate to domination. Against the Anari, the forces of

the battlelands

Population: 39,046 (69% Tuomi, 11% Anari, 10% frostborn, 8% Saxa, 2% engro)
Ruler: None (loose tribal confederation)
Religion: Tiw, Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe, Thunor (secretly Thrym)
Imports: Ale, clothing, wine
Exports: Fish, gems



the Liche-Priest, and the armies of the Hellfrost, the tribal armies marched to war under the banner of Tiw. Little has changed down the centuries, and when tribes clash today both sides invoke prayers to the war god.

All settlements over 2,000 souls maintain a temple to Tiw. These structures serve as the living quarters for unmarried men, a focal point for the militia to rally, and, more often than not, as the court of the local noble (though rarely his actual home). While every village has a shrine, from where the elder calls the men to arms and leads ceremonies, virtually every house boasts a small statue to the war god.

While the Tuomi have never practiced farming on an industrial scale, every settlement has fields and herds enough to feed its people. Eostre is popular in both her aspects, with every settlement having a shrine. Often little more than a carved stone located in the fields or near the winter animal yards, the shrines are the focus of communal worship.

Kenaz is the third most popular deity in the Battlelands. Introduced by the Anari, his faith found few worshippers among the Tuomi until the Blizzard War. Protected by the recently formed Iceblade Mountains and lacking a large population density, the Hellfrost horde largely skirted the western edge of the Battlelands in favor of striking against the Anari strongholds of Aspiria and Chalcis.

Elements of the horde did strike east toward the coast, but they were driven back by the fierce tribesmen, Anari soldiers, and clerics of Kenaz. When the war ended and the frost giant raids began, the clerics of Kenaz taught the Tuomi how to combat them.

Kenaz is seen as both a fire god and a war god in the Battlelands, as evidenced by the rise of the cult of Goðjaðarr, one of Kenaz's aspects. Within a few more generations, Kenaz may actually lose his war god status, replaced completely by the minor deity.

Neorthe has always been important in the Battlelands, for fish has always been a staple part of the diet and the sea god is one of the four nature deities. With the rise of Calivar as a major naval power and the Battlelanders willingness to take the fight to invading frost giant ships, Neorthe's cult and grown in recent years.

The fifth most popular god is Thunor. The Battlelands are frequently wracked by westerly storms and northerly blizzards, and the wide open spaces are ideal temples for the storm god's priests. The independent nature of the Tuomi and their lack of centralized government and laws also leads them to honor Thunor.

Together, Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor are viewed as the gods of nature. Lacking great cities, the Tuomi consider themselves more at peace with nature than any culture except the Finnar, whom the Tuomi consider rather backward due to their lack of metalworking and wandering nature.

Thrym, unfortunately, has a growing number of worshippers among the civilized races. His cultists work with the frost giants, providing intelligence on defenses and plans to combat them, as well as attacking temples to Kenaz and assaulting wandering knights of the Order of the Giant Slayers.

Military

The belligerent tribes of the Battlelands maintain warriors totaling between 5% and 10% of the population. The tribes do not differentiate between the sexes in war, and during war a further 20% of the tribe can be mustered in the form of militia. Whereas in many feudal systems arming the peasants is seen as a bad idea, the Tuomi believe it is every person's right to carry arms.

Most warriors carry four short spears, three designated for throwing and one for stabbing, along with a medium shield. Swords are expensive, and only the nobility and favored warriors can afford them. While axes are ideal weapons, the Tuomi consider them work tools, and so disdain them in battle. Metal armor is expensive, and thus worn only by the elite. Most militia do not even own a leather shirt, instead fighting in just their everyday clothes. All warriors wear war paint.

Warriors are not grouped into companies, nor organized by weapon type. Instead, warriors stand in the battle line under their clan banner, with the mormaer assuming overall command.

Standard tactics are to intimidate the enemy with war cries, chanting, wailing, a cacophony of drums and horns, and the clashing of weapons on shields. Individual nobles and warriors often step forward to issue challenges or boast, demonstrate their physical prowess through heroic feats, or bare their backsides or genitals to show their disdain for the enemy.

When the signal is given, the entire line advances at a jog, gradually increasing pace. Spears are launched at long, medium, and short ranges, the warriors never breaking stride while they pepper the enemy lines with their javelins. As the lines converge, melee weapons are drawn and shields set in preparation for the bloodshed to follow.

Horses (and sledges in winter) are used to carry nobles and elite warriors into battle. The warrior is a passenger, with a lesser warrior controlling the mount. As the mount approaches, the warrior throws his spears before dismounting to engage in combat. The rider then remains close by, ready to drag his master away should he be wounded or killed.

Trade & Tribute

Two trade roads extend into the Battlelands, opposite ends of a network known locally as the Great Road. While they form a vast arc, few merchants ever traverse any further than Ludogov in the Borderlands, the great market town at the center of the route. Ludogov imports barrels of ale and casks of wine from Aspiria, which merchants then sell to traders from the northern and southern Battlelands.

Merchants from Jotungraef, in the northern Battlelands, export barrels of salted and smoked fish to the Glittersands, metalwork from the forges of Kenaz's temples to Lakeland, and gems and semi-precious stones to the jewelers of Ludogov. In return, they bring back small quantities of glass, furs, and ivory, most of which are destined for the wealthy elite rather than the common markets, and wagonloads of alcohol.

In the south, merchants from Calivar carry fish to trade with the settlements along the route while heading to the great market at Ludogov, from where they purchase alcohol and timber (from Pohst). The further along the road they travel, the more profit they make from their fish. Were the Aspirians to build a trade road to be constructed from Aspiria straight to Scayle then their merchants would have easier access to the Calivar to Ludogov route, allowing them to compete with the Battlelander fish merchants.

Internally, there are no distinct trade roads. Had the Anari truly conquered the realm, then perhaps things might have been different. As it is, the old system of bartering rules when it comes to trade. Crafters from each tribe sell their wares to local merchants, who transport them in bulk to neighboring markets. Here, they are swapped for locally produced goods or wares imported from more distant tribal lands. Goods not sold to local inhabitants are collected in with local exports and in turn taken further afield from their source.

In this manner, cargos eventually travel the length and breadth of the Battlelands, though in ever diminishing quantities. Because of the way trade works, the cult of Var has never managed to extended its influence far beyond the great towns of Calivar and Jotungraef, though independent merchant-clerics earn an honest living.

In addition to trading, the tribes are proponents of raiding, a practice their ancestors instigated long ago. While cattle are the main target, they are not above snatching anything of value, including hostages. Ancient laws dictate that no clan may raid members of the same tribe, for that leads to discord. Most raiding is bloodless and seen as just another aspect of daily life. When blood is spilled, deliberately or accidentally, then hostilities ensue. These blood feuds can, and often do, last for generations.

Architecture

Before the Blizzard War, the native Tuomi lived in wattle-and-daub roundhouses much like their neighbors in the Borderlands and

Drachenlands. When the frost giants and their orc and goblin allies began raiding, these flimsy structures were largely abandoned in favor of designs once used by the Battlelanders' distant ancestors.

In rural communities the standard habitat is the wheelhouse, a building comprised of circular drystone walls encompassing a central communal area and hearth. Stone piers extend into the room from the wall, forming buttresses to support the wooden roof (over which turf is laid) and dividing the interior into compartments. Depending on the family's needs, these compartments may be used for sleeping, storage, shrines, or workshops.

Wood is in short supply, and seats, cupboards, and beds are built of stone. Dried reeds, heather, and furs are used to line the beds and provide comfortable sleeping, while curtains of treated animal skins allow for areas to be sealed off. Doors are a luxury, even to the outside. Wheelhouses are built facing away from the prevailing winds and with very low doorways. Animal skins are used to keep out the wind and rain.

Many are dug into the ground, leaving only the roof visible as a low, grassy mound. Since they are designed to be concealed, most wheelhouses lack a chimney. With no windows and minimal ventilation, the interior is dark and smoky all year round. The width of wheelhouses varies from 12 to 40 feet, depending on the owner's status.

An earth rampart encircles larger communities. Drystone walls with packed earth in between and topped by a walkway top the rampart. Fortified gatehouses prevent entrance. Unlike in most Anari and Saxa towns, houses do not stand in separate plots. Rather, they are built in long, single story terraces formed in squares around communal allotments. Most houses are single rooms with a packed clay floor and a central hearth.

The central market square, the hub of town life, is surrounded by the houses of the nobility, merchants, and priests, as well as small temples, warehouses, and workshops. Although these upper class housing blocks appear no different to the houses of the common citizens, individual houses are much larger.

Logs are laid in the streets to allow stable footing in wet weather and during snowy winters. With little decent timber, these logs must be imported. Most towns impose a road tax to help pay for this.

Large temples, whether rural or attached to a town, are built as a series of paired semi-circular, drystone wall chambers built around short, narrow corridors. Viewed from above they form an irregular series of oblongs. Covered by turf or thatch supported on stone lintels or wooden frames, the rooms form the temple complex. Only temples of Ertha break from this mold, being subterranean and more akin to huge wheelhouses. Since many temples stand outside the nearest settlement's defensive walls they are vulnerable to attacks by giants. Stout, pointed wooden posts are placed internally, touching the roof but providing no structural support. Giants who stamp on the roof quickly realize their mistake.

When it comes to fortifications, the standard defensive structure is the broch, a drystone, hollow-walled tower. While brochs are fortifications, they are rarely garrisoned by more than a handful of defenders. Rather than being true castles or forts, they are refuges, inhabited only when giants or orcs come raiding, and then usually only by the women and children.

Brochs vary in size from 15 feet to 50 feet internal diameter, with walls 10 feet thick, and rising as much as 60 feet. Whereas most towers are relatively straight, brochs noticeably narrow as they heighten. Unlike most towers there are no windows, and unusually for fortifications there is just a single entrance, albeit one which requires entrants to bend double.

The gap between the exterior and interior wall conceals a stairwell that winds up to the flat roof. A signal beacon on the roof is lit only when danger threatens, thus alerting the nearby settlements to prepare for trouble. When settlements are further away, horns may be blown instead. In taller brochs, narrow doorways within the stairwell lead to upper stories used for storage.

MAJOR LOCALES

This section details new adventuring locations and places of interest within the Battlelands.

DUBHSLIEVE

Located on the western slopes of the Battle Mounds, the village of Dubhslieve ("black hill") comprises over 30 subterranean wheelhouses linked together by short, curving corridors. Unlike other wheelhouse settlements, which are just a few feet below the surface, Dubhslieve was constructed by hollowing out a large hill.

Created as a refuge for important leaders during the Anari invasion, it remained only sparsely populated once attitudes changed and relations warmed. During the Blizzard War, Dubhslieve fell to barbarous orcs, the inhabitants put to the sword or enslaved and dragged back to the orcs' vile lairs.

Although Dubhslieve was eventually recaptured, it fell to orcs again just a year ago. The mormaer of the local tribe, the Bliesblituth, led a small force against the invaders a month ago. He has yet to return. Until the mormaer is confirmed dead, the tribe cannot appoint a new ruler. Chaos reigns and the orcs grow bolder each week.

GIANTS' BLOOD RIVER

Flowing from the Battlemounds to the coast, the water of the Giants' Blood River has a distinctive ruddy hue. Local legend claims the water is the rain-thinned blood of all the giants slain while trying to cross the hills.

The water is used in the fermentation of Giant's Blood Wine, a particularly strong, viscous drink flavored with bitter, salty herbs. Fermented in only small quantities by the cults of Tiw and Goðjaðarr (who alone know the secret recipe), only those who have slain a giant or who are about to enter battle with one are permitted to drink it, and then only sparingly. It is widely held that drinking the wine grants one the strength of a giant and the courage of a hero.

GIANTS WOOD

Tales of heroic feats against giant raiders could fill volumes. One such story tells how a priestess of Eostre Plantmother transformed a raiding party into trees. The wood is smaller today than when it was formed, the result of deforestation. The trees have a thick, red sap that makes it unsuitable for firewood but ideal for resisting being put to the torch.

Few venture deep into the forest's heart, for it is said the trees are animated and strike out at all in their reach. There is truth to this—the dwindling wood is home to a small colony of tree men who have grown angry at the destruction of their home.

GLITTER-STONE CASTLE

Although the Anari never truly conquered the Battlelands (contrary to what surviving official records and maps from the era claim), they did establish colonies throughout the region at various times. Seeking to exploit the gem seams of the Battle Mounds, the invaders established several fortified mining camps. Despite their best efforts, the Anari could not adequately protect them against the warlike Tuomi, and the decision was taken to build a large castle. Its primary purpose was not the subjugation of the belligerent natives, but the protection of the rich seams.

Once the castle was finished, the small camps were abandoned and the mine entrances sealed. Working from the lowest levels of the castle, miners carved miles of tunnels into the hills in search of the glittering stones that give the castle its modern name.

The impressive walls could not keep out the Tuomi for long, and the castle fell in –319. Anari attempts to reclaim the region ended in –328, when a massive relief army sent by Emperor Perspilex XXIV was soundly defeated. Although victorious, the Tuomi were denied the huge stores of gems secreted in the bowels of the castle. Unable to send their stock of gems to safety, Anari engineers broke through a dam keeping back the waters of a subterranean river, deliberately flooding the chambers.

Never again in Anari hands, the surface structure was left to the elements. Its walls and towers, weakened by three centuries of neglect, were finally brought down during the Blizzard War.

What remains of the upper levels have been carefully picked over down the centuries. However, the flooded levels have never been explored. That gems lie here in abundance is commonly known, but the treasure is not without its guardians. Ancient golems, once used to mine the gems, still walk the flooded ruins, and the hand of the Liche-Priest reached out to awaken the drowned defenders, turning them into zombies.

Of the three sub-levels, the lowest two are completely flooded (requiring *environmental protection* spells to explore) and the upper one flooded to knee depth.

INISDUN

Inisdun ("island stronghold") is a rotting wooden fort standing on a low island on in Candle Marsh. In times past it housed a small community of rush gatherers, but it was abandoned in favor of settlements on the fringes when the bufomi and gatormen became more aggressive. Today it is a border outpost of the Muircholaich tribe, for in winter the marsh can freeze almost solid, giving raiding frost giants easier access. Life is hard for the warriors. In summer swarms of biting insects hovering like clouds and disease is a problem, while in winter the temperatures are unbearably cold. Food is always in short supply, as is potable water.

To help maintain the fort, the mormaer has offered adventurers seeking to battle the bufomi or explore the gatorman ruins hospitality at the fort. In return for a safe place to sleep and recover, he asks for 10% of any treasure found in the marsh.

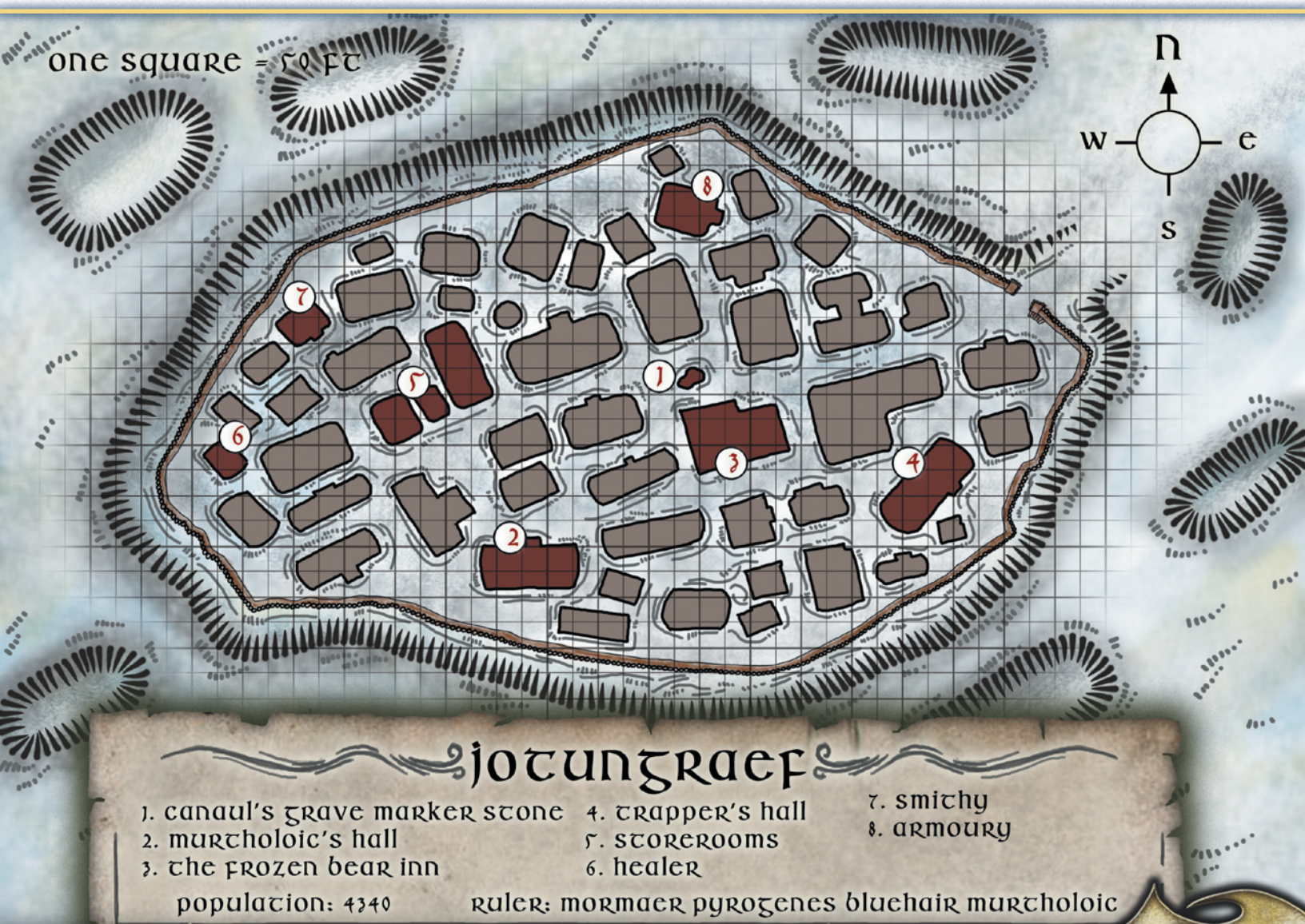
RATHTEARMANN

Meaning "the earthen ring-fort refuge" in Tuomi, Rathtearmann is a huge, circular hill fort in the central Battlelands. Living here on a permanent basis are four priests and four paladins, one of each from the cults of Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor. An arkhwisard, known as the Keeper of the Refuge, is granted stewardship at the behest of the mormaers, who gather to elect a new steward when the old one dies or retires.

Although outsiders believe the name refers to an actual refuge, a place of sanctuary in times of trouble, Rathtearmann is actually a neutral meeting place. Here tribes can settle their differences or forge alliances, safe in the knowledge they will not be attacked (at least not by other Tuomi). Although weapons may be brought into Rathtearmann, using one against a fellow Tuomi is a crime against the gods punishable by death.

In the event tribes cannot make their peace or are here to declare war on each other, the tribes are warned by the Keeper that no blood may be shed for a period of 24 hours after they leave the hill fort. Any tribe breaking this cardinal rule will quickly find its allies unwilling to take their side in the coming conflict, and its enemy's ranks swollen by other tribes.

The only structure inside Rathtearmann is a raised stone platform. Atop stand four braziers arranged at the corners of a square. When tribes gather here, one pot is filled with grain, another water, a third left with nothing but air inside, and the fourth with burning charcoal. Together these represent the four nature gods of the



Tuomi, and filling the pots ensures the deities are present during any negotiations.

Non-Tuomi may enter the site only at the direct invitation of a tribe, and emissaries from that tribe must be present the entire time the outsiders remain. Outsiders found inside the earthworks without a tribal representative may be slain on sight.

Temple of Goðjaðarr

The temple is something of a rarity, for Goðjaðarr, the god of frost giant slaying, is a minor deity associated with Kenaz and Tiw. Having been instrumental in thwarting dozens of frost giant raids, the clerics know the temple is a prime target. While the basic construction is similar to other temples in the Battlelands, the roofs of the various chambers studded with sharp stakes as a precaution against giants.

Thick stakes supporting frost giant skulls mark the approaches to the temple. Banners of flayed skin emblazoned with warnings of the fate that will befall all giants who harass the Battlelands flutter in the wind. Internally, many small furnishings, such as lamps, candle holders, and statuettes are carved from frost giant bone. The floor of the main worship hall is a mixture of clay and powdered bone.

As well as honoring Goðjaðarr, the temple is the headquarters for the Order of Giant Slayers, many of whom are lay members of the cult. The pair of chambers nearest the main entrance are set aside for their use. While the cult has plenty of lay members offering lip service, the core cult boasts just 20 priests and 34 paladins in total, and only around half of those are present in the temple at any one time. Thus, the cult relies on the Order for extra muscle.

The high priest (actually a paladin), Gart Half-a-Man, is a mountain of a man. He lost his left arm and suffered a permanent impairment of his left leg in battle against a frost giant. These disabilities might have ended the career of a lesser man, but neither has prevented Gart from continuing to war against his hated enemy. Such is his strength and skill that he wields a heavy maul (taken from the giant that destroyed his left arm) with just his right arm.

Cult alchemists manufacture and sell a small range of devices. Since their spells are limited to only affecting frost giants, they are not picky about to whom they sell their wares. Some critics of the cult have insinuated the cult could be selling alchemical devices to frost giant agents. Faced with this accusation the clerics merely smile coyly and comment that the giants must only need them to fight each other, for they are of no use against other races, and if the giants are fighting each other then so much the better.

In order to help local communities fend off raiders, prices are kept artificially low at just 75 gs per Rank of spell. Clerics of the cult, members of the Order of Giant Slayers, clerics of Kenaz and Tiw, and Heath Knights can buy them for just 60 gs per Rank.

The rapidly expanding cult of Canaul-Tiw is antagonistic toward the cult of Goðjaðarr. The cult of Goðjaðarr claims Canaul was a mortal and that later in his life he dedicated himself to their deity. Canaul-Tiw's worshippers consider this heresy, and accuse the cult of perverting the true message for political reasons.

Persons of Note

This section details NPCs the heroes may encounter on their adventures through the Battlelands.

Aed Ghosttalker Canutulachama

Aed lives on the fringes of his tribe, revered by his kith and kin yet also an outcast, for he practices the ancient art of soul binding. Unlike many of his remaining peers, Aed has no interest in personal power. All his skulls are invested with *boost Knowledge*, which he uses to help solve problems. The wizened old mage is a follower of Hoenir. He believes that if he had not preserved the knowledge contained within his skulls, it would be forever lost and the world would be a poorer place.

Although Aed is the recipient on the skulls' spells, his trappings take the form of the relevant skull seeming to talk in a deep, hollow voice. It is this illusion, for the words are Aed's not the trapped soul's, that earned him his nickname, Ghosttalker.

Where Aed acquires his skulls is a mystery, for he never leaves his small house. According to one story all his skulls were willingly donated. Sick wise men who wish to help pass on their wisdom approach Aed in the last days of their life and allow him to enact his dark rituals.

Mormaer Ila Wartooth Tolarggan

Chief of the Tolarggan tribe, whose lands border the southern Battle Mounds, Ila has dyed her hair dark-red and had all her teeth except her canines removed. Her rivals whisper she is a cultist of Hela with aspirations of becoming a vampire, clearly evidenced by her visage. It is true Ila uses necromancy, but she is devoted to Kenaz.

In her youth, Ila, the only child of the late mormaer, was a warrior. While fending off a frost giant raid in the Battle Mounds she discovered an ancient temple to Hela. Inside were dozens of jars full of strange powder. She left the temple intact, for she had no wish to raise Hela's ire by desecrating it.

The death of her beloved father at the hands of frost giants drove Ila over the edge. She returned to Hela's temple and stole the jars of powder, which she had learned were alchemical *zombie* spells created by a disciple. She then instructed her warriors to excavate the Mounds for corpses, which she then animated as zombies and skeletons. Bound to her will, they secretly serve the tribe as suicide troops, throwing themselves against frost giant raiders with no care for their safety.

The supply of dust has run out (and the ranks of her undead army are thinning). Ila is desperate to acquire more without attracting the attentions of Scaetha's cult.

Why Come Here?

The Battlelands are a patchwork of tribes whose relationships are in a state of near-constant flux, plagued by giants and orcs, and troubled with hard winters and raging storms. Coupled with their remote location, why would an adventurer want to come here?

* Orders. Of all the heroic archetypes, only Hearth Knights of Sword and Lance status and clerics of Kenaz are likely to be sent to the Battlelands, for here the war against Thrym's minions is waged on a daily basis. Other heroes might be asked to journey here, but short of a major quest they would need to be in nearby lands. After all, any cleric of Eira can help after a particularly nasty tribal conflict—a cleric in Royalmark, regardless of their Rank or Glory, isn't going to be sent halfway across the continent for a matter which can be handled locally.

* Glory. Most adventurers who come to the Battlelands voluntarily are likely to do so in search of glory. With frost giant and orc raids a regular occurrence, there is plentiful opportunity to record one's deeds for posterity in the blood of slain foes.

Renowned mercenary leaders might be hired to fight on behalf of a tribe or lend support against a forthcoming frost giant assault, but again the heroes would have to be fairly close to be of much assistance—there is little they can do once the raiders have landed unless they are in the vicinity.

* Duty. One possible reason for visiting is familial duty. A Tuomi hero in foreign lands may eventually receive word that requires him to return home. Perhaps his father is ill, missing, or kidnapped, his clan has been annihilated, or he has been nominated as a candidate for nobility due to his glorious deeds.

* Passing Through. Unless the adventurers intend to journey to the Glittersands, Lakeland, or the Great Forest (or Hrimthyr Isle for those of sufficient valor), it is most unlikely they will be passing through the Battlelands. After all, it is far easier to reach realms such as the Borderlands, Witchwood, and the Drachenlands from Aspiria and Chalcis. Still, the Foaming Sea is renowned for its storms, and a voyage from Alantaris Isle to northwest Alantaris could result in the heroes being shipwrecked in the southern Borderlands.

BLACKSTONE, BARONY OF

For 15 years Regent Orol Drakestaff has held Blackstone Barony in his iron grip, slowly squeezing the life from its people. Oppression, tyranny, and misery have wracked the land, but a new dawn is close to breaking. Baron Pendel, the rightful heir, is coming of age, and there are those who act against the Regent, albeit from the shadows. Blackstone stands at a crossroads, but whether it will walk into salvation or damnation remains to be seen.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Blackstone Barony.

* **Empty Markets:** Regent Drakestaff ensures the markets are always short of even basic goods. With regard to prices and availability, treat all goods as one availability category higher. Thus, goods commonly marked "V" carry a "T" availability in Blackstone. City goods have their prices doubled, before any other modifiers are applied. Special goods are only rarely available here, even at places that would normally carry them.

Although heroes can make more money selling goods acquired during adventures, as even basic wares like pottery and clothes fetch good prices, being a stranger means few citizens will openly talk with them. Furthermore, being caught buying black market goods means a lengthy jail spell. All Streetwise rolls to sell goods are subject to a -4 modifier (includes the Suspicion penalty; see below). With success, the goods can be sold for 50% of their value, 75% on a raise. Selling goods in this manner is punishable by imprisonment and 1d4+1 years hard labor.

* **No Education:** Native heroes aged between 9 and 20 have received little education. All Knowledge skills purchased during character generation cost two points per die up to the hero's Smarts, and four points per die thereafter.

* **Suspicion:** The locals do not trust outsiders. All non-native heroes suffer a –2 Charisma penalty in Blackstone. Demonstrating trustworthiness or a desire to help the inhabitants can alleviate this, but it always requires a lot of work.

* **Wanted:** Any cleric, except those of Maera, discovered in the Barony immediately falls under the watch of the Regent's informers. Any act of sedition, and the Regent allows great leeway in what constitutes sedition, results in the cleric gaining the Minor Wanted Hindrance. This becomes the Major version if they do anything to actually antagonize the Regent. Drakestaff has no interest in pursuing fugitives outside his borders, however.

Clerics of Hoenir and Thunor automatically gain the Major Wanted Hindrance if discovered in Blackstone.

ATMOSPHERE

Blackstone Barony is a drab, depressing land of black granite buildings, near-constant rain, waterlogged lowlands, and sparsely covered hills. Entering the small nation brings on feelings of claustrophobia, for the towering peaks of the Dragonspine loom constantly on three sides of the near horizon, adding to the oppression felt by its inhabitants.

The citizens of Blackstone appear at first glance to be typical of any realm, mistrusting of strangers and keen to speak of their lord in a good light. Yet behind this thin veneer lies fear and hatred. A close observer quickly notices that men rarely make eye contact even with their neighbors, and words are chosen with great care even among family members. No one speaks in hushed whispers, for to conceal a conversation is to be accused of sedition and plotting against the Baron and his Regent.

Strangers, not that many come here, are treated with cordiality, yet behind the warm smiles are eyes that betray feelings of fear and suspicion. Most citizens quickly point strangers to inns and other structures set aside solely for them and scurry away, unsure whether the visitor is just an innocent traveler or one of the Regent's spies sent to test their loyalty. If questioned on local events, they become tight-lipped.

When the Regent's black-clad guards walk the streets, as they frequently do, the good citizens of Blackstone scurry out of their path, heads bowed, giving them no reason to harass them. These brutal thugs always talk to strangers, speaking politely yet with a constant menace of violence while they ask them their business and check their papers.

Every citizen of Blackstone knows someone who has been taken away on minor charges and never seen again. While they lament the loss of kith and kin, no one speaks openly about those taken from them in the dead of night. Everyone knows the Regent has a network of informants— men, women, and even children paid handsomely to inform him of any seditious talk. The inhabitants of Blackstone have learned to say little and think much, for thoughts, at least for now, remain free.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

As a barony, Blackstone has never had much of a social hierarchy. Technically, the ruling baron is the highest placed citizen, though Regent Drakestaff is the current head of state. Although 14 is the age of majority, the barons long ago set the age of inheritance at 16. This gave heirs time to mature before taking on the heavy mantle of responsibility (like most Anari realms noble titles are familial, passing from parent to oldest child).

Ranking below the baron are the knights, hereditary nobles whose families once held the greatest wealth or influence. Together they formed the College of Knights, an advisory body that kept the baron in touch with his people and events outside his borders.

Drakestaff has swept aside these titled families, charging many with treason and ensuring they disappeared. The fortunate few were informed on the Regent's plans by courtiers still loyal to Baron Pendel, and managed to flee to neighboring realms. In their stead are a new generation of knights— men loyal to Drakestaff who impose his iron will and reap rewards from imposing harsh taxes and overseeing the slave mines.

Below the knights once ranked, in descending order, the clergy and magicians, senior military commanders, merchants, master crafters, educated men, soldiers, and then the common citizens. Blackstone had no true social classes, for status was based on occupation, allowing any man the chance to climb the social ladder.

While there was always inequality, for every land has those with money and influence and those without, every citizen was a free man, entitled to own his own land (though he still paid the baron taxes) and receive impartial justice. Nowadays, being a cleric is a risky profession, soldiers rank just below the knights, educated men are hounded, and the Regent has claimed virtually all the land. Where once stood a proud but small land of free men, there is now only a land of serfs.

EDUCATION

Since the Regent's rise to power all formal education, even that provided by the temples, has been prohibited. Publicly, Drakestaff

claims the temples were preaching sedition by soiling the good name of the Barony, but in truth it is because he knows educated men are harder to control than ignorant ones.

Education does occur, of course, but for the most part it is kept simple. Children are taught the skills they will need to survive as adults, the laws and lore of their homeland, and such like. Knowledge of other realms is extremely limited, for the Regent does not permit interaction between natives and outsiders, and few inhabitants have the wisdom necessary to pass on other lore.

In days of old, the citizens used to say that the wise man spoke because he had something to say, while the fool spoke because he had to say something. Today, it is the wise who keep their mouths shut, for being known to be educated is to invite charges of treason.

Drakestaff has plans to open new schools in a generation, where every child *will* be educated. Of course, what the children learn will not only be strictly controlled, but it will be shaped to fit Drakestaff's version of events. If his plan succeeds, the history of Blackstone will be rewritten and the Regent's authority imposed on the masses.

RELIGION

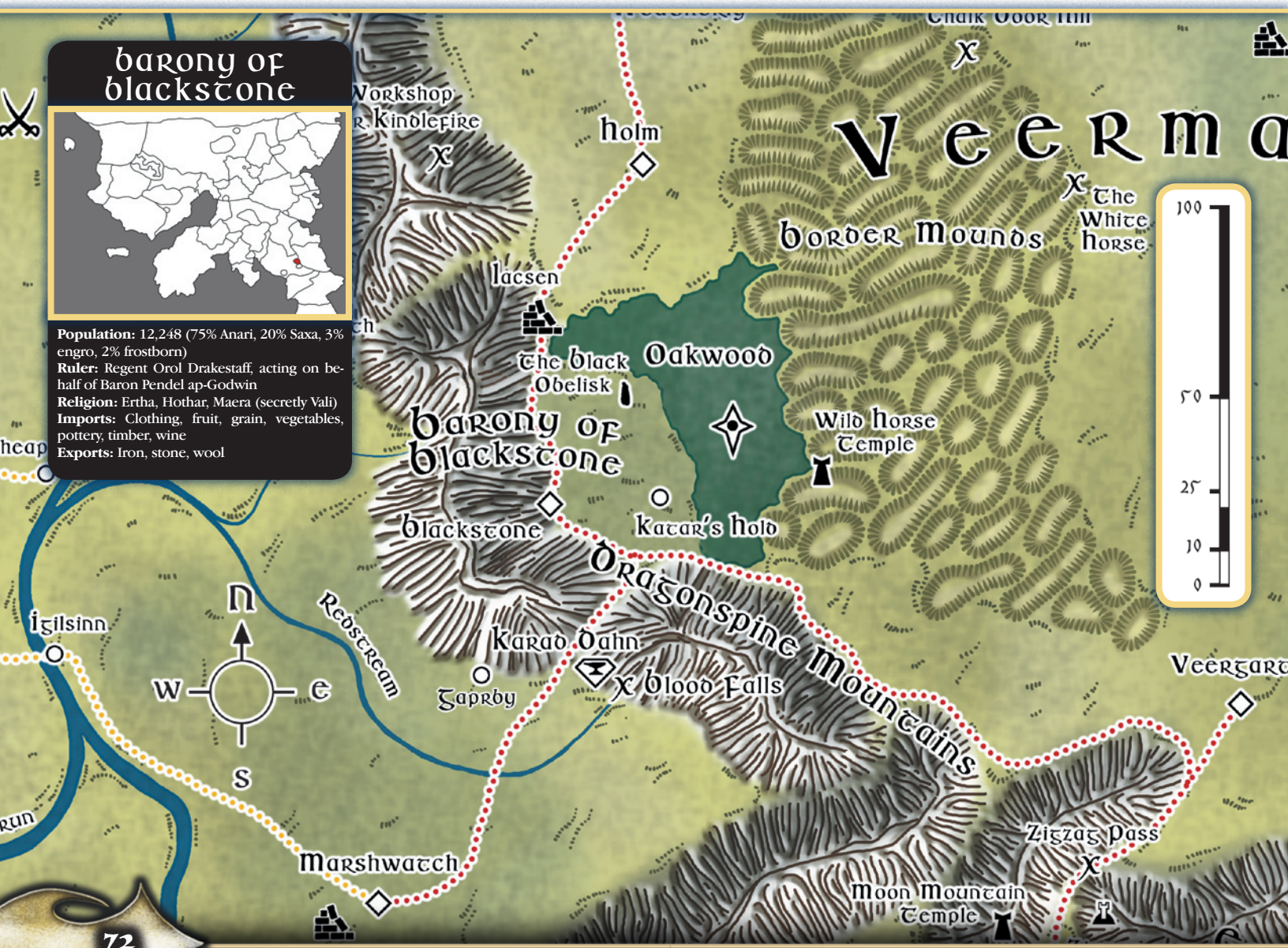
As with many other aspects of life, religious freedom has been heavily curtailed by Regent Drakestaff and his thuggish army. Much worship now takes place in secret.

The land's small but prosperous iron mines, and extensive and now largely disused quarries, gave rise to the cult of Ertha as the state religion under the old barons. Today, Ertha's cult is technically allowed to practice, and indeed it remains the largest cult in terms of number of worshippers. However, temples are frequently raided, the clergy accused of seditious acts, and worshippers arrested for troublemaking. Since any cave will suffice as a site of worship, and the hills of Blackstone are riddled with them, new temples are springing up faster than the Regent's men can locate them and close them down.

Many worshippers suspect it will not be long before Regent Drakestaff has the cult declared illegal. While some observers claim such an act would finally unite the people into open rebellion, others are convinced it would crush the last vestiges of resistance.

Despite the Regent imposing many new laws and clamping down on crime, the cult of Hothar has suffered similar attacks to that of Ertha. Hothar is concerned with truth and fair justice, something the citizens have been denied the last 15 years. Despite the persecution, Hothar remains popular; the citizens of Blackstone cry out for justice and equality.

Maera is now the official state religion. Most worshippers do pay only lip service, and then only out of fear of the Regent's vicious thugs. Although clearly not a cleric, Regent Drakestaff has declared himself as high priest of the cult in Blackstone. A few clerics did protest this act of heresy, but since they "chose to leave Blackstone" there have been no further complaints, at least not openly.



Drakestaff has little true interest in the cult of Maera, though she is his patron. Ironically, while the Regent cracks down on the cult of Hothar with one hand, he promotes it, at least in secret, with the other, for much of his devotion goes to Jarngrímr, the tyrannical minor god of obedience and conformity.

The cult of Vali is on the rise, for where there is brutal oppression there are men who would do anything to achieve liberty. Such men, righteous as their hearts may be, are easy targets for corruption. While much of the famine sweeping the land is the direct result of Drakestaff's manipulations, the cult of Vali knows that it would take little to extend the misery.

The cult of Thunor, god of storms and freedom, is outlawed in Blackstone. Drakestaff knows that should the cult ever gain widespread support, it could end his reign. To prevent this, he has had every worshipper of Thunor branded as a rebel seeking to seize Baron Pendel's throne before the boy can claim his prize, with the clergy accused of being the ringleaders.

While the main cult of Thunor has few adherents here, the cult of Haptsönir, minor god of freedom from tyranny, operates in secret in the oppressed nation. For now, their actions are limited to posting flyers decrying the Regent's harsh rule and minor raids, primarily to free prisoners before they disappear forever. Each act of defiance, no matter how small, chips away at Drakestaff's authority and gives the people hope. But Haptsönir's cult is tiny, and unless its members are careful to conceal their identities, the seeds of hope they are planting may wither and die.

The cult of Hoenir, which was never especially large, has all but disappeared (along with the Lorekeepers), at least on the surface. During the Night of Cleansing (487 IR), Regent Drakestaff accused the cult of spreading malicious gossip and false facts. The sole temple was closed within hours of his decree being made, its precious books (except those of interest to the Regent) were burned in the marker square, and the clerics were interred and then outlawed (that is, they were sent to the mines). Since that dark night, clerics of Hoenir have avoided the remote nation.

Other faiths are found here, though there are few clerics. Of these, there are only one or two paladins per cult outside the state cults of Maera and Tiw, and even these cults have minimal numbers. Most faiths suffer some form of persecution. Tiw is the official patron of the military, though his worship is prohibited to other citizens on pain of death.

MILITARY

Blackstone has a population of just over 12,000, yet a full 1,000 of these are soldiers.

Officially there are 600 soldiers. Known as the Black Watch after the color of their tunics and shields, they serve Baron Pendel in name only, being now the exclusive property of Regent Drakestaff. All the old guard, those officers loyal to the former baron, have been removed from power, either through forced retirement or having been accused of crimes against the state.

The army is divided into ten companies, each led by a captain and assisted by two sergeants. Two companies are on permanent duty at the border forts on the trade road, five companies patrol the streets of the town of Blackstone, and the other three companies are spread among the rural villages. The companies are rotated to a new posting every few months.

The Black Watch are little more than thugs, and would be of little value if Blackstone were to be invaded. More than a few are former violent criminals, given parole on the condition they serve Drakestaff. Treat them as Typical Watch, but with chain hauberks and long swords. Captains should be treated as Wild Card Experienced Watch with chain hauberks.

Another 350, unofficially known as the Iron Guard, are responsible for guarding the slaves working the iron mines. If anything, they are more brutal than their regular counterparts, for they have the power of life and death over their charges. Their companies are typically 50 men strong, but are otherwise identical to the regular army.

Drakestaff's bodyguard comprises 30 heavy infantry (treat as Veteran Mercenaries) known as the Black Guard and 20 light cavalry (treat as Common Mercenaries) known as the Black Riders. Each is commanded by sergeant (treat as a Mercenary Captain), who in turns answers to the Captain of the Guard, the most senior military official. He has the ear of the Regent and ranks even above the knights, much to the nobles' disgust.

There is no militia anywhere in the barony, nor can the Regent call upon a fyrd. Indeed, the law prohibits possession of all weapons except daggers. Outsiders may buy a license granting them permission to carry arms (see below). Similarly, the nobles of the realm may not maintain a standing army. Instead, they command the troops stationed in the settlement they rule on behalf of the regent. Each may have a personal bodyguard of just ten men.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Blackstone sits on two trade roads. The major road runs from Marshwatch in Midmark through the barony and Veermark, before joining the Ostmark trade network at Lieksa. Its stretch within the barony is known as the Iron Road. The second, now largely disused, runs from the town of Blackstone through southern Veermark, up Zigzag Pass, and into Sutmark.

Blackstone exports iron ore and ingots, black granite, and wool. Much of the iron is now kept in Blackstone, where it is forged into weapons by the Regent's orc allies, though some is still sold to Veermark. Much of the wool, which is a strong, wiry variety, is sold to Midmark. The granite trade has always been small, for none of the surrounding countries build with stone, and since the Regent gained power that trade has slowed to a mere trickle due to the closing of many quarries. What little reaches the merchants goes to Ostmark, where building with stone is in vogue.

Thanks to its geography and climate Blackstone is forced to import pottery and timber, as well as many staple foodstuffs. Grain and vegetables flow down the trade road from Ostmark or the Crystalflow Confederacy, and wine is imported from Nordmark. Almost all other trade goods eventually reach Blackstone from the Confederacy via the Midmark trade road.

One import, which is never publicly acknowledged, is slaves. While many of the slaves in the iron mines are Blackstone citizens, there are a growing number of outsiders. Some of these were accused of a crime and sentenced to hard labor, some were strangers who had the misfortune of being kidnapped from the Barony's inns (after unwittingly revealing no one would miss them for some time), and others are sold by the Velvet Shackle.

The Regent controls all trade. He sets import and export quotas, determines what goods may be brought into the country, and sets duty rates. Imports are carefully controlled, both in terms of goods and quantities. He ensures there is never enough to go around, and prices are kept artificially high. Thus, the people are always wanting even for basic essentials. Those most loyal to him are, of course, always kept supplied.

All foreign merchants must purchase a license. This is renewed annually and costs 20 gs. Each license details the name of the merchant, the goods he transports, and those who accompany him. Licenses are checked frequent, and full-scale searches of caravans are performed at the borders.

All outsiders, whether merchants, foreign dignitaries, or casual travelers, are required to lodge only in specific establishments. Every settlement must, by law, provide an inn (though quality varies immensely), in which only strangers may drink, eat, or sleep. The owners are often loyal to the Regent, if only out of fear. This allows him to keep an eye on strangers and determine if they represent a threat to his rule. Visitors are permitted to walk the streets, but only with an escort of the Regent's Black Watch. As well as allowing the Regent to keep tabs on the visitors, it prevents locals from approaching the strangers and making any sort of contact.

The various taxes account for a staggering 60% of a citizen's income. Export tax is set at 4% and import tax at 3%. Strangers wishing to wear armor must buy a license. This costs 5 gs per point of protection and is good for just one month. Licenses for weapons cost 3 gs per damage die, but one must be acquired for every

weapon except daggers. Again, these are valid for one month. Note that when it comes to missile weapons, only the bow or crossbow is charged, not each arrow. Throwing weapons, however, are charged for each individual weapon.

The license requires the holder to give his name, faith, and place of residence while in the barony. Falsely submitting information, or staying outside the listed residence, is a crime punishable by 1d3 years hard labor.

ARCHITECTURE

The barony takes its name from the black stone used in the construction of its buildings. The finer ones, such as Blackstone Manor and the former temple to Ertha, now the temple of Maera, are built of black granite, while common structures are built of black sandstone.

Most peasants live in single room houses, with thick walls to help provide insulation. Heavy woolen blankets are used for internal partitions. Those with wealth live in larger houses. As a rough rule of thumb, every step up the old social ladder gave one a single extra room. Thus, a common soldier would have two rooms, while a cleric could boast eight. The nobility reside either in fortified towers or manors, as was the original owner's preference.

Slate shingles cover the roofs of most structures. Drab gray in color, and often stained green with moss, these are about as colorful as exteriors get in the barony.

Whereas in many lands animals are kept in with the family, albeit in a separate room, in Blackstone it has long been a tradition for communities to erect communal stone byres for their livestock. The same applies to crop storage. Under the Regent's rule, this makes it easier for his officials to set taxation rates, as everything is in one convenient place.

Standing adjacent to the trade road on each border is a small fort. Originally standard motte-and-bailey designs, the tower in each has been replaced with a stone construction for added protection. All visitors entering or leaving the barony are required to check in here before going about their business.

MAJOR LOCALES

Blackstone Barony is a small realm, with only two places of interest mentioned in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. This section gives the GM new locales for parties seeking to adventure in the oppressed land.

THE BLACK OBELISK

Amid the dank wetlands that make up central Blackstone there stands a four-sided, pyramidion-topped, polished granite obelisk of unfathomable age. Located on each side are square panels engraved with strange, flowing glyphs that glow as if written in liquid fire. Touching the runes is inadvisable, for they burn as hot as a campfire, despite not radiating any discernible heat to the obelisk or surrounding air. The script is unknown, and the runes have so far defied all attempts to translate them.

The few scholars who visited the remote site before the rise of the regent suspected the text might become readable only when the message is complete, for there is one panel missing from each face of the obelisk. Until such time as the panels are found and replaced, their theory remains just that.

The locals know of the obelisk, though they have no desire to visit the site. The most popular stories concerning it claim it is a signpost left by Angar Kindlefire to show those with the right knowledge the way to his fabled home. Questions as to why a reclusive wizard would signpost his lair are quietly ignored. Other tales state the obelisk fell from the sky in the months before the Blizzard War; it marks a sun dragon's grave; is a prophecy carved by a cleric of Sigel that indicates when the dreaded Fimbulvintr would come; and that a fiery entity carried it from the southern realm of Al-Shirkuh.

BLACKSTONE

Blackstone is a depressing place, sure to sour of the heart of the happiest soul. Its building are constructed from black granite, durable against the elements or invaders, but unattractive to the eye. The spirit of its people is equally dark, their spirit broken by physical abuse from the Regent's thugs, crippling taxation, and the imprisonment of many loved ones.

Even the weather is miserable—moist winds carried across Veermark dump their rain on Blackstone as they try to climb the imposing Dragonspine Mountains. When it isn't raining, it is usually foggy, the result of cold air tumbling down from the peaks.

The Hammer and Anvil: The largest and once the most popular inn in the capital, the Hammer and Anvil has fallen on hard times. Drakestaff official designated it the sole inn in the capital catering to outsiders. Unfortunately for the proprietor, Ogust ap-Adric, the few visitors that bother to stay bring in little money.

Guests may purchase food and drink at prices akin to those in other lands, another contributing factor to Ogust's plight. Ingredients are bought from the local market, but shortages mean prices have risen dramatically. Unfortunately, Drakestaff sets the price at which meals may be sold, and they are lower than the cost of preparing the food.

Not that Ogust grumbles much, and never in front of strangers, any of whom might be one of the Regent's spies checking up on him. Astute visitors cannot help but notice that the innkeeper's smile and jovial demeanor are forced.

The Temple of Maera: Still known to locals as the temple of Ertha, albeit only in whispers, this grand building has been the focus of Maera worship since Drakestaff made it the official religion. His men were not subtle in their removal of Ertha's iconography—carvings and inscriptions were removed with hammers and chisels, and statues had their heads smashed off.

While the main temple sits above ground, its windowless halls mimicking a cave, it has extensive cellars. Drakestaff moved quickly against the cult, for he believed the vaulted chamber contained a king's ransom in gold, gems, and iron ingots. Despite many searches, which included excavating new tunnels to search for hidden chambers, and brutal interrogations, the Regent has unearthed so hint of any wealth. Tortured clerics have all said the same thing—there was never any great wealth. Drakestaff, as stubborn as he is cruel, refuses to be believe them.

IRON MINES

There are a total of 16 iron mines operating in Blackstone. Of these, only half are known to the general public, seven being operated by paid miners, and one a prison for those sentenced to hard labor. The latter is nothing new, for even when the barons ruled prisoners were sentenced to work rather than languishing in jail and profiting no one.

Slaves operate the other mines. Such is the extent of Drakestaff's tyranny that a total of 2,400 slaves toil away to extract iron ore. Of these, the great majority are citizens of the barony, outlawed on paper yet secretly sent here to work until they drop. And drop they do, for the miners are worked 15 hours a day, rations are minimal, disease is rampant, and the guards are brutal in the extreme. Average life expectancy is a mere two years for those who performed manual before coming here, and much less for those unaccustomed to physical work.

Slaves are kept chained day and night in work teams of four people. Where one goes, the others must follow. Even when one dies, it may be days or weeks before the corpse is unshackled and dragged away. They are kept inside the dark and dingy mines, sunlight only touching their skin after they have died to meet the regent's ever-increasing quotas. Life is little better for the paid miners, though at least they are permitted to leave the mines and receive some financial compensation for their toil.

A 50-man company of Iron Guard protects each mine. No matter how much ore is produced, the slaves suffer. If the production quota is met, the captain is rewarded with gold, which he shares with his troops. This encourages him to work the slaves harder,

for greater production equates to greater financial reward. When the quota is short, the captain is punished by loss of privileges or a fine. He then takes revenge on his men with similar punishments, and they in turn vent their anger on the already exhausted slaves by making them work harder.

The guards have two barracks outside the main entrance. Each squat structure contains sleeping quarters, a kitchen, a mess hall, and a well-stocked armory. Should the miners gather the will to rebel, the guards can seal the mine by knocking down a few well-placed supports. Each mine has just a single entrance, though it is possible some of the deeper depths extend into natural cave systems with other exits.

KATAR'S HOLD

Population: 281
Ruler: Lady Esclarmonde ap-Harnaudin

Katar's Hold squats a top a low hill amid the central wetlands. The inhabitants of the small village raise hardy goats and plant a few crops, but their lifestyle is very much a subsistence one. Like all settlements in the barony, its palisade was torn down and its ditch filled, so as to provide no safety for those who would rise up against the regent.

Standing on a neighboring hill are the remains of Katar Manor. Formerly the home of the ruling nobleman, it burnt down ten years ago, claiming the lives of the lord and his entire family. Such was the intensity of the blaze that the very walls of the house fused together and, in places, actually melted. Today it is shunned, for the locals claim the ghosts of the noble family haunt the site, their fire-shrouded specters seeking revenge on the living.

One of just two female knights serving the regent, Lady Esclarmonde rules Katar's Hold now. Her headquarters is a newly erected stone tower in the center of the small settlement. The only other structure of note is a small shrine to Eostre's dual aspects. It is little used these days, for public gatherings are forbidden.

Esclarmonde is a vile creature, possessed of limitless spite and malice. Her facial features are sharp yet attractive, yet are permanently marred by a grim sneer. She is a skilled torturer, an accomplished liar, and like most of those who claim nobility under Drakestaff, out to line her own pockets at the expense of the



people. She maintains a bodyguard of six warrior-women known as the Witches of Esclarmonde, for all are supposedly sorcerers as well as skilled fighters.

LACSEN

The fire-blackened shells mark all that is left of Lacsen, a small village that dared to defy the Regent's new rule. Those who were not slain were arrested and sentenced to work in the mines. Lying off the main roads, Lacsen has been largely forgotten and ignored since its destruction, save for those who desire to strike back against Drakestaff.

The cellars of the old inn, The Mason's Rest, now serve as a meeting place for the Lord's Men. Here they have amassed a stockpile of weapons and provisions. Alas, a traitor in their ranks has alerted the Regent to their plans. Drakestaff intends to strike soon in order to crush the rebels. Unless someone learns of his intentions and can warn the Lord's Men, they may suffer a mortal defeat.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following NPCs may prove friends or enemies of heroes looking to explore the Blackstone Barony.

DANAIN AP-MAUGIS

Chief herald to Baron Pendel's father, Danain has kept his position only because he was also the baron's ambassador to Midmark and Veermark. Regent Drakestaff is keen to show his neighbors that life continues as normal while the young heir awaits his ascension, and that meant keeping Danain in his post.

Loyal to Pendel, Danain, now in his sixties, finds himself in the unenviable position of being the regent's spokesman. It is he who publicly announces new draconian laws, he who speaks out against the criminals troubling the land, and he who informs the nobles in neighboring realms that all is well in the barony. To many citizens he is the voice of Drakestaff, and therefore just as guilty of crimes against the populace. Danain would dearly love to see the regent removed from office and order restored to his homeland, but he lacks the spine to take action. It doesn't help that everywhere he goes he is accompanied by a detachment of four Black Guardsmen. He knows Drakestaff's claims that they are present only to protect him against rebellious elements are lies; these men are there to ensure he toes the official line, and execute him should he fail.

LIBERATOR HANSINE AP-RITON

The sole paladin of Haptsönir in the barony, Hansine is a young woman filled with righteous fury and the overwhelming desire to end tyranny. A native of Chalcis, she works by day at the Anvil and Hammer, one of the inns in the town of Blackstone set aside for outsiders. By night, she dons an iron mask and actively fights against the regent's autocratic rule. She has contact with the Lord's Men, but is not a member.

Knowing that a death sentence awaits her should she be caught, she is extremely suspicious of everyone, even her most trusted allies. Unfortunately, her fiery red hair, shapely figure, and pleasant looks attract men like moths to a flame. Since anyone she meets could be a spy for the regent, she is cold and distant. Love is something she has never experienced and, until Blackstone is free, she likely never will. Such is the price she pays for helping to ensure freedom for others.

MAINET AND FOULQUE AP-DOOLIN

Mainet and Foulque are brothers, though they do not share much resemblance. Mainet, the older by a year, is short and overweight, with well-groomed brown hair and dull brown eyes. His younger brother is a head taller, athletic, blond, and has gray eyes. There differences extend beyond the physical to the spiritual, for while both are clerics, Mainet is a priest of Var and Foulque a paladin of Nauthiz. Neither is especially charitable.

Despite frequently quarreling over their religious stances, the two work together to run the black market in Blackstone. Mainet is a licensed iron ingot merchant whose travels take him to Midmark and Veermark, while Foulque works as his chief wagoner. Both have official papers permitting them to speak to outsiders, though they are careful to keep discussions focused on trade unless they know the outsider well. Together they purchase goods in neighboring lands and smuggle them into the barony (money always greases the wheels of corruption), where they sell them for vast profits. That they are profiteering from the abject misery of others did not trouble either until recently, for both their gods are fixated on acquiring wealth, not helping others.

A month ago the pair fell out, though they still work together. Mainet believes the *status quo* is good for business despite the high taxes (there being little competition), while Foulque has developed something of a conscience. He believes their smuggling "empire" can be used to benefit the oppressed citizens by bringing in food and weapons. Much to Mainet's displeasure, his sibling is suggesting they sell smuggled food and weapons at cost!

SIR ACOSTANT AP-FOILAN

Sir Acostant, one of Drakestaff's newly-appointed knights, plays a dangerous game. On one hand he is a brutal lord who imposes the regent's laws with a rod of iron, and who displays great personal loyalty to his master, obeying orders to the letter, no matter how repulsive he may find them. On the other hand, he is a secret supporter of the Lord's Men, funneling the organization arms and money through various channels.

Although he might appear altruistic at heart, Acostant, a former mercenary commander, is merely hedging his bets. If Drakestaff manages to remove Baron Pendel and claim the throne, then he will turn on the Lord's Men in the hope of securing a greater title. Should Pendel assume power, or the people ever rise up against their cruel overlord, he has no qualms about assassinating Drakestaff and using his ties with the Lord's Men to absolve him of his wrongdoings while in office.

WHY COME HERE?

A land held in the dark grip of tyranny, where the native people are treated little better than slaves and all strangers are suspected of being spies and rebels, Blackstone Barony is not on most adventurers' list of places to visit. So what can bring the land's mighty heroes to this oppressed land?

* Orders. Both the cults of Hoenir and Thunor may order members to infiltrate Blackstone Barony. Opposed to tyranny and oppression, such clerics are dispatched only to help liberate the tyrannized peasants and plot the overthrow of the Regent. Given their presence is a virtual death sentence, only the bravest and most capable ever receive such orders. Eira's clerics may sometimes receive the call to tend to the needs of the suffering, but they are as unwelcome as other clerics.

Iron Guild mercenaries may be hired to safeguard caravans against the actions of rebels, but they typically have little interest in politics. Heroes avowed to the monarchs of Midmark and western Veermark might come here to discuss diplomacy or trade, or act as guards to emissaries.

* Duty. The cult of Haptsönir, minor god of freedom from oppression, cannot order its clergy to Blackstone, but any asked would consider it their duty to help if asked.

Even without being given orders, adventurers devoted to justice and law may feel compelled to visit Blackstone to rally the peasants against their cruel overlord. Such actions are risky, but can form an entire campaign—the heroes beginning with only their party strength and slowly building up a powerful resistance network.

* Passing Through. The barony lies on the trade road linking Midmark and Ostmark, a well-traveled road. Characters journeying between these realms may be forced to travel through Blackstone, especially if time is against them and the shortest route must be taken.

BORDERLANDS, THE

The loose confederation of villages and towns that make up this frontier land have weathered the terrors of the Liche-Priest and the ravages of the Blizzard War. Orcs, giants, and beastmen are constant threats, yet the Borderlands remains a bustling center of trade. Here there are plentiful opportunities to earn money and glory. There is also much danger.

Details on Tuomi culture can be found in *The Battlelands* section.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Borderlands

* **Land Grab:** Since there is no central ruler, heroes wishing to found a new settlement are free to do so, and will encounter little opposition unless they try to claim someone else's lands. Most of the Borderlands' settlements lie along or close to trade roads.

* **Trade:** With most of the settlements along the trade roads, merchants are frequent visitors. Items hard to find in other realms can be relative common here. City items in a town or town items in a village cost 25% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost 50% more than normal, if available. Special goods can still only be purchased in the described location.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Ever since the Anari conquered Aspiria, the Borderlands has functioned as a central marketplace, somewhere traders from neighboring states and cultures to buy and sell all manner of goods without having to venture to the goods' place of manufacture. Centuries may have passed and the native Tuomi have lost their grip on the realm, but the scattered settlements continue to form a vital link in Rassilon's great trade networks.

When outsiders talk of the many trade roads running through the Borderlands they do so from the perspective of Ludogov being the capital. This is because four major trade routes pass through the town and it is the most centrally located. All names below are those used by Ludogov's citizens and foreign merchants. Every settlement has its own name for the road it straddles, a source of much confusion for those new to the region.

The Purple Road runs from Aspiria to Ludogov and is named both for the Aspirian wine that flows along this route and the Purple Hills the road traverses (and to a lesser extent the Purple Mead exports). Gems are another major import. Ludogov's craftsmen work the precious stones into gold and silver jewelry before exporting them to markets far and wide. The Battlelands is also a major source of gemstones.

The Wooden Road goes from Ludogov to Pohst, where logging is a major industry. Much of the wood is sold in Ludogov, from where it is exported further afield.

Heading southeast is the Dragon Road, so named for the potent marsh dragon stomach acid sold by the swamp-dwelling citizens of Scayle. From Scayle, the Low Battle Road runs to the southern Battlelands.

Heading north from Ludogov runs the Glass Road. The name is a recent one, having been adopted when trade through Glass Pass ceased and Vimmar became its source into the Borderlands. Before that it was the Fur Road. The Cattle Road winds its way from Vimmar to Hjorn. From here it becomes the Giant Road as it carries on eastward, eventually crossing into the northern Battlelands at Giantwatch as the High Battle Road.

MAJOR LOCALES

THE BEAR'S DEN INN

On the road south of Melitel stands a lone inn known as Bear's Den (or more commonly just the Den). Protected by a stout palisade, part of which is formed by the inn's main hall, the stable block (which can cater for pygmy mammoths), and the servants' quarters, the inn provides a much-needed refuge for merchants traveling between Ludogov and Scayle.

The main hall is wooden with a low, turf roof. A single-story structure, it contains a drinking hall, a small kitchen and larder, the personal quarters of the owner's family, a storeroom for barrels of alcohol, and four private guest rooms (one single, two doubles, and one six-person). All for room have a fire, but the wood costs extra. Patrons short of coin or who care nothing for privacy may sleep in the main hall, in which a fire is kept burning all year round. The servants quarters are a small longhouse, again constructed of wood and turf. It houses the six servants who work the inn and stables.

The stables are a two-story building. The ground floor houses stalls for animals, while the upper floor is used for storing hay. To prevent fire, the stable is constructed from green wood logs, a tree found in Melitel that is resistant to fire due to its higher water content.

Food prices are as per the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*. Drinks are served only by the half-gallon jug. Prices range from 5 gs for decent wine down to 1 ss for small beer. Accommodation is 5 gs per night for the private room, 2 gs per night for a bed in the double room, 5 ss per night in the six-berth room, and 2 ss per night in the main hall. Firewood for the guest rooms is an extra 3 ss per night (guests may use their own supplies) and a hot bath 2 ss. Stabling is 3 ss for riding horses, 1 gs for war horses, and 4 gs for pygmy mammoths per night. This includes fodder and a rubdown.

The inn takes it name not for the many bearskin rugs that line the benches, nor the cozy, dimly-lit drinking hall, but for the large black bear that roams freely throughout the establishment. No one knows who owns the bear, which is referred to simply as Bear. The current owner claims it was part of the furnishings when he took over, and he has no intention of getting rid of him. While new customers find the sight of the hulking brute unsettling, Bear only growls at those causing trouble. Few rowdy patrons need a second warning.

Bear is actually a leypabear. Curious about the so-called civilized races, he moved into the inn 45 years ago. Initially intending to spend just a few months learning their strange customs, he has grown to love human company for its endless variation and savor the taste of mead. Despite his curiosity, he finds his bear form more comfortable. It also allows him to eavesdrop on patrons' conversations without raising suspicion, thus giving him the opportunity to learn the true hearts of men. The inn's supposed owner, Wilfred ap-Bredei (mixed Anari/Tuomi heritage), deduced Bear's true status years ago, but has vowed to keep his secret. No one else among the staff knows. A friend of the elves of Melitel, Bear has learned something of the druidic arts down the years.

BLAIR CLAIGIONN

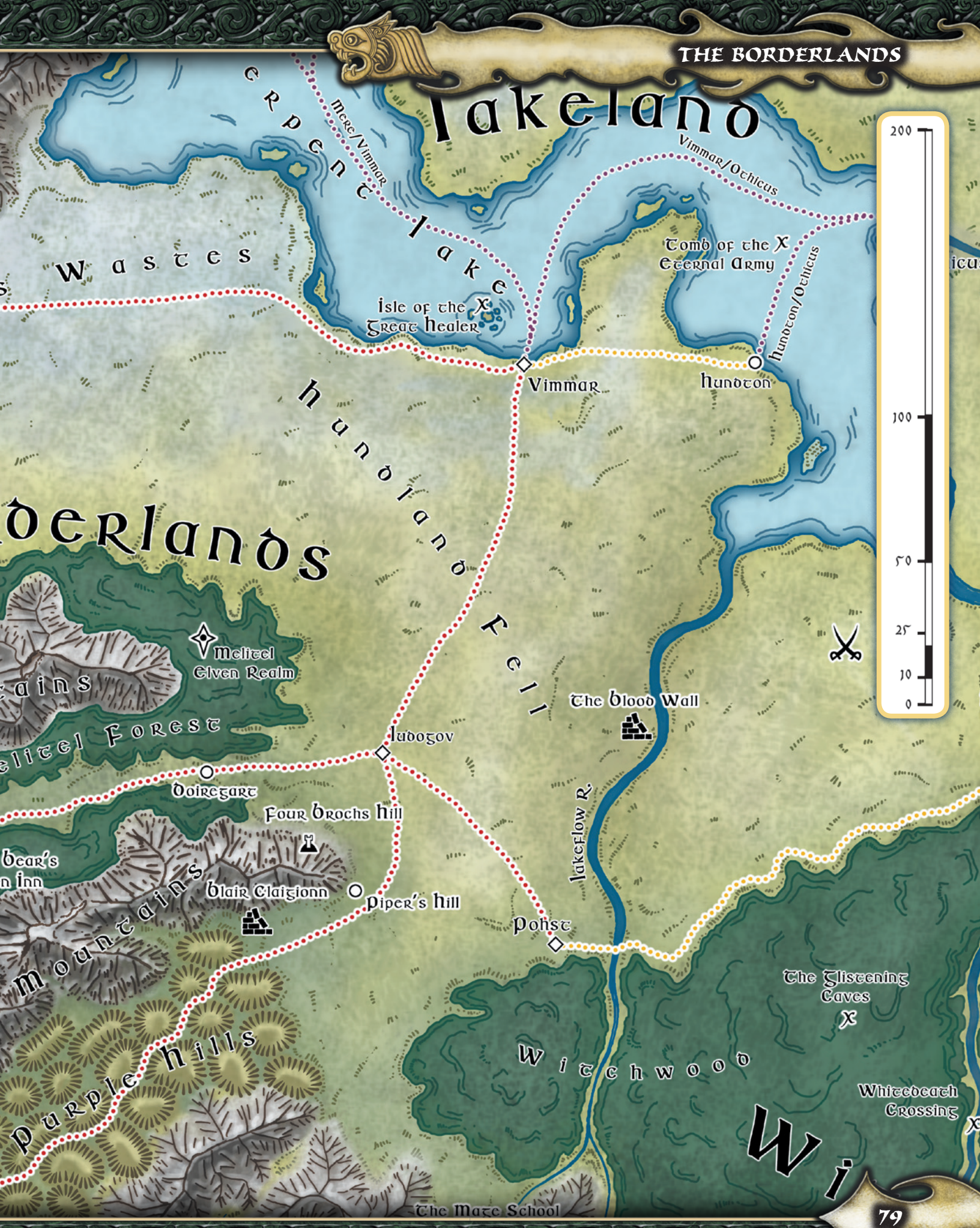
In his attempt to conquer Aspiria, the Liche-Priest sent his armies through the southern Drachenlands and down toward the Purple Hills. Given advanced warning by fleeing refugees, the Aspirian

The Borderlands



Population: 40,489 (35% Tumoi, 25% Anari, 10% Saxa, 10% dwarves, 10% frostborn, 5% taiga elves, 3% hearth elves, 2% engro)
Ruler: None (loose confederation)

Iceblade Mountains
Glass Pass
Iceblade Forest
Glitter-Stone Castle
Giantwatch
Hjorn
Auroch Hills
Auroch Hills
Fey Cattle Farm
Beast Temple
Dubhslieve
Giants Wood
Trozniv
The Borderlands
God-Wound Village
Zagniv
R. Bladerun
Silvercap Mountains
Karad Naroz
Rathtearmann
Sea Elves Temple
Calivar
R. Caprun
Star Valley
Candle Hills
Stormridge
Darklight Forest
Finegal's Ring
R. Wisp
Northern Marches
Scayle
Druntock Wood
Hollow
Hills


Lakeland
Serpent Lake
Mere/Vimmar
Vimmar/Othicus
Wastes
Tomb of the X
Eternal Army
Isle of the X
Great Healer
Hundon/Othicus
Vimmar
Hundon
Hundland Fell
derlands
Melitel
Elven Realm
ains
elitel Forest
The Blood Wall
Ludogov
Doiregart
Four Brochs Hill
bear's
n inn
Lakeflow R.
Blair Claigionn
Piper's Hill
Pohst
Mountains
The Listening
Caves
X
Purple Hills
Witchwood
Whitedeath
Crossing
The Maze School
200
100
50
25
10
0

army marched to battle beyond their borders. The first clash of the campaign took place just north of the Purple Hills.

Many thousands of Aspirians and their allies were slain, but the undead army's progress was halted. How many undead perished that day is unknown, for historical records are notoriously exaggerated. The site was named Blair Claigionn ("Blar Kylcun"), the Plain of Bones, an indication of the carnage that was wrought here.

Unable to bury their dead at the time, and unwilling simply to let them become servants of the damned liche, the corpses were hurriedly hacked apart and left for the crows. After the war, great burial mounds were erected on either side of the trade road, which cut through the heart of the battlefield, monuments to the fallen and Aspiria's courage in that darkest of days.

Blair Claigionn is haunted. Dread wraiths and ghosts drift over the battlefield, unable to find rest. Worse, cultists of Hela often come here looking for intact specimens or relics of old missed during the hasty burials. In some tombs the dumping of undead bodies still possessing minute traces of necromantic energy has caused the bones to merge into massive undead creatures half-jokingly called grave elementals.

Slower caravans are often forced to camp beside the trade road at night. Few sleep soundly, despite numerous perimeter bonfires and alert guards. Clerics of Scaetha pass through on occasion, but they have no time to excavate the great mounds in the hope of finding an active undead. When undead rise in strength, though, they are quick to respond.

THE BLOOD WALL

On the western bank of the Lakeflow River stands a grisly remnant of the Liche-Priest's passage through the Battlelands. A 15' high stone wall forms a square almost half a mile to a side. Imbedded in the wall are hundreds of corpses, still fresh and stained with blood despite the passage of almost 600 years. Tortured screams and moans constantly emanate from the writhing corpses.

No living creatures save cultists of Hela have seen what lies inside the compound. Those who try to climb the walls are attacked by grasping arms and gnashing skulls, only to meet swarms of zombies and clouds of disembodied spirits so thick they resembled dense fog. Flying has revealed nothing save constantly swirling mist, though whether that is natural or the countless ghosts is unknown. The wall is undoubtedly imbued with magic, for it has resisted even the heaviest siege weapons and damaging miracles.

When the site was discovered the cult of Scaetha was quick to launch a major assault. A hundred clerics died for naught, for not one managed to survive more than a dozen steps once beyond the wall before the attack was abandoned. Their torn and battered corpses were later found imbedded in the wall.

That the compound was raised by the Liche-Priest is not disputed, for only he could imagine such a monstrous edifice and command so many fell spirits. Yet its purpose is subject to conjecture. The most popular story claims it is the resting place of a powerful lieutenant of the cursed cleric, who protected by his guardians, slumbers until his master awakens. Some say the site marks where the Liche-Priest was wounded in battle, though no records ever speak of him traveling this far west. Just as unlikely are claims it is the gateway where Hela's dark spirits enter the mortal realm.

While the undead defend the site with eternal fervor, they have made no attempts to break out. Rather than waste manpower watching over the site, clerics of Scaetha visit when in the region just to check. Aside from fresh corpses added to the wall, nothing has changed down the centuries.

DOIREGART

Population: 942
Ruler: Grandfather Oak
Religion: Eostre Plantmother
Imports: Iron
Exports: Grain, vegetables

Doiregart ("Durugart"), Tuomi for "the enclosure of the grove," stands on the trade road south of Melitel.

In the center of the village, surrounded by a stout palisade, stands a small forest. It covers an area of around ten acres. The site is considered especially sacred to Eostre Plantmother, and only her clerics or visiting druids are permitted entry. Other elves may be granted access, but such enquiries are handled on a case-by-case basis. Reapers known as the Earth Blood Guard patrol the perimeter day and night, ever vigilant for intruders. They have standing orders to attack first and ask questions second.

Doiregart's ruler, Grandfather Oak, is a tree man. He lives in the sacred compound, communing with his goddess, tending the trees and plants, and greeting visiting fey. Quite how Grandfather Oak came to lead the community is long forgotten, but he has stayed here since its founding a little under three centuries ago. Although the clerics of Eostre obey his every command without question, he rarely makes any decrees. For the most part the high priestess, currently Cultivator Sexburh Eadricsdohtor, runs the village.

Virtually every citizen is a worshipper of Eostre Plantmother, though prayers are still offered to other gods when appropriate. At present the cult has 35 priests and 20 paladins. Every year, the cleric whose land produces the most crops is awarded the title high priest for the next year.

The high priest is responsible for judging civil and criminal cases in addition to her duties as a cleric. In addition to common laws, Eostre's religious laws (sins) are treated as criminal legislation.

The fertile land surrounding the village is divided into plots of equal size. Only clerics of Eostre Plantmother may own land. The villagers are their tenants. They pay rent and must work for the cleric on whose land their home stands, but they are also granted a small patch to grow their own crops and earn a fair wage. Villagers keep sheep and goats, but only for their milk and wool. Fish and fowl are eaten, but no other meat.

High priestess Sexburh is deeply troubled, for Grandfather Oak has been suffering blight. No spells or herbal remedies have been able to help his condition. Sexburh is unsure whether the tree man is ill, or succumbing to the ravages of old age. So far she has managed to keep his condition secret, but no secret remains so forever.

FEY CATTLE FARM

Travellers crossing the tough grassland that is the Aurochs Wastes often rub their eyes in disbelief when they first catch sight of the isolated farm. Unlike a stead, which is akin to a small village, Fey Cattle Farm consists of just a small thatched cottage and a garden plot. The cottage is occupied by two fey, although which is one is resident depends on the season.

In spring and summer, it is home to Gwendolyn. A glaistig (see *Hellfrost Expansion*), she takes the form of an attractive female Tuomi. Rather than following the same path as the rest of her kin, she opted to raise cattle herself rather than just be a protector of other people's cattle. Unfortunately for would-be cattle thieves, her chosen breed are aurochs and they are far from tame.

When fall and winter grip the land, Gwendolyn abandons the cottage to her friend Jut-Jaw, a nules-murt (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*). Like his counterpart, he has abandoned his natural home, in his case the forest, to live in isolation and raise cattle. He cannot entirely escape his Unseelie nature and still steals cattle. In his case, he ventures into the Aurochs Hills to rustle wild aurochs.

The pair meet just twice a year, during Summer Court Day and Winter Court Day, when they exchange pleasantries and gossip before journeying to wherever it is the fey go when their court is not ruling.

The house also changes with its occupant. When Gwendoyln is resident, the cottage is homely and welcoming, with climbing vines over the door that bear succulent fruit and berries more properly found on trees and bushes. Hot vegetable stew simmers over the stove and the aroma of warm bread fills the little house. The garden is full of colorful, scented, flowers, lush spring vegetables, and tasty fragrant herbs.

Jut-Jaw is no less hospitable to guests, despite being an Unseelie, but his version of the house is dark and dingy. The bread is moldy, the stew is cold and of questionable ingredients, and fat insects slither and crawl across the dirty straw floor. His garden contains bitter roots, nettles, and plants toxic to humans (such as deadly nightshade, which Unseelie find very tasty as a seasoning).

Both fey are committed vegetarians, though they are prepared to sacrifice one of their herd to feed the few visitors who stop by. In return for hospitality, they ask only for stories—Gwendolyn favors comedies and stories of heroes, while Jut-Jaw prefers tales of doom and woe. As well as eating well during their stay, guests are gifted with portions of raw aurochs flesh on their departure. The tasty meat stays fresh for as much as mone month, making it ideal as trail rations.

Finegal's Ring

The massive hill fort known as Finegal's Ring came into existence, so it is said, during the Anari invasion of the Borderlands. Raised overnight by a faerie lord at the behest of a powerful chieftain, Finegal, the impressive earthworks proved impossible to breech, for any damage was instantly repaired. Today the fort stands empty and unguarded. Any people who feel threatened may take refuge behind its banks and ask for the ancient magic to be awakened, but there is a terrible price to pay for safety—as it was with Finegal, the faerie lord demands an offering of ten children. The children are not slain, but are instead taken to Alfheim, never to be seen again.

Four Brochs Hill

In the northern foothills of the Hollow Mountains stand the remains of four brochs (circular, hollow-walled stone towers) constructed at the corners of a walled courtyard. Constructed as refuges rather than houses or forts, brochs have remained in use by the Tuomi for many centuries. However, these specimens served another purpose.

Raised in the latter days of the Demongate War, each of the towers was sacred to one of the four elemental gods—Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor. Etched into the walls were runes of power, potent wards intended to focus divine energy to a point in the dead center of the courtyard, wherein stood a small obelisk marked with Sigel's holy symbol. Despite their obvious importance, no Tuomi clerics ever worshipped here.

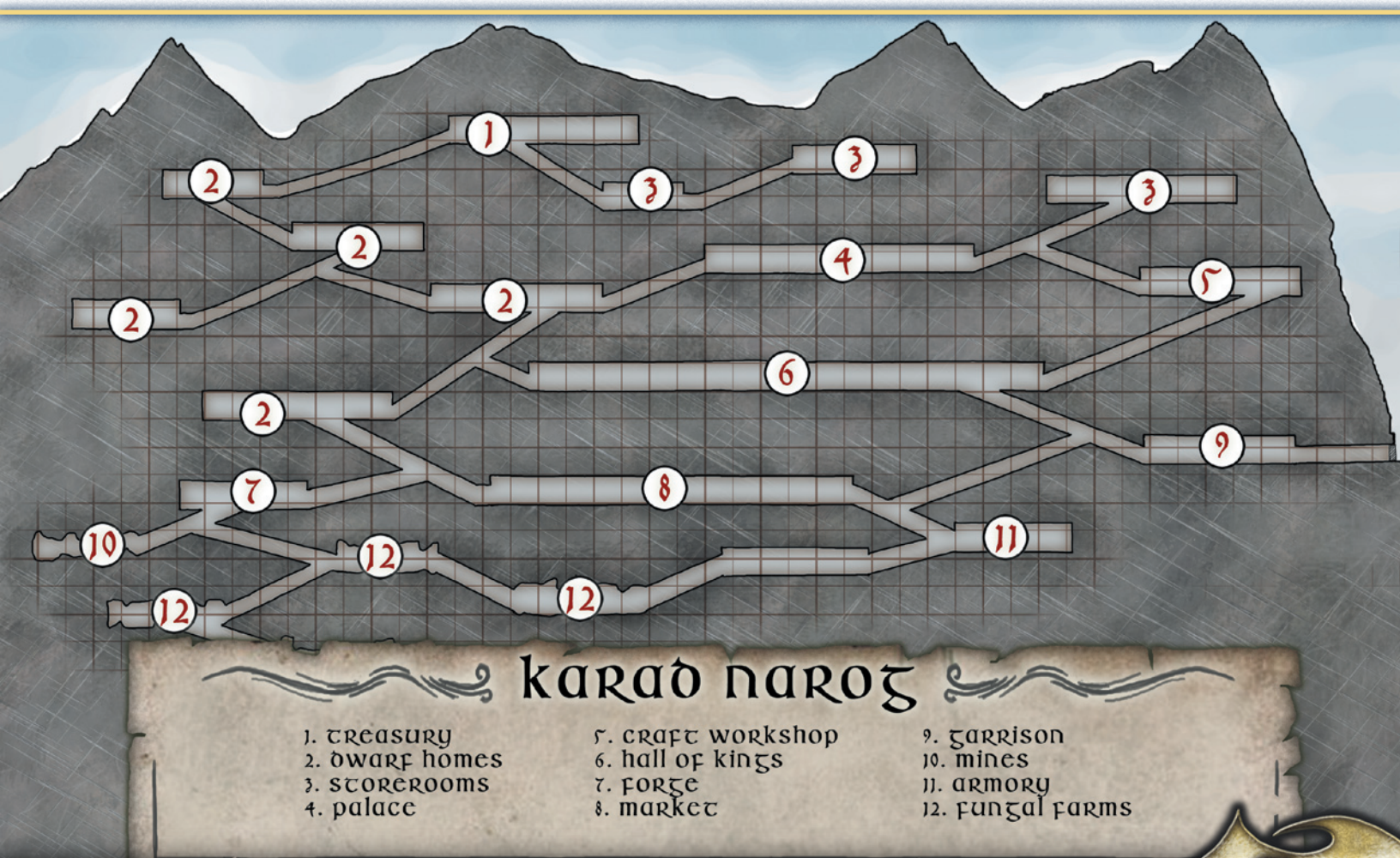
Eventually recovering from the chaos of the Demongate War, the Anari attempted to conquer the disparate Tuomi tribes once and for all (a venture that never succeeded). The brochs were given to the Convocation of Elementalists as halls of residence, the wily emperor seeking to both curry favor with the powerful order and reinforce his armies with their magic.

Within a week of the mages moving in the Tuomi began to assault the walls. For three years the wizards weathered regular attacks, sometimes relieved by allied soldiers, other times forced to fight alone. Then, late one summer afternoon, a vast Tuomi force gathered at the base of the slope. The mages prepared to sell their lives dearly, but the warriors did not attack. Instead, they began singing funeral dirges. As the sun set below the horizon, they vanished into the gloom, leaving the mages perplexed and relieved.

A caravan visiting the site a week later found the compound abandoned. The furnishings were intact, meals left half-eaten, clothes neatly laid out, and valuable relics and alchemical devices left behind. The only clue was a single word hastily carved into a wooden table—Chernobog, Tuomi for "black god." What happened to the inhabitants has both perplexed and troubled the Convocation ever since.

The Tuomi never rebuilt the brochs. Instead, they shunned the place as cursed. Even today, they avoid camping within sight of the empty towers, and only hurry past them while whispering prayers of protection from darkness. Young Tuomi are given no reason for avoiding the place—it is simply ingrained into them never to venture there under any circumstances. Any Tuomi who claims to have visited the brochs is immediately considered an outcast, shunned by even his closest family.

Originally standing six yards high and dominating the skyline, time and weather have reduced the brochs to mere stubs, the highest walls barely reaching two yards. The outer walls have fared even



worse, and are now barely visible through the tough, coarse grass. The courtyard obelisk has shattered. Worryingly, the stone appears to have shattered from within rather than been damaged by some external force.

GOD WOUND VILLAGE

Population: 676
Ruler: Merciful Daughter Glitterskin
Religion: Eira, Ertha
Imports: Pottery, timber, vegetables
Exports: Healing

A low peak in the Silvercap Mountains, God Wound Mountain is named for the red vegetation that clings to its summit. Legends claim that a deity dripped blood onto the mortal realm during the God War. A single splash landed on the mountaintop, staining it red as the blood soaked through the rock and into Ertha's Realm. Which deity suffered the injury depends on who is telling the story. Listeners demanding further proof are pointed to the base of the mountain, where stands God Wound Village. Within the village's stone walls are numerous bubbling mud pools, steaming vents, and sulfurous fumes.

The hot springs and mud pools have long been held to have curative properties. One drinks the water to cure internal ailments and bathes in the warm mud to rid oneself of external afflictions. God Wound Village is Rassilon's only known spa resort. The water and pools do have some beneficial effects (Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises is removed after two hours of treatment and drinking a pint of the water each day serves as an antibiotic), but they are not magical.

The village's primary export is the range of beauty and health treatments it offers. At a minimum of 20 gold scields per treatment, the citizens make a decent living. More traditional herbal healing (brewed using the hot water) is also available, as is magical healing.

Although the cult of Eira is popular here, for obvious reasons, there is also a sizeable temple to Ertha. The citizens come here to mourn, for they believe that while the god's blood which causes the earth to bubble and hiss cures mortal afflictions, it pains Ertha. Devout cultists scourge themselves so as to feel Ertha's pain, and practice bloodletting, spilling the hot fluid onto the ground in a bid to alleviate the burning inflicted by the wounded deity's blood.

The village's mayor is always the high priestess of the cult of Eira. A frostborn, Glitterskin finds the hot air uncomfortable. Only in winter does she feel comfortable. Her devotion to curing the sick prevents her from leaving for a more suitable climate. With so many rich clients, the cult has decided it is necessary to have a permanent military force. Led by a Peacekeeper, the army comprises 26 veteran mercenaries. They are handsomely paid.

In the hills above the village are numerous caves. The heat from the god's blood is felt even here, for the temperature inside is always equivalent to a Hearthlands' summer, even in the coldest of winters. The warmth has recently drawn Orcs here. They know the village is wealthy, for they have seen the number of visitors. For now their raids have been limited to testing the defenses, but soon they plan a major assault.

God Wound's growing popularity is damaging the cult's fortunes in Ludogov. Although the clerics in the great town are pacifists, nothing about their faith prevents them bad mouthing their business rivals.

GROZNIV

Population: 422
Location: Comes Blout "the Whiskerless" Seonaidh
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Ullr
Imports: Pottery, timber, vegetables
Exports: Bone, horn, leather, meat

Nestled in the lower slopes of the Aurochs Hills, Grozniv is a predominantly Tuomi settlement. In the center of the community is a joint temple to Eostre Animalmother and Ullr. It takes the form of a round, dry stone building with turf placed over a wooden roof frame. Entrance is via a ceremonial walkway, its length marked with tall posts atop which are aurochs' skulls. Nearby is the home of the ruler, a small, circular building, this time with a steeply pitched conical roof. Located further out are some three dozen wheelhouses.

The citizens of Grozniv grow a few hardy root crops to supplement their diet and keep goats for milk and wool. Much of their food and livelihood comes the wild aurochs that live in the nearby hills. Meat and bones are essential ingredients in every meal, while leather and horn is cured and sold to the traders that pass by once each summer. The citizens are hard folk, well accustomed to living off the land and surviving the long winters.

All in all, it is a fairly standard village, save for one unusual fact—there are no children below the age of four.

All the babies born in the last three years have been freaks, human save for their head, which is that of a wild beast. Prayers were made and sacrifices offered to both deities honored by the villagers, the citizens fearful they had been cursed for some slight, but this did nothing to halt the incidents. Paranoia quickly followed. Menfolk became convinced their wives were cavorting with beastmen or being subjected to some fell enchantment, while the women accused their husbands, who often ventured deep into the Aurochs Hills of being bewitched or replaced by beastmen in magical disguise. Sex became less frequent, and finally stopped altogether a year ago. Despite this celibacy, women still fell pregnant, siring a new generation of beastmen.

After much discussion it was decided to leave the babies in the hills for the wolves and bears to claim their flesh, the parents relying on Eostre Animalmother to claim their souls. A few mangled remains have been found, but most of the children disappeared. Now the villagers are beginning to wonder if the beastmen tribes have adopted the babes.

Too proud and too ashamed to ask for help, the villagers have suffered in silence, the sexes growing steadily more distant toward each other.

KARAD NAROG

Population: 4,049
Ruler: Hauld Ragvig Brittle-Beard
Religion: Ertha, Eostre Plantmother, Tiw
Imports: Icewood
Exports: Fungi, gold, silver

The sole dwarf fortress-city in the Battlelands, Karad Narog lies in the Silvercap Mountains, not far from the source of the Caprun River. Though still reclusive, they do trade with communities along the river.

While the city continues to exploit the rapidly shrinking veins of precious metal, its primary export is actually slabs of dried fungus. While searching for fresh mineral resources in the lower depths of the city, miners accidentally broke through into a network of natural caverns covered in vast growths of fungi. Finding the fungi edible, they quickly began harvesting it and selling it to icewood traders.

Although a few orcs and goblins occasionally stumble into the caverns, fungals are the biggest menace. Normally timid creatures, the strange beings have reacted to the theft of their crops with violence. The dwarves have so far managed to hold on to their new revenue stream, but losses are mounting.

The current ruler is extremely elderly. He has clung to life despite being infirm for the last 50 years, seemingly refusing to die. Given the state of politics in the city, his reluctance to pass over is understandable.

The nobles who serve him are divided into three competing factions. One believes there is more mineral wealth to exploit. They argue the diversion of resources to harvesting fungus is an insult to their ancestors. Another faction believes the mineral resources have all but been exhausted and the dwarves should abandon their home for richer grounds. The third faction also holds the mineral resources are spent, but they advocate an expansion of the fungi trade.

The hauld tries his best to appease all three factions, but tensions are rising and there have already been acts of sabotage. Ragvig feels that his death will trigger a civil war, for he has no heirs and the main contenders for the title come from different factions.

PIG FORT

Population: 573
Ruler: Husbander Caewlin the Boar (Mayor)
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Var
Imports: Grain, pottery, vegetables
Exports: Pigs, pork products, truffles

The comically named settlement sits close to the Aspirian border, inside an old Tuomi hill fort overlooking the Purple Road. Nearby is a small patch of wild forest, aptly known as Pig Wood. The Tuomi name for the settlement is Dun Muc ("Fort of the Pigs").

Pigs form the backbone of the village's economy. Salted pork, smoked pork, and piglets are the main exports, supplemented by truffles unearthed by the pigs during their foraging. Villagers from far and wide, even Aspiria, bring their sows to mate with the prize boars.

Pigs are not regarded as being clean animals, what with their fondness of rolling in mud. The streets are filthy with churned mud and pig dung, and stink to high heaven in summer. That the Tuomi word for pigs (muc) sounds like the Anari word muck has led many to believe the settlement is actually named for the pervasive odor.

The mayor of Pig Fort is always a cleric of Eostre Plantmother elected by the people. Each mayor rules for five years. Only the heads of families who keep at least 20 pigs may vote. Most citizens thus maintain a small herd. The current mayor's nickname comes about from his sexual appetite and his fierce temper. He is also highly protective of his community and an astute businessman.

The temple of Eostre, which naturally is decorated with images of swine, serves as a place of worship, a veterinary clinic, and a slaughterhouse. Although Apple Day is a festival to Eostre's Plantmother aspect, it is held in Pig Fort as Nut Day (nuts grow wild in the forest and form part of the pigs' diet). Great markets are held each Herding Day. Although there are some sheep in the community, Birthing Day is determined by the first piglet to be born to the temple's swine herd.

PIPER'S HILL

Population: 319
Ruler: Mayor Hardouin ap-Amyon
Religion: Var, Eira
Imports: Trade
Exports: Trade

Piper's Hill sits at the base of a large, round hill. It takes its name from Tuomi word *Prevairecnoc* ("Peebiru Knoc"), which literally means "hill of the piper."

The local Tuomi believe the hill is home to a powerful Unseelie noble known as the Black Piper. In days past they sacrificed a young child (decided by lot) to the fey lord at the start of each year to appease him. When the Anari founded a trading post at the base of the hill they forbade the practice. The Tuomi immediately packed up and left. They continue to avoid the village.

The village sits alongside the Dragon Road, at the base of the eastern foothills of the Hollow Mountains. Over the years the trading post grew into a prosperous village. It was resettled after the Blizzard War, but it remains small by Borderlands' standards.

Part of the village's income still comes from general trade. A convenient halfway point, it caters to merchants from Scayle and Ludogov, as well as the smaller communities along the trade road. Piper's Hill has no natural resources of note. Instead, it imports raw resources, and turns them into finished goods.

Though not wealthy by the standards of other realms, trade is good and profits high. A lot of money has been spent over the years providing strong fortifications. A high, steep sided earth bank fronted with flat stones and topped with a palisade lies behind a deep ditch. Access is via a wooden bridge and a double gatehouse.

Originally governed by descendants of the original founder, an elected mayor has ruled since the last scion of that house died childless. Since the settlement relies on trade and crafts, they hold power. Only merchants and craftsmen may stand for office and vote in the elections. The mayor rules alone, but if he wants to be reelected he must appease the voters with his policies.

The citizens of Piper's Hill live in fear of the Black Piper. Shortly after the settlement was founded a great plague of rats descended on it. Fearful of their lives and livelihoods, the inhabitants accepted the offer of a passing stranger. In return for a hefty sum, he would drive away the rats. The villagers refused. The rat problem grew worse and the stranger returned, this time demanding a higher price. After a month of this the villagers could hold out no longer and accepted the stranger's by now exorbitant fee.

The stranger produced a set of pipes and played a haunting melody. Hypnotized by the unearthly notes, the rats followed the musician out of the village and into a cave in the hills from which they never returned. The piper returned to the village and demanded payment, but the villagers refused. The stranger put up no fight. Instead, he smiled wryly. He casually told the villagers that the price would be paid down the centuries, but not in coin. With that, he left.

Every generation (about 15 years) since that day, the same strange, unearthly music floats down from the nearby hill. When it does, the citizens weep, for by morning a number of children will have disappeared. Many believe the Piper is taking one child for each gold coin he was promised. Sadly, no one knows what final price their ancestors agreed. No spell or charm has been able to prevent the children vanishing. This year marks the start of the 15th year since the ghostly notes were last heard.

STORMRIDGE

Population: 330
Ruler: Council
Religion: Thunor, Eostre, Ullr
Imports: Timber, wool
Exports: Flour, game bird meat, grain

The village of Stormridge lies on the northern edge of the Hollow Mountains, a half day's walk from the trade road. Despite the cold weather, the citizens manage to grow crops of barley and wheat. Some of this is sold as grains, part is ground into flour in the village's windmill (a new fangled contraption erected by the cult of Thunor), and part is used to feed the great flocks of game birds that live in the nearby forest.

A council governs the village. Three seats are permanently held by the clerics of the major deities. A further six councilors are elected every two years.

The near-constant wind that blows from the mountains has attracted many clerics of Thunor, who believe the site is blessed. Some prayer kits have remained aloft for years, eventually falling to earth only when the material has rotted away. Other kits never get airborne, a clear sign of Thunor's displeasure.

The wind mill that dominates the skyline is the only one in Rassilon. Its inventor, Thunderbrother Magnus Wind-Breeches, so named for his chronic flatulence, came up with the idea after watching the prayer kites. It is a rudimentary design and not that efficient, but with no suitable watercourses for a water mill it is better than nothing. The mill, which turns day and night, has bought much prosperity to the small village, but also a great deal of envy from neighboring settlements. The mill has survived three arson attempts so far.

THIEFTON

Population: 319
Ruler: Boeri Filbert Greenteeth
Religion: Nauthiz, Freo, the Unknowable One
Imports: Information, stolen goods
Exports: Information, stolen goods

Thiefton cannot be found on any map. In order to ensure safety on the bandit-infested roads, many engros have grouped together to form a tribe. Their brightly painted wagons continuously travel the trade roads, stopping off at villages to sell information and miscellaneous goods, while simultaneously acquiring new stock. The engros rarely return to the same community in the same season in the hope their larcenous pilfering will have been forgotten by the next time they call. Many of the wagons are not only reinforced, but contain hidden slits through which crossbows can be fired.

The position of boeri is not hereditary. When the incumbent dies, the ryes elect a new one from among their number. The current boeri has extremely poor oral hygiene, leaving him with green teeth and foul breath.

ZAGNIV

Population: 600
Location: Ruira Cailis ap-Odbin
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Ullr
Imports: Metalware, pottery
Exports: Timber

Located in the northern foothills of the Silvercap Mountains, Zagniv is home to a village of farmers and herders. While the nearby flatlands are ideal for growing a variety of crops, flocks of hardy sheep and goats are grazed on the hillsides.

The buildings are an unusual design, more to a lean-to in design and with every front facing away from the mountains. The walls are made of thick wooden posts laid horizontally, with the front aspect much higher than the rear. The roofs are thick slabs of stone laid at acute slope and embedded into the ground at the rear of each structure. Surrounding the back of the houses nearest the slopes is a semi-circle of stout, waist high posts. The unusual architecture is not some bizarre fashion, nor does it have any racial or religious significance. It is essential to the villagers' survival, though.

The higher foothills are inhabited by a tribe of cliff giants. Once or twice a year, they clamber down the slopes to steal livestock and roll huge boulders down upon the villagers. Their initial assaults caused terrible damage, with boulders crashing through wooden roofs and crushing the unsuspecting occupants, or rolling down the mountain and bashing through walls.

The current architecture provides protection against both the larger rolled boulders and smaller thrown ones. In most instances, the stones crash onto the sloping stone roof and roll back. The wooden posts catch the stones, preventing them from rolling through the streets or the front of neighbor's houses.

Ruira Cailis would dearly love to be rid of the giants once and for all. Unfortunately, the village militia is not up to the task and she cannot afford to hire an army to slaughter the brutes. A small band of experienced adventurers content to accept hospitality and whatever wealth the giants possess, however, would be ideal for the task.

PERSONS OF NOTE

NEVE

Neve appears to be a young Tuomi girl of about ten years of age. Her hair is dark, her complexion unmarked by scars or blemishes. Only her eyes reveal her true nature, for they are windows to a soul of utter evil. Her name is an alias based on a title she was given long ago—Cnaimh Seinneadair ("neev sheyn-u-der")—the Bone Singer.

Neve was born into a Tuomi family in –264. A gifted singer, her parents hoped she would become a storyteller, a respected position among the Tuomi. Their dream turned sour when the girl turned eight, for she developed an unholy gift—her songs could conjure fell spirits into nearby corpses. Neve kept her power a secret for several years—the dark lady who visited her in her dreams said it was not for sharing. Her parents suspected something was wrong, for she shunned the company of other children, preferring to play in the woods, where she claimed her special friends lived.

Fearful her secret friends were fey who sought to lure her into their strange world, her parents followed her, along with a local cleric of Sigel. What they saw shocked them to their core—the young child's special friends were zombies, vile undead which obeyed her every command. Her parents pleaded for clemency, for the cult of Sigel acted swiftly. As she died, she pledged her soul to the dark lady.

Neve remained in her grave for nearly two centuries before rising from the loamy soil. As the Liche-Priest's army surged westward, Hela, who had claimed the child's corrupted soul—as was her divine right as her patron—sent it back to her body. She proved a staunch ally of the Liche-Priest.

Neve survived the war by dint of Hela's special blessing (see below). She has continued to serve her dark mistress ever since, always managing to stay one step ahead of the cult of Scaetha (who hunt a powerful necromancer, unaware she is a mere child).

That Hela broke the Compact when she awoke Neve from death' grip is undeniable. The child appears totally mortal, and she does not register as undead to any spell (though she has the Undead special ability and is susceptible to Scaetha's fury). Unfortunately, the gods were distracted at the time and thus enacted no punishment.

SEANACHIE

Seanachie ("shenuchy") is a title, not a name. It means storyteller in Tuomi. Seanachie appears to be a Tuomi maiden of some 20 summers, with red hair and freckles that flare up in summer. Her brilliant green eyes display wisdom far beyond her mortal years. Few people can hold her gaze for long.

Seanachie has collected and retold stories for the best part of 127 years, yet has not aged a day. As a youth, she boasted that she would learn every story, poem, and song before she died. The Unknowable One, her patron, decided the mortal needed to be a taught a lesson about being careful what you wish for, the sin of arrogance, and making promises you cannot keep.

Thus, she is cursed to do as promised before being allowed to die. Knowing that her immortality could work in her favor, the god laid further curses, preventing her from ever learning anything new except stories. Anything else she tries to learn is forgotten when she next awakens. As befits the Unknowable One, the geas is naturally one that can never be fulfilled—new stories are invented every day, and the world is a vast place. Never vindictive, the Unknowable One feels she will have learned her lesson in another century or two. Assuming she has, he will allow her to age normally and grow old gracefully.

The Unknowable One has not broken the Compact with his actions, for his servant's fate is written in the Norn's loom. Despite their wisdom, the three goddesses have not discovered how he pulled off this trick.

VOLAS MEATA-GARG

Volas is insane. A priest of Eira, he is an itinerant healer and herbalist, moving from community to community and offering his services in return for room and board. He is exceptionally timid by nature, never looks anyone in the eye, is extremely polite, and disdains all forms of violence, even verbal threats. Of course, he does nothing to stop acts of violence, being too afraid to speak out.

But when his madness strikes he becomes a fearless warrior filled with Tiw's battle fury and lust for combat. Violent and warlike, this personality is a paladin of Tiw.

The cleric suffers no physical transformation when his personalities switch, but his mental abilities are altered. Physically nondescript and rather average, his healer personality is intelligent but spineless. Conversely, his berserker nature is as thick as mud but possessed of indomitable will.

Volas actually possess two distinct souls. At his birth, the time when the gods allot souls to physical bodies (unborn babies are deemed to have no souls and are thus incapable of sin), both Eira and Tiw blessed the child simultaneously. He received two distinct souls, with totally different personalities, desires, and goals. That Eira's gift was dominant was purely a matter of luck, and is rather ironic.

Although he is a cleric of diametrically opposed deities, sins committed by one personality do not reflect on the other. Thus, when he kills while under the influence of his berserk warrior personality he suffers no sins for his actions when he reverts to his pacifist personality.

Meata-Garg, pronounced "metu-garg" means Timid-Savage in Tuomi. Only his closest friends know and use this name, and never around strangers.

CAIRN LANDS, THE

The Cairn Lands were once the home of the Vindari, that ancient culture which exists today only as faded inscriptions on the walls of crumbling ruins and barrow mounds. Today, this largely unsettled land is a rural backwater, famous for little save the Cairn Hills, that dark upland amid whose valleys walk the restless dead.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Cairn Lands.

* **Fearful Realm:** Knowledge of what horrors still dwell there, too many ghost stories as a child, and the pervasive air of menace give a –1 penalty to Spirit rolls to resist Fear within the Cairn Hills. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others.

* **Limited Trade:** No major overland trade routes pass through the Cairn Lands, and even maritime trade is limited due to the seasonal nature of its major exports. All goods with a Town availability cost double outside Hergist (where they cost 50% more than normal). City goods are four times as expensive as normal except in Hergist, where they cost three times a much.

* **Necromantic Energy:** The Cairn Hills are awash with vestiges of necromantic energy. All arcane skill rolls with a necromantic trapping are made at +1. Furthermore, the entirety of the Hills counts as a graveyard for the purposes of characters with the Disciple of Hela Edge.

* **No True Nobles:** While rich landowners and herders sport titles of ridder and lendmann, there are no true nobles in the Cairn Lands. Any citizen can elect to use one of these titles, though without the Noble Edge it grants no bonuses—either the citizens ignore it or everyone thinks the titleholder is just arrogant and presumptuous.

Cairn Landers tolerate these low titles, but publicly ridicule and scorn those with delusions of grandeur. Any local claiming a title above lendmann suffers –1 Charisma among his fellow Cairn Landers for each social step higher. For instance, a Cairn Lander "thegn" has –2 Charisma. This has no effect on outside nobles, who are entitled to hold such lofty positions.

WHO WERE THE VINDARI?

Many scholars claim the Vindari and Saxa once shared common ancestry, so similar were the roots of the cultures. In ancient times, the Saxa dominated what is now the land beneath the Icebarrier Mountains, while the Vindari were largely limited to the Cairn Lands, Trond, and Heldalund. Their realms abutted those of the central Heligi and most northerly Selari, though there is dispute as to whether the cultures actually existed at the same time and, if they did, what the relationships were. With most records lost or hidden away in private libraries, discovering the truth could be a life's quest.

While the Saxa remained clannish, adopting a true feudal system only after their uprising against the Anari, the Vindari quickly established a king and a system of nobility bound by oaths of allegiance based on the king's position, not his bloodlines.

They were also less aggressive than their cousins, preferring to settle disputes through law courts rather than feuds and wars. It was this, in the end, that spelled their downfall, for first the Anari and then the Saxa conquered their homelands. The brutal expansion of the Liche-Priest and the terror and destruction of the Blizzard War were the final death knells, but the bell had begun to toll centuries beforehand.

ATMOSPHERE AMID THE CAIRNS

The Cairn Hills are a strange landscape. Here the hills rise round but steep in long, hard to reach promontories, towering over the valleys below. From late spring to early fall, mist fills the valleys at night, giving the impression of islands floating amid a white sea. Yet these islands are ones at which sane men do not wish to set anchor, for only the dead dwell on them.

Atop each isolated hill is a cluster of ancient barrows. Raised long ago by the Vindari, they are testimony to the honor they showed their ancestors, for to erect a burial ground on hills that seem to defy attempts to scale them was a monumental task. Some entrances are still blocked by weathered stones inscribed with faded names of old, or flanked by crumbling statues whose long-erased visages were once those of the occupants. Others are open to the elements, gaping holes of darkness.

Atop the hills the grass grows short, for the wind that continually howls across the landscape seems to resent the presence of life. In the valleys the undergrowth grows thick, clogging trails in tough, thorny walls as if warning the living to venture no further. Those who press on find themselves in a labyrinth of snaking gullies and narrow valleys. It is easy to become disoriented, especially when the mist rises, and difficult to accurately backtrack. A wrong turn and a man could be lost here for days or weeks, possibly forever if some dark denizen claims his body and soul.

The curious and those whose duties require they walk here must at some point venture into the valleys, for there is no way to cross from peak to peak without the power of flight. The open barrow entrances are a constant presence, their entrance tunnels leering down like sightless eyes on those who would trespass into this haunted landscape. Many remote areas of Rassilon impart feelings of isolation on the wanderer, yet here there is only the constant feeling of being watched by powers that wish no good.

Many of the barrows lie empty. The cult of Scaetha has cleansed a great number over the years, destroying withered and bony corpses, and the grave goods later stolen by brave thieves following in the clerics' footsteps. Yet occasionally one stumbles across a barrow in which not only are the grave goods intact, but they have been laid out and added to with recent acquisitions. These are the barrows one must avoid at night, for the inhabitants are far from still and silent.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Unlike most other realms, the Cairn Lands lacks any true form of nobility. Those with power may claim noble title, but no social superior has bestowed them. The inhabitants of the Cairn Lands are however, heavily tied to a social system that has not changed in centuries.

The top social class are the bondi, free men who own their own land or business. Around a quarter of the population falls into this category. Only the bondi may stand for election in the national moot, and only the bondi may moot in these elections. Between them, they own everything not covered by Dalthalinin Wood and the Cairn Hills, or men do not live in either domain.

Territories are not set by law or lines on a map, but by boundary stones placed by the landowner. Disputes over these stones are commonplace at the national moot and at regional moots. In many cases the disputes can be settled amicably, but when talking fails bloodshed begins. Blood feuds over as little as an acre of land have

The Cairn Lands



Population: 25,346 (70% Saxa, 15% hearth elves, 10% Anari, 5% engro)
Ruler: Moot
Religion: Sigel, Eostre, Scaetha
Imports: Fruit, Wine
Exports: Cheese, leather goods, wool

Wood
The Skull Shrine
Trandly
Trondavoe
Paraxus
Fickle Forest
Barony of Cul
Barony of Crond
Crond bay
Two Enclosure Farm
Boar Vale
The Boarstream
The Burnt Mounds
Dalthalinin Wood
Cairn lands
The Fey Bridge
The Blessed Well
N
W
E
S
Mountains
Karad Zor
The Charnel Pit
The Moot
Cairn hills
Hergist
Hergist/Crondav
The Hall of Kings
Old Men. Rd.
The Dragon Horn
The Dark Temple
Cairn Run R.
The Stormwald
The Black Hall
Pit of Mist and Shadow
Storm Mountain
Vends bay
Iokka
Oboltun
The Great Fleet Wreck Site
100
50
25
10
0

raged for generations in the Cairn Lands, with entire generations being brought up knowing nothing but animosity toward their land-stealing neighbors.

Beneath the bondi are the karls. These are technically free men, in that they are not slaves, but they do not own their own property or businesses. Their homes, and the land they farm or business they operate, are rented from the rich landlords. By law, they owe their landlord total allegiance, though they can move to a new area if a new landlord will accept them. Their social superiors are honor bound to provide fair justice, adjudicate legal disputes, and provide protection from raiders.

Karls may rise above their birthright—all it takes is for a bondar to grant them a sliver of land as their own and they in turn rise to the bondi social class. Such gifts were once commonplace, hence why the bondi class is so large, but these days it is exceedingly rare. When such gifts are bestowed, the land is usually a patch the bondi doesn't want, such as areas of poor moorland or land near troublesome neighbors.

While slavery has been abolished elsewhere, in the Cairn Lands it remains in practice. However, the only slaves permitted are those who have been sentenced to serve as a thrall (the Saxa term for a slave) by a moot.

Servitude in this manner is handed down not just on the guilty party, but his wife and children as well (other kin escape this punishment). Sentences may range for a number of years, to a number of generations, to perpetuity. Most often, though, their length is tied to the weregild system. The thrall and his family, and perhaps descendants, serving until their debt is paid off.

Families that cannot pay their way may voluntarily become thralls. They are usually taken into a bondar's house to perform menial tasks, but receive a roof over their heads and basic food.

JUSTICE

Justice in the Cairn Lands is handled via bondi or the moots. While Hothar may be invoked at trials and his clerics consulted on matters of law, his cult has no judicial powers here.

A karl who has a dispute with another karl answerable to the same bondar (singular form) has no choice but to approach his master for justice.

A karl who has complaint against his bondar, another bondar, or a karl answerable to a different bondar must bring his grievance to the regional moot. Traditionally, for every 50 bondi families there is a moot. The borders for these regions were laid down long ago and change only infrequently. While any karl or bondar can attend and bring business before them, it is the doomsmen (a dozen bondi chosen by their peers each year; see *Rassilon Expansion 2*) who judge legal cases. Their word is not final, however.

If the plaintiff feels justice has not been received, he may approach the national moot. This austere body of 20 elected officials meets at Hergist during the summer months. For those living far from the capital, their justice is often out of reach. Every member of the national moot serves as a doomsman. In some instances this means the accused may actually be judging the case-such is the law in the Cairn Lands.

EDUCATION

Education isn't a big thing in the Cairn Lands. In fact, telling someone they are as educated as a Cairn Lander is an insult across the western and central Low Winterlands. This isn't to say the inhabitants are stupid—they just lack academic knowledge of most subjects except those they need to know. Talk to one about sheep farming and he'll prove a near genius, but ask him to name the capital of Heldalund, hardly a remote land (from he Cairn Lands, anyway), and he may well question whether such a place even exists.

Education is firmly located at home. Parents and grandparents teach the children about their nation and way of life, passing on traditional skills, folklore, and religious stories. Unless an elder has visited a foreign land or the family lives in Hergist or near a border, facts about other nations are fragmentary at best, and downright false at worst.

Saxa is the dominant language, brought in by the new wave of settlers two centuries ago, though Auld Saxa and even the supposedly extinct Vindari tongue remain in use in some backwaters. Anari is largely confined to Hergist, where most of the Anari population dwells. Trader is rarely spoken outside Hergist, and even then it is restricted to those who must deal with outsiders. Fortunately, most of the visiting merchants are from Ostmark, and so speak Saxa. Literacy rates run at around 30%. Much knowledge is passed down orally, as is the Saxa way. Only the rich, who wish to show they are not as ignorant as the serfs, and those connected with trade, magic, or temples typically bother to learn their letters.

RELIGION

While the sheep flocks of the Cairn Lands provide income for most of the population, it is the cult of Sigel that claims the most worshippers. Until Hela's madness, the sun god was a relatively minor deity in the Cairn Lands, worshipped for his control over summer rather than his fight against evil. Following the infestation of the Cairn Hills, when the dead began to walk, it was the cult of Sigel who first led the defense of the realm, for Scaetha's cult was a minor one during the initial outbreak. Over the course of the Liche-Priest's reign of terror Scaetha's clerics took on more duties, but Sigel was always viewed as the greater of the pair, the general compared to the captain. Though much of the surviving population had largely deserted the small realm as the Thrym's army swept south, it fell again to the clerics of Sigel to hold them at bay.

Although incomers later recolonized the land, the natives who remained held Sigel as the defender against evil, promoting him to patron of their land, and the nearest thing the Cairn Lands have to a state religion. The *status quo* has not altered over the centuries. Cult activities were focused on the southern realm until seven years ago, when Cul fell to the frostborn conqueror, Frostweaver. With Scaetha's clergy now filling the role as defenders against the undead still roaming the Cairn Hills, the cult of the sun god has increased its presence in the northern districts.

Second by a nose is Eostre Animalmother. Virtually every stead and village has a shrine in her honor. Despite this plentiful worship, there is but a single temple in Hergist and only a handful of priests. For the most part, worshippers utter their own prayers and perform their own rituals. Such ceremonies are passed down from generation to generation. Each family has its own particular version of the rituals, which has led to a plethora of different wordings and actions.

Of the various sub-cults of Eostre, Bolverk, the god of cattle raiding is the most popular. Since there are few cattle in the Cairn Lands, here he is regarded as the god of sheep raiding. Most of Bolverk's clergy publicly proclaim this to be an insult and refuse to participate in sheep raiding. In truth, much of the lack of enthusiasm comes from the simple fact their spells are not suited toward sheep.

Scaetha's cult, the third most popular, suffers from varying worshipper numbers. When the clerics swarm into the Cairn Hills and slay undead, the cult enjoys a wave of popularity. Once the situation has calmed and the crusade forgotten, worship again dies away. For this reason the clerics are very much doom mongers, warning of the need for eternal vigilance against a foe that never sleeps, and spreading horror stories of what fate awaits the Cairn Lands should its citizens ever cease to honor Scaetha. Even so, the cult has few long-term adherents north of Dalthalinin Wood.

These activities have led to certain friction with Sigel's cult. While the latter are no less fervent in their desire to rid the world of evil, they see little long-term benefit in scaring the populace to attend temples.

Var has a single temple in Hergist, but his cult has few worshippers outside the town. Even within its palisade, it is only those directly linked to mercantile activities who offer him prayers, for the Cairn Lands are simply not a powerful enough trading nation to stir the hearts of everyday citizens.

With its lack of a standing army, the Cairn Lands have little need

to honor Tiw. Even the small defense forces, few as they are, owe more allegiance to Sigel and Scaetha than the war god. Hothar receives a nominal nod when appropriate, but for the most part the citizens live their own lives without the need of a strong government or rigid law enforcement. Thunor is honored as the god of rain rather than the god of personal freedom, again simply because no one enforces their will over the inhabitants. Were a strong leader ever to rise and seek to unite the nation, the cult of Thunor would likely receive an influx of worshippers.

Of the dark gods, Thrym and Hela are the most popular. Both are concentrated in the south, where the majority of their inhuman minions dwell. While the cult of Thrym is the larger and more active, Hela's worshippers are far more insidious, plotting in secret for the second coming of their dark master, the Liche-Priest.

MILITARY

The name of the Cairn Lands is often invoked by its neighbors when referring to negative military matters. Saying an army is "As ready as the Cairn Lands" implies defenses are non-existent, for example. Aside from Cul, which has a sizeable army, none of the surrounding states do, which only adds to the insult and mockery of the Cairn Lands.

Best estimates place a mere 2% of the population as professional soldiers, giving the realm some 500 men to call upon. Many of these so-called warriors are little better than local toughs playing at war. They may be equipped in expensive armor and wield imported long swords, but these are more to show the status of their master than prepare them for battle. A small few of the wealthiest citizens have huscarls or mercenaries on staff.

This isn't to say the Cairn Lands is totally defenseless, of course. Every citizen who owns his own land or house has the gods given right to bear arms, and many popular landowners encourage their serfs to do the same. Only the rich citizens who mistreat those beneath them fear armed uprisings.

Armed only with a spear and clad in a leather jerkin and cap, this ragtag army is no match for a truly professional host. But what the Cairn landers lack in equipment and training they make up for in spirit. The Cairn Lands are their home, and like those who settled here before them, they will die defending their land. Or that is the popular boast, anyway. No one has bothered to seriously invade here in centuries, for even the orcs only launch small raids.

All that said, things are slowly beginning to change in the north, where the Cairn Lands share a small border with Cul. Fearing Cul expansion into the fertile plains, the local landowners are discussing the formation of a joint army. The intention is to hire a proper commander, someone who knows war, to train the men to function both as a collective and in small units.

The cult of Scaetha has 20 priests and 30 paladins stationed in Hergist, but they are only interested in the undead of the Cairn Lands. Should Cul actually invade the north, they would likely by quick to make a deal to ensure they remained neutral and dedicated to their cause. Of course, it is ever came to light that Frostweaver was somehow tied to the cult of Hela, then he would find the clerics implacable foes.

Sigel's cult, for all its popularity, numbers 25 priests and 34 paladins. The priests spend much of their time evangelizing, pushing the moot for better ties with the Hearth Knights, and maintaining the small temples. The paladins are now divided between the north and south, drastically limiting their use as a military force. While they do sometimes operate solo or in small warbands, much of their time is spent training the local soldiers how to actually fight properly.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Cairn Lands never was, and is unlikely to ever be, a major trading power. No trade roads cut across the landscape, and with only a single, remote population center it seems infeasible any merchant would care to bother pushing for one.

Aside from fruit and wine, which are something of a luxury here, the citizens are self-sufficient in basic root vegetable crops, and barley and wheat are grown in the central and northern plains. For most citizens their diet comprises lamb and mutton stew with heavy, unleavened bread. Not exactly a royal feast, but warming enough on a cold day. For most other commodities the nation holds its own, never having enough to export, but ensuring no one goes without.

Wine is imported from Ostmark in great vats. Local merchants then decant it into small casks and bottles before selling at inflated prices. Fruit is rarely purchased fresh. Much of it is dried, and either eaten as is or used in cooking, or takes the form of preserves. Occasionally, a batch of frozen fruit will reach the markets. This extravagant luxury costs a small fortune (in terms of what a peasant can afford).

All of the Cairn Lands' exports are related to sheep. While the meat and milk is only rarely sold, the wool, skin, and cheese are sold to merchant ships heading to the Icedale Freeholds. Some enterprising crafters have tried to develop a vellum trade, but there are few centers of learning in the region, and those that do exist, such as the Magocracy and Chalcis, are simply too far away.

Hergist boasts the only major market. With its location in the southeast corner, it caters really only for the southern population. Elsewhere, where the population is scattered into small settlements, locals gather with their neighbors a few times a year to trade, buy new wares filtering through from foreign merchants, settle disputes, and arrange marriages. Typically these markets are held whenever the local moot gathers.

Rather than always being in the same place, the location of the moot-market alters each year, thus sharing the financial burden, responsibility for organization, and the profits around the local communities. This practice has stymied the cult of Var's attempts to expand their god's influence. The thought of having a single marketplace is quite alien to many rural Cairn Landers.

With no centralized government there is no set taxation system. Every landowner is entitled to raise taxes as he wishes, and with many citizens tied to the land as serfs they can do little but complain when their masters grow greedy.

Those who own their own land pay no taxes, for there is no one to pay them to. They must still spend money, of course, for nothing in life is free, but their money goes further. Come election time, those wishing to stand for the moot are prone to giving gifts to their neighbors. While in some lands this may be considered a form of bribery, in the Cairn Lands it is taken as a timely reminder that if you vote for the gift-giver, good things will befall you later.

Most citizens, however, must pay rent on their homes and land, as well as taxes to keep the local army equipped, the fortifications up to strength, and so on. For most citizens, around 35% of their income is lost to taxation, though this figure varies from region to region.

With few cattle to steal, local clans and families actively engage in sheep raiding. Ancient laws permit this, but only if the ringleader is a bondi. For the bondi, sheep raiding is a valid means for acquiring wealth, but for the lesser social classes it is theft, and punishable by being outlawed. Of course, the lack of government means an outlaw is only banished from the lands on which he committed the crime and his home territory unless local landowners club together to enforce the law in their jurisdiction.

ARCHITECTURE

Saxa architecture dominates the settlements of the Cairn Lands. Longhouses, temples, warehouses, all are made of wood. Timber is felled in Dalthalinin, though only with the consent of the elves. Despite persistent stories that the elves demand a dozen firstborn sons of each generation, the elves ask only for prayers to Eostre Plantmother, bales of wool, sheepskin, and to be otherwise left alone in return for the timber.

Any stone structures are to be found in the northern reaches, where the Anari who conquered Trond once held power. Mostly these are the shattered remains of castles, border outposts de-

stroyed by the twin apocalypses of the Liche-Priest and Blizzard War. Most are said to be cursed, regardless of any anecdotal evidence, and thus are avoided by the superstitious Cairn Landers.

The Cairn Landers have absolutely no forts. Most settlements in the south are fortified with palisades and ditches, for orcs and undead are constant perils. In the west, along the border with Temujin Marsh, fortifications are lighter but still prevalent, for within the dank mire dwell trolls and bufomi. Settlements near Cul are beginning to erect defenses out of fear the frostborn baron will soon invade. Elsewhere, low stone walls, more for preventing livestock escaping than holding back marauding foes, are the norm.

MAJOR LOCALES

Below are some places heroes may wish to explore during their foray into the Cairn Lands.

THE BLESSED WELL

What deity blessed the well that now stands in the ruins of an unnamed village has long been forgotten. Truth be told, few people even recall the well's existence. Even those who search for it have few clues to act on, for it has no distinctive physical features. Only by lowering a bucket into its depths and checking the contents can the searcher be sure he has found the object of his quest, and even then only on certain days of the week.

On Marketdaeg, the water one might except to find is replaced with ale. Monandaeg finds pails brimming with crisp white wine, Sunnandaeg golden mead, and fresh milk of Milcdaeg. On the other four days, the well produces just water. Clambering down the shaft reveals nothing unusual—no inscriptions, no carvings, no aura of magic. Indeed, regardless of the day of the week, the shaft ends only in cold, fresh water.

THE BURNT MOUNDS

North of Dalthalinin Wood, far from the myriad tombs of the Cairn Hills, is a smaller yet still extensive cemetery. Scattered across the landscape are the distinctive humps of barrows. The grass on and around each tomb is blackened by fire. While unusual, it is made more mysterious by the fact that local legends claim the grass has been that way for many generations. The cults of Sigel and Scaetha both claim that the mounds were torched during the invasion of the Liche-Priest, but there is no documentary evidence to support this, and folklore claims the land was blackened long before that time.

Lorekeeper Esther ap-Davyd has devoted her life to studying the barrows and their occupants. Grave goods from inside barrows sealed until recently indicate the occupants were Vindari nobles, but why they were buried so far from the Cairn Hills, the traditional burial grounds for nobility, and why they were put to the torch remain enigmas she has yet to crack.

Unsubstantiated legends tell of fiery skeletons and flame-shrouded spirits walking among the barrows on the nights of the Deorcmonan, of buried treasure looted from the mounds and concealed long ago, and of ancient practices so vile that those who partook in them were refused burial in the Cairn Hills.

Esther refutes all of these wild stories, for she has seen nothing odd at night, nor does any evidence point to anything related to strange cults. She hopes that excavating one of the larger mounds will shed some light on the mysteries, but she requires strong backs—the superstitious locals refuse to dig into the mounds for fear of angering the spirits of the dead.

THE CAIRN RUN

The borders of the Cairn Lands are largely dictated by water. The only major river not to lie on a border is the Cairn Run. Rising high in the Icebarrier Mountains, it cuts through the Cairn Hills as series of streams which eventually join and flow out into the Narfel Sea. The town of Hergist (Vindari for "turbulent mouth") sits at its mouth.

The inhabitants of Hergist use the water for washing clothes, but rarely drink from it, even far upstream, without making a sacrifice to Sigel. Fish swim in its muddy waters, but no citizen would dare to eat one without similar supplication. Further upstream, no one dares touch the water, yet alone drink it, for it is said to be cursed, spelling instant death for those who so much as place a single drop against their lips.

During the time of the Liche-Priest, a fell lieutenant cursed the waters as they flowed through the Cairn Hills, imbuing them with necromantic energy. Hergist would likely have been destroyed by the foul taint, were it not for the sacrifice of a priest of Sigel.

The priest swore a blood oath, the most sacred form of oath known, vowing that he would not cease uttering prayers of cleansing over the waters until they were purified. According to legend, he sits still somewhere along the banks of the Cairn Run, droning the same prayer over and over, as he has done for over eight centuries.

Of course, no one has ever encountered the priest, but that does not mean he does not exist. One tale goes that if he stops his incantations the waters will turn foul instantly, the river filling with blood and putrescent flesh. Another less graphic version simply says that the waters would give off vapors that cause the living to die and then rise again as servants of Hela. In order to avoid that fate befalling Hergist, a town who holds the sun god in high esteem, Sigel took pity on the priest and hid him from mortal eyes.

When he is spoken of, he is referred to only as the Sunless Priest, for it is said that in order to conceal him, Sigel had to remove him from his sight. Thus while he still serves the sun god, he is destined never to see Sigel's Hearth while he continues his sacred duty. Small offerings are made during Sigel's holy days to the priest who, through his faith and sacrifice, keeps Hergist safe.

THE CHARNEL PIT

According to Cairn Landers there are many tunnels beneath the Cairn Hills. None of these are natural. Rather, they were carved by the undead to link the barrows. Winding staircases descend from these barrows to below the level of the valley floor, into a catacomb of tunnels lined with the skulls of their victims. The same story states that in the center of these catacombs is a vile pit in which the undead throw the corpses of their victims until they need their earthly remains.

The clerics of Scaetha have found no evidence of any tunnels, but they do not dismiss their existence out of hand. That the Cairn Run is tainted is hard fact, for the cult regularly offers sheep to the water. Something must be causing the pollution, and what better than a festering charnel pit filled with necromantic energy?

THE FEY BRIDGE

Entering the Cairn Lands from the west means crossing two rivers. The first is shallow and slow-moving, easily fordable at multiple points and no real barrier to traffic. The second is trickier, for there are far fewer crossing places. Many travelers elect to head south and ford the river where it is shallower. Those of ignorance minds, brave hearts, or limited time risk the stone bridge that spans a wider, faster-flowing section.

The structure appears innocuous enough, and it's certainly study enough to support a caravan of heavily-laden wagons. At certain times of the day or year, crossing the bridge brings one not to the Cairn Lands, but to one of the fey realms of Alfheim.

Sunrise and sunset, moonrise and moonset, and the hours in which the seasons change, a time few mortals can detect even with magic, are the riskiest times to venture across the span, for one is almost guaranteed to be stranded in Alfheim. Other times are far less dangerous, though the fey are mischievous and capricious creatures, and one never knows when they might to decide a mortal into their world without warning.

As to whether the fey control what happens to those who cross the bridge or if it is a random act caused by some strange magic is unknown. Certainly the fey can decide in which unearthly realm they end up. Mortals, though, are deposited seemingly at random.

Since the fey realms exist the length and breadth of Rassilon, this could mean one appears in a realm coinciding with distant Angarion, or even the Battlelands. Unless one has traveled to Alfheim before, though, one is unlikely to realize the transposition between earthly regions until one leaves the fey lands, and by then it is too late to do anything about it.

HERGIST

The Backpack: Few locals have the stomach to enter the Cairn Hills in search of treasure, but that doesn't stop them catering to the needs of braver outsiders. The Backpack is a general store, but with a bias toward tomb robbing. Backpacks, candles, crowbars, flint and steel, hammers, lanterns, oil, picks and shovels, and rope all cost 10% less than normal.

The Barrow: The unfortunately named temple of Var takes its name not from a burial mound of the dead, though the locals do claim it is dead inside, but from local tradition that the first merchant of the cult to operate here did so by setting up a wheelbarrow full of trade goods. Unlike most temples it contains no market, for the citizens have long used the moot hill for trading.

Profiteer Folkisunu, and two junior clerics, run the temple. While they do trade, they make more money from acting as brokers, helping local merchants find trading ships and visiting merchants find buyers for their wares.

The Burning Hall: A small temple to Sigel, the Burning Hall is named for the glow given off by its roof when struck by sunlight. Many centuries ago the roof was clad in gold leaf covered wooden shingles. Many were "lost" in the Blizzard War, when clerics and followers of the faith carried them into battle as shields. With finances ruined in the aftermath of the war, they were replaced with bronze covered shingles. Today, the roof burns red and gold when Sigel smiles upon it.

The Glittering Hall: One of just three inns in Hergist, the establishment is frequented mostly by visiting merchants, being cheap but cheerful. The owner, Carolus ap-Both, tells foreigners the inn was once decorated in gems excavated in the Cairn Hills, hence its name. No one locally disputes the claim, for everyone knows Carolus' family have been tomb robbers going back many generations. Carolus doesn't plunder tombs these days—he hires others to do the dirty work, then fences the goods to visiting merchants, taking a hefty 20% cut for his efforts.

The Sump: Officially known as the Temple of Water, the Sump is a temple to Neorthe. Despite relying on the ocean for trade, Neorthe is a very minor god in the Cairn Lands, more so since the Liche-Priest rose and the Cairn Run spoiled. The Sump sits at water level, the river actually flowing through the main hall to a depth of several inches (more during floods).

Ever since the Cairn Run became polluted, folk have been fearful to wade through the water, which is actually supposed to bless them as they cross to the altar. Even the high priest (actually the only priest), Navigator Leofstan Tree-Legged, crosses the temple floor on stilts.

The Wool Market: Dedicated to Eostre Animalmother, this simple building and its associated outbuildings serves as her only temple. Much of the complex is occupied by pens, for the temple doubles as Hergist's sheep market. Here farmers buy and sell animals to improve their flocks, as well as sell various sheep-related products to local traders and visiting merchants.

The four priests are overworked, both in their earthly duties of looking after sick livestock and in their spiritual duties. Much of the latter involves trying to replace the various local rituals and prayers with the cult's official ones.

PIT OF MIST AND SHADOW

Deep in the Cairn Hills stands a circle of 12 stones. The stones are spaced as if the circle should contain 13 menhirs. Where the 13th one should stand is a gap, as if the stone was never erected or perhaps taken away at a later date. Within the stone ring is a gaping pit, its fathomless depths filled to the brim with mist and shadow.

A legend, now recalled only by the oldest inhabitants of the Cairn Lands, tells that during the final campaign against the Liche-Priest a cabal of 13 necromancers met in secret amid the barrows to perform a fell ritual. Through potent spells and countless sacrifices they opened a great pit.

Before the dark ritual could be completed, a mighty hero (traditionally a paladin of Sigel, but modern versions frequently substitute in a paladin of Scaetha) wrought destruction upon them, turning a dozen of them to stone, for they could not abide the purity of Sigel's light (or Scaetha's wrath). The remaining necromancer, the leader of the sect, escaped destruction, fleeing in terror as his comrades fell.

The story goes on to say that the pit is a gateway to Hela's dark domain, a channel between the worlds of mortals and gods. Some believe the ritual was intended to bring forth a new body for the Liche-Priest, one blessed by Hela herself to be imperious to weapons and spells.

Every two and a half years, a figure cloaked in a voluminous black robe descends into the mists at dusk, guided by the invisible light of the Deorcmonan. At dawn he emerges clutching a single bone. Over the centuries he has collected all but one piece—the cranium. His next visit is scheduled for the next year, a time that coincides with many prophecies warning of the Liche-Priest's return.

TWO ENCLOSURE FARM

On the rolling plain north of Dalthalinin Wood stands a solitary farmhouse. As isolated as it is, the building has no fortifications. On one side of the building is a large enclosure holding white sheep. On the opposite is an identical enclosure containing black sheep. The shepherd, Cadwalla Edgertsunu, looks after the sheep for a pair of fey nobles, as his forefathers have done for generations.

His duties are very light, for the animals need no regular attention. He faithfully shears the white sheep during the last days of winter and the black sheep as summer fades. The wool is handed over to fey, who arrive without fail the day after their court ascends. On occasion he receives a command, either through dreams or a fey messenger, to move sheep between the enclosures. White sheep placed among the black flock immediately turn black, and vice versa. Aside from their ability to instantly change color, the animals appear perfectly normal. Even *detect arcana* reveals nothing unusual.

Cadwalla has no idea why the fey might want to graze their sheep on earthly grass, why they require a mortal shepherd to watch over them, or what their changing color means. Truth be, he doesn't actually care—he is well paid in gold and silver for his menial tasks.

Cadwalla warns anyone trying to steal a sheep to leave them be, though he is not prepared to risk life and limb for the beasts. Indeed, aside from his verbal warning, he does absolutely nothing to prevent rustling, knowing that the next dawn the sheep will have returned to their enclosure, no matter the distance they were taken. Anyone who kills a sheep, however, has raised the ire of the animal's fey owner. Fey are immortal and do not think of time as do mortals, but sooner or later it will demand recompense.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The Cairn Lands have few persons of much interest. One of those who might seek the heroes' help while they are in the realm is detailed below.

SUN PRIESTESS HILDEG SIGEL-BURNT

Sun Priestess Hildeg Sigel-Burnt, so named for her dusky skin, is the current high priest. Her most faithful followers say her skin is a clear sign of special blessing. Others hint that one of her ancestors traveled to the desert realm of Al-Shirkuh, purchased a black skinned girl from a slave market, and brought her back as a wife.

Hildeg is trying to convince the national moot to back the Hearth Knights' petition to build two forts. Unfortunately, she does not sit on the moot, and thus can only bring limited pressure to bear. She also suspects the Ashen Veil are operating in the region, something she has had little luck convincing the cult of Scaetha.

CHALCIS

The hardy citizens of Chalcis have weathered the yoke of the Anari Empire, withstood the terror of the Liche-Priest, and held strong in the Blizzard War, but now their realm is facing threats that cannot be so easily defeated. The metallic race known as the Scavengers plague the rich mines, while the borders of Witchwood encroach deeper into Chalcis each year, bringing with them hard winters.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Chalcis.

* **Metal Goods:** Metal items are commonplace in Chalcis' markets. Any metal items can be purchased for 90% of the normal price. Unfortunately, the abundance makes it harder for heroes to sell booty. Prices for selling the spoils of adventures are reduced to 15% and 35% respectively for metal items, such as weapons and armor. Unusual items, like jewelry, may, at the GM's discretion, fetch the standard prices.

* **Scutage:** All visitors to Chalcis are required by law to provide military assistance in the event of an invasion. A tax of 1 gs, paid monthly, alleviates this burden. In return, the visitor is given an engraved metal disc which states how long he is exempt from military duty. Failure to answer the call to arms is punishable as cowardice, a crime which carries a maximum penalty of death by hanging.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Once part of the Anari Empire, Chalcis was ruled by a governor until the Empire collapsed. The military commanders who usurped power appointed themselves nobles of the realm and decreed that no prince, king, or emperor would ever hold power over the land again. As such, the highest noble title is that of duke, held by the ruler of Chalcis. Realizing that the people would not accept being downtrodden again, the constitution was written to give them finite powers to decide who ruled them.

If a duke has a legitimate heir, then he or she automatically becomes entitled to rule upon reaching the age of 14 (adulthood). If the duke has no legitimate heirs, the people of Chalcis are given the power to elect the next duke. Any titled noble of Chalcis who has sworn loyalty to the realm is entitled to stand, regardless of the legitimacy of his birth. In most cases, the new duke founds a new dynasty to show he has no ties to the former ruler, though those following a popular duke may attempt to cash in on his popularity by continuing the same dynasty. A handful of times the people have tried to elect a non-noble to office. In all but one instance the candidate was knighted by one of the other nobles in order to stave off bloody riots.

Despite the good intentions of the early constitution, several dukes developed ideas of grandeur and tried to rule as tyrants. Following a handful of riots, a brief civil war, and too many assassination attempts, the nobles bowed to the peoples' wishes and gave them the right to remove unpopular dukes from office. No vote is held. Instead, the people show their displeasure through protest marches, refusal to pay taxes, and riots.

Sensible dukes resign from office once the people rise against them, preserving a modicum of honor by acquiescing to the will of the masses and avoiding civil war. Those who refuse to step down may be removed by the tried and tested Anari method of assassination. In order to ensure the duke was never untouchable, his personal bodyguard is selected from the Highmoor city guard, a military unit whose first loyalty is to the citizens, not the duke.

Ranking below the duke are the nobles, which range from count down to knight. Unlike the dukes, they cannot be removed from power by legitimate means and the citizens have no say in who inherits the title. Only the duke may create new counts, though other nobles may create lesser nobles to serve under them. Strict laws force nobles who create titles to cede a set amount of their land to the new noble. Thus, the more nobles a count creates, the smaller his personal domain becomes.

Every count and baron is automatically appointed to the High Council, an advisory body with no true governmental powers. Rather, their gatherings are a means for the duke to judge the mood in his realm.

The main divisions of the masses are the upper, middle, and lower classes, though there are gray areas in between. A mix of wealth, social standing, and influence divides the classes, though one must have all three to truly qualify for the upper class. Thus, while a merchant may be richer than a nobleman, if he has no important friends or social contacts he doesn't qualify as upper class, no matter how much he protests. After all, social class is not determined by law, but by the acceptance of one's peers.

However, if he acts above his station, the middle classes may not want him either. Hence, he may be called upper-middle class. Such classifications are rarely considered good. In the eyes of both the upper and middle classes the merchant may be seen as having aspirations above his station.

Wealthy merchants and crafters, important priests and mages, court officials, and top military commanders generally fall into the upper class, with their less affluent or influential counterparts forming the middle classes, along with scribes, popular bards, and other non-industrial roles. Everyone else is in the lower class.

While most citizens are tied to a noble house, the nobility is renowned for its debts. As such, any man or woman of sufficient means may buy their independence and own their own land. Such individuals are, however, always beholden to the duke.

EDUCATION

While the cult of Hoenir has yet to spread far in Chalcis, formal education is available to those with sufficient wealth. Scribes from the Chalcis Scriptorum hire themselves out as teachers, tutoring young nobles and gentry in literacy and basic numeracy, while mages from the Tower of the Four Paths teach more advanced subjects. In many cases, private tutors are the norm for the rich, while the poor learn from family, friends, and local clerics.

The Chalcians are a proud people, though rarely arrogant. All children are taught about the battles against the Liche-Priest, Hellfrost horde, and numerous orc invaders, and they speak of them with great zeal, remembering the fallen for their heroic sacrifices.

Although most of these conflicts occurred under the rule of the Anari emperors, and despite the population being predominantly Anari stock, it was always the Chalcians who won or lost, never the Anari. Indeed, most Chalcians hold the days of the empire to be a dark time best consigned to history.

In some lands, divisions along bloodlines still hold true. Despite centuries of inter-marriage, anyone born in Chalcis is deemed to be a Chalcian, regardless of his or her heritage. Children are taught from an early age that love of and loyalty to Chalcis are what makes a true Chalcian, not his ancestry. This extends even to non-humans, though only the tiny engro population ever call themselves Chalcians—the elves and dwarves prefer to keep their races separate, despite enjoying peaceful relations with the Chalcians.

RELIGION

The major gods of Chalcis are, in order of popularity, Ertha, Thunor, Var, Kenaz, and Sigel. As always, most major gods have some form of worship, with participation ranging from many thousands to a few dozen.

Although trade has decreased, the export of metal ore and ingots remains Chalcis' primary income source. It is widely claimed that under the Anari yoke, more people worked in the mines than in food production. This is a slightly distorted view, first because many of the miners were slaves and second because the farmers were forced to work in the mines during the summer and winter months, thus swelling the number of miners. Still, mining is in many families' blood, and Ertha remains the most honored deity in Chalcis as a result.

Thunor's worship began among Saxa slaves shipped here to work the mines. After the revolution the Saxa were freed, though many chose to remain in Chalcis as free citizens of the new realm. When the new constitution was founded, personal freedom played a large role, and worship of Thunor spread. The cult enjoyed a huge surge in popularity after the Battle of Thunor's Fury, when unseasonal rains hampered the orc advance.

Thanks to the country's valuable exports, Chalcians enjoy a good standard of life. Though few citizens are rich, many could once afford small luxuries every now and then. Even with the recent troubles, heavily laden caravans are a common sight on the trade road between Deepdale and Shapryr. Most markets boast a shrine to the god of trade, and his temples form the great markets in the major towns. Often temples to Ertha and Var are combined, for the two deities are firmly linked in Chalcian mythology.

Unsurprisingly, Kenaz is a major god. While Chalcis does not export large quantities of worked metal goods, the exception being silver jewelry, much of the ore extracted from the mines is smelted and cast into ingots before being sold. Since the advent of the long winters, support for Kenaz has spread further afield. In the villages near Witchwood, worship is growing to rival that of Ertha. Fire-and-brimstone preachers, who warn of the Fimbulvintr and the dangers of Thrym, are commonplace.

During the madness of Hela and terror of the Liche-Priest it was Sigel who led the forces of light, not Scaetha (her promotion came as a result of that struggle). The Chalcian armies fought valiantly to stand against the dark tide, and worship of Sigel, though reduced, has been a part of daily life ever since.

It should be noted that while some agricultural areas favor Eostre Plantmother, many Chalcians see good harvests as the work of Ertha, for providing rich soil, Thunor, for keeping storms at bay, and Sigel, for shining brightly on the ripening crops. The elves of Nutwood have no such confusion, and Eostre Plantmother is duly thanked for her role in the great cycle of life.

MILITARY

As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, the Duke has an army of 6,000 men divided into six equal strength regiments. Of these, one is stationed in the Orcblood Hills as a precaution against orc attacks, two are on the border with Witchwood, two are scattered through the mining settlements to protect against Scavenger raids, and the sixth watches over the Inner Sea from a string of small forts. The regiments on the Orcblood Hills and northern border with Witchwood are also responsible for safeguarding the border with the Drachenlands.

In the last year, Duke Howel has formed an independent company known as the Knights of Chalcis. The company comprises 20 knights and 100 heavy cavalry. All the knights hold titles and are hand-picked from the noble houses of the land. Since members must swear loyalty to the duke, this helps keep the power of the nobility in check. The cavalrymen are all scions of upper class houses and hold the rank of Squire of Chalcis. The company is led by Count Maugis ap-Marc, a distant relative of Duke Howel.

The Knights' barracks, a heavily fortified small stone castle, sits between the eastern edge of the Granite Mountains and the High Moor. Duke Howel maintains quarters in the castle. Their primary role is to act as a rapid reaction force, thundering into battle anywhere in Chalcis in under a week.

Officially that is the entire standing army. Unofficially, Howel can call upon the Chalcis Rangers, a band of some 30 adventurers formed a decade ago and sworn to serve the realm. They are well paid (100 gs per month plus room and board) and enjoy the Duke's favor, but they are assigned hazardous missions, such as spying on Witchwood, scouring the Mistlands for signs of orcs, and launching retaliatory raids against the much-feared Scavengers. Many hold minor court titles as well, allowing them to carry arms in Highmoor. In this manner, Howel has a private bodyguard at all times, for by law his personal guard is hand-picked from the Highmoor city guard, giving him no say in who watches his back.

A city guard protects Highmoor, the Duke's seat. Their oaths of loyalty are to the citizens of Chalcis, who pay their wages and upkeep, not to the ruling duke, for they were formed to keep the dukes in line and prevent them from becoming tyrants. By tradition, no soldier paid by the duke may enter Highmoor without their permission, and even then all arms must be surrendered. In recent times this has been relaxed slightly, allowing the regimental-captains and a small honor guard (no more than five men) to come and go as they please.

Although nobles are entitled to maintain a private army of up to 300 soldiers, only the richest can afford to keep anywhere near this many. Most knights can muster around 10 men-at-arms, barons five times that, and average counts around 150 troops.

Chalcis maintains a small navy, though it is not under the command of the duke. Nobles whose lands include part of the shoreline are required to supply a minimum of one longship and adequate crew per 50 miles of coastline. Currently, the navy stands at 15 longships. Since maintaining a standing navy is expensive, each noble is awarded a stipend based on the number of ships he possesses to help offset the burden. These are paid for by taxes raised throughout the country.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Chalcis was once a prosperous land, its citizens enjoying a better standard of living than anywhere else in Rassilon. Thanks to their sizeable profits, the nobility kept taxes low and the workforce happy. The results of Chalcis' rich ore veins were felt even in non-industrial communities, for the dukes had long placed taxes on the richer nobility so as to alleviate suffering and hardship in poorer areas.

Unfortunately, ore production has dropped 50% in recent years and many outlying communities are facing increased hardship as their livelihoods are destroyed. The nobles' income is reduced, so they must raise taxes to meet all their obligations and extravagances (heaven forbid they should do without their luxuries). Even so, the duke receives fewer taxes from his nobles, and the amount of money he has to fund poorer settlements is declining. Over the last 110 years, the gap between rich and poor has steadily risen. In the last five years, since the Scavenger attacks increased in intensity and frequency, the divide has increased even further.

The situation hasn't become desperate quite yet, but while the poor grow poorer (even if the rich aren't growing richer) dissension is stirring beneath the still waters of Chalcian society. Clerics of Vali have made greater inroads in the last few years, corrupting, converting, and subverting to their insidious ways. Alas, it is not just the poor who fall sway to their charming words and warm smiles, for while the rich suffer less, any reduction in income is felt in some way, and those with power and wealth are loath to relinquish their grip on the reins.

Chalcis is borderline self-sufficient in basic wares. Agriculture feeds the people, though without much to spare—a hard winter could result in localized famine, while two or three would cause a national disaster.

Most pots and clothing, the next basic necessities, are locally produced. Quality varies immensely, and does not compare to the wondrous pottery of Heligioland. Unfortunately, the loss of Silver-

dale means such wares have risen steeply in price thanks to the longer route required to reach Chalcis' markets.

Much of the country's major imports are artwork, gems, and leather goods. Most gems are bought by jewelers to be placed in gold or silver rings, brooches, and amulets and then exported. Painting is virtually unknown in Rassilon, so much of the artwork is sculpture or tapestry.

Taxes are divided into two distinct lots. Hearth tax, property tax, road tolls, citizenship tax, and sales tax are paid to the duke's coffers. Out of this he funds the army, maintains the trade roads, and subsidizes the navy. Income and property taxes are paid directly to the nobility. Religious taxes are paid directly to each temple, though the temples must pay taxes to the duke.

ARCHITECTURE

Most Anari settlements are built around a manor, the home of the local noble or his appointed headman. While the exact layout of a manor varies considerably, they share common features. Typically they sit inside a wooden palisade, for in many places this is the only fortification. The manors of headmen, knights, and poor barons may contain just the lord's banquet hall, barracks, servant quarters, and a single granary. Those of the rich barons and counts might boast a grand banquet hall, with adjoining kitchens and guest rooms, the lord's private lodgings and a private shrine to his patron deity, extensive servant quarters with better lodging for important courtiers, workshops, barns, stables, granaries, and maybe a brewery. A small vegetable garden, orchard, and herb garden are normally present as well.

Even in the great cities, houses are typically single-story wooden structures. Rectangular in shape, the walls are wattle-and-daub construction. The shingle or thatched sloped roof overhangs the main house, preventing water from pooling near the walls.

In rural communities the house is normally divided in two. On one side are the main hall and the owner's private chambers, while in the other is a byre for livestock. City and town dwellers may keep dogs, but the practice of having livestock running around the streets has long been abolished. Instead, communities share common land on the outskirts of town.

Stone construction is reserved for castles and temples, the latter serving as fortifications in time of need. Castles tend to be ugly edifices, built for function rather than aesthetics. Temples, on the other hand, are grand affairs, erected with no expense spared. Chalcians favor arches in their holy places, for these represent the arching heavens. Interior decoration ranges from minimal to excessive, depending on the budget and piety of the clerics or noble who sponsored the building.

MAJOR LOCALES

While Chalcis' major settlements and geographical features are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, this section provides new insight into some existing places and additional locales to explore.

ANNAEL

Population: 1,406
Ruler: Baron Cadmar ap-Sornehan

Custodial sentences are rare in Rassilon. The accused may be kept in jail while awaiting trial, but punishments rarely involve incarceration since that requires feeding a criminal. Shortly after Chalcis' independence it was decided to introduce forced labor as a punishment. Slavery had been abolished along with Anari rule, and mine workers required wages. Thus, convict labor was seen as a means of acquiring cheap labor.

Annael is a prison camp in the foothills of the Granite Mountains. Surrounded by a high palisade and deep ditch filled with slim wooden stakes, it houses 1,200 inmates, 200 guards, and six auxiliaries, including a Sister of Mercy and a priest of Ertha. Guards are equipped with long spears and crossbows.

Conditions for the inmates are rudimentary and they are worked hard. Unfortunately, recent Scavenger attacks on the mines have reduced the workforce, causing a drop in production. To ensure quotas are met, Baron Cadmar, who is paid based on the amount of ore mined, has begun offering local judges incentives to sentence criminals to hard labor rather than inflict other punishments. He has also started buying slaves, something banned under Chalcian law. Even so, he still needs more workers. To that end, he has hired gangs of thugs to kidnap fit men and women to work the mines.

CASTLE LETHE

Population: 512
Ruler: Baron Raoul ap-Danain

"Castle" Lethe is actually a motte-and-bailey on the southern edge of Witchwood. In olden times it watched over the now-abandoned trade road leading to the Borderlands. Now it serves to protect Chalcis against incursions from the denizens of the Ice Queen's realm.

The baron's family has watched the forest expand into Chalcis over the generations. Despite orders from the duke not to interfere in the forest's growth until diplomatic measures have been undertaken, the baron regularly orders his siege engineers to launch fiery bales into the forest, along with incendiary *blast* alchemical devices. Each summer, the inhabitants of the nearby village gather torches and axes and set to hacking back and burning the encroaching saplings.

The baron has avoided ducal punishment by claiming the burnings are to honor Kenaz, a popular deity in Chalcis. As a religious observance, no matter how tenuous the claim, the duke is powerless to prevent the activities, for only the cult of Kenaz can declare the acts illegal. Given Kenaz's hatred of Thrym and all he stands for, there is little chance the cult will issue such decrees any time soon. Indeed, many of Kenaz's clerics actively support the baron, gifting him alchemical devices and blessing his actions as a true son of the faith.

DRAYTON

Population: 50
Ruler: None

Three centuries ago, an Anari knight by the name of Lanval ap-Dragan was visited by a cleric of the Norns. The wise crone informed the knight that one day he would fight a terrible foe. Although Lanval would be victorious in battle, his opponent would return to trouble the knight's descendants. No more would the crone say, though Lanval pressed her with many questions.

Years later, Lanval fought an adult marsh dragon by the banks of an innocuous river. The ferocious beast tried to make good its escape, for it was sorely wounded by Lanval's magic sword (which he had previously quested to find in preparation for this day), but it succumbed to its injuries. The creature fell from the sky, spiraling to earth, whereupon it crashed into the boggy soil. As if grasped by unseen, subterranean hands, the mangled corpse was quickly sucked down from view.

Remembering the cleric's words, Lanval had a manor erected on a hill overlooking the site, from where his descendants could keep a vigil over the dragon's grave. Soon a small village grew up around the manor. The villagers named it Dragonton, "the enclosure by the dragon." As time passed, the name was corrupted to Drayton, the settlement's current name, and its original meaning forgotten. Today, the locals believe it is a bastardization of Draganton, meaning "the enclosure of the Dragan family."

As time marched inexorably on, the dragon's decaying corpse began to affect the landscape itself. The boggy ground expanded year after year, becoming a foul, mildly acidic mire inhabited by biting insects and sickly toads. Even away from the bog, the soil was corrupt and crop yields were poor. As a result, the village never grew in size.

For generations the descendants of Lanval, who had taken the family name Dragan, watched, and waited, but nothing happened, nor did it look like anything ever would. Vigilance turned to apathy and finally to ignorance. As the generations passed and the bloodline became tainted by marriages within the small community, so

chalcis



Population: 88,637 (65% Anari, 13% Saxa, 12% hearth elves, 6% frost dwarves, 3% frost-born, 1% engro)
Ruler: Duke Howel ap-Selyv
Religion: Ertha, Thunor, Var, Kenaz, Sigel
Imports: Artwork, gems, leathergoods
Exports: Copper, iron, jewelry, silver



the familial line grew weaker and more degenerate. The last of the Dragan family (a raving lunatic) passed away a generation ago, and with him vanished the reason for Drayton's existence. The great manor now stands empty, a stark memorial of the extinct House of Dragan.

Several months ago, a cleric of Vali learned of the ancient prophecy and of the dragon's rotting remains. Making a deal with a paladin of Hela, the pair secretly traveled to the bog, arriving just a few days ago. They conducted a dark and terrible ritual to reanimate the beast as an undead plague dragon—the first of its kind.

Now possessed by the soul of an evil dragon, the marsh dragon's decaying corpse has been slowly working its way up through the dank muck and fetid waters, while its fell influence has tainted the very air around Drayton spawning a virulent plague.

Drayton and its curse are explored in *V4 Death in the Mire*.

DULCESTER

Population: 552
Ruler: Mayor Hardouin ap-Mainet

The village of Dulcester lies on the banks of the Bitterstream close to the border with Aspiria. Until recently, it was a settlement of farmers and herders with little to note it from the many others in that region. Three months ago, as the Deorcmonan rose, people suddenly began dying.

That the deaths are of supernatural origin is without question, for the victims burst into writhing black flames which consume flesh and bone in seconds, leaving only a pile of ash. Equally as mysterious, someone or something leaves a black rose on the steps of the temple to Eostre after each death. That the deaths only occur on the nights of the Deorcmonan have only added to the fear. Beyond the flames and phase of the moon, there appears to be no pattern to the deaths—some victims were outside in the streets, others safely locked indoors.

The citizens are terrified, and neither the mayor, the militia, nor the clerics of Eostre can find a cause for the random killing. Baroness Erembourg ap-Jerome, the feudal overlord to whom Mayor Hardouin answers, sent two clerics, one of Scaetha and one of Hoenir, to investigate, but both were consumed by black flames immediately upon entering the village. To date, 16 people have died in the flames, and the locals suspect more will follow when the next Deorcmonan comes around.

There is one possible explanation, but no one in the village recalls the event. During the Blizzard War, in the year –1 to be precise, refugees from eastern Aspiria crossed the border into Chalcis in a desperate bid to reach the docks at Shapryr and find safe passage to the Hearthlands. Unable to cope with the number of starving and sick, Chalcis tried to close its borders, giving hastily written orders to use necessary force.

One group of Aspirians made it as far as the outskirts of Dulcester before being set upon by troops under the command of a panicked junior officer who mistook them for bandits. Men and women, young and old, as well as children, were senselessly slaughtered before the troops were reined in. Exactly 500 years and three months have passed since that fateful day.

DUNVIK

Population: 263
Ruler: Navigator Stigand Aculfsunu

The northern coastline of Chalcis is a remote, rugged place, littered with dozens of small bays and coves divided from each other by the steep peaks and towering cliffs of the eastern Orcblood Hills. In one such bay lies the fishing village of Dunvik.

Founded after the Blizzard War by freed Saxa slaves, Dunvik sprawls along a thin, rocky beach at the base of a high cliff. The only overland route, a narrow trail that winds down the cliffs and along the coast, is difficult to navigate in good weather, and is impossible once the snow falls or the wind blows strong. Those few outsiders who have need to come here do so by boat.

To say Dunvik has seen better days is akin to saying the Liche-Priest was mildly wicked. Its wooden buildings, frequently battered

by storms, are in a state of near terminal decay. The furnishings would not look out of place in a lowly dung collector's hut, and the citizens' clothes are little more than patched rags.

Its inhabitants are little better. They are a strange breed, dour and insular by nature, intermarried to the point that everyone is related by blood to their neighbors, and all displaying strange physical traits, such as baldness among both genders, scaly skin, bulbous eyes, and strangely wrinkled necks. While they use fire to heat their shanty homes, they prefer to eat the fish that forms the great bulk of their diet raw.

Originally ruled by a hereditary ridder, governance has been in the hands of the cult of Neorthe since the last ridder died heirless three generation ago. The temple, as rundown as the other buildings, boasts a strange statue. Neorthe is depicted not in his typical guise as a merman-like being, but as some perverse human-fish hybrid.

Dunvik holds a terrible secret. For generations the inhabitants have been interbreeding with finfolk, slowly taken on fishy features as their human blood becomes more diluted. Their worship of Neorthe has become equally perverse. On the rare occasions small numbers of mariners visit or are shipwrecked, the unfortunate souls are bound and thrown into the ocean, where finfolk claim them. Most never return, but a small few are released to become villagers, adding new blood to the inbred familial lines.

HIGHMOOR

City Guard: Highmoor's city guard comprises 200 infantry and 50 cavalry. They are divided into units named for the tower that houses their barracks. Each infantry tower holds 20 men, while a cavalry tower holds just ten (the lowest level having been converted to stables). The word "tower" has entered common parlance in the capital, and any unit of guards is just called a tower (as in, "Which tower was called out to handle the fight?").

In peacetime they wear leather armor and carry short swords, clubs, and small shields. A quarter of the infantry are equipped with crossbows. During war or civil unrest, they switch to chain armor, long swords, and medium shields, with half the infantry issued crossbows.

Two towers of infantry and one tower of cavalry serve as the duke's personal guard, and are fittingly known as the Duke's Guard. They are outfitted with chain armor, with the infantry carrying pikes and the cavalry long swords and medium shields.

The Cemetery: Although the citizens of Chalcis recall the Liche-Priest's deprivations with clarity and understand the threat of undead, they refuse to change their ways out of fear. After all, their armies stood strong against the undead where others quailed.

Located fifteen miles beyond the walls of Highmoor, atop the High Moor proper, the Cemetery has been the ancestral burial ground of Chalcis' nobility since it earned independence. Walled and protected day and night by a small contingent of Scaetha's clerics known as the Grave Watch, the cemetery remains in use today. In defiance of Hela, nobles are buried intact, without the customary severing of head and feet practiced elsewhere.

The placing of metal grave goods has sharply declined over the last century, for while the Scavengers have yet to reach this far in any strength, no one wishes their ancestors to be hacked apart for their grave goods. Instead, grieving relatives use the money to pay for the Grave Watch, ensuring the dead receive adequate prayers and remain in their tombs.

Dagwald's Cauldron: Located in the dingiest part of the Low Quarter is Highmoor's only independent alchemist (the others all work for temples). The owner, Dagwald (see page xxx), is extremely knowledgeable when it comes to alchemy and matters arcane. He is not adverse to whiling away an afternoon debating theoretical arcane matters with customers, so long as they buy something.

Chalcian law prevents him from selling any dangerous devices except to members of the military and duke's court, and then only if proper authentication is provided in written form. However, for those willing to pay triple the going rate, Dagwald can arrange a "special delivery."

Nertomar and Wid: Perhaps the oddest couple anywhere in Chalcis, if not Rassilon. Nertomar and Wid are a burly Anari and a slim, attractive, yet unassuming engro. They are purely business partners, despite the many rumors to the contrary.

Nertomar is a cleric of Forseti, while Wid (which she claims is short for Wilhelmina) is a paladin of the god. The pair operates a detective agency, taking on jobs ranging from finding missing pets to investigating accusations of treason.

Recently they have begun devoting more time to the destruction of Highmoor's thieves' guild (see below). Progress has been slow, mainly because the pair suspects several important members of Highmoor's upper class are up to their necks with the guild. Without hard evidence, they may find themselves facing charges of libel. Worse, if they trust the wrong person they might find a dagger in their ribs next time they go out for a drink. About the only people they trust are the duke, who has never actually met them, and Dagwald the Alchemist, whom they have solved three cases for in the past.

The Temple of Chalcis: The second largest building in Highmoor, the temple is sacred to no one deity. Instead, its grand hall, the only room within the walls, is divided into numerous shrines, the size of the shrine varying on the number of worshippers resident in Highmoor. With several cults sharing the same holy days, the temple can be extremely busy, hot, and noisy on certain days of the year.

The major cults maintain a smaller temple for their high holy days elsewhere in the city, if only to ensure no one else's faith encroaches on their special day. These smaller temples also contain quarters for the clerics, the libraries, treasuries, and so on, as well as cult-specific rooms, such as an infirmary for the cult of Eira and forges at the temple of Kenaz.

Thieves' Guild: The only criminal gang in Highmoor are the Gallows Dodgers, the local thieves' guild. Comprising an inner circle of five clerics of Nauthiz, all of whom are prominent citizens, an outer circle of 15 professional thieves, and a loose affiliation of petty cutpurses and burglars, the guild controls all larcenous activities in the capital. They have no interest in the gambling racket, leaving that to another branch of Nauthiz's cult.

The guild knows someone is investigating its activities, but it has no idea who. Should the identity of the snoopers be discovered, the guild will not hesitate to take swift action to conceal its affairs.

THE MADMAN'S GARDEN

The story of Bayard Black-Fingers is well known among the cult of Eostre Plantmother. Legend says that the priest lost his mind and strayed from the oath of righteousness. One story claims he stumbled across the arcane treaties of Novormira the Decayed, a liche and lieutenant of the Liche-Priest who studied the art of imbuing plants with necromantic energy. (Although slain by the cult of Scaetha before the Liche-Priest fell to ruin, her work paved the way for the creation of the Withered Lands.) Other tales state that he desired to become a tree man, saw animals as the enemy of plants, or became ill after inhaling strange spores.

Whatever the cause of his madness, Bayard secluded himself in a deserted tower in a deep, wooded valley in High Moor, wherein he conducted strange research. Within a few years, the forest began to develop a foul reputation, and it was widely avoided. By the time his superiors took action, it was too late.

What had once been a verdant, unspoiled wilderness had become corrupted. The ground was shrouded in thick brambles and ferns that grew an alarming rates to conceal paths or parted without provocation to reveal previous hidden trails; moss men hunted animal trespassers amid the dense vegetation; corrosive rots slithered from the bogs that had sprung up on the valley floor; thorndarts lurked among the shrubbery, waiting to ambush any animals that crossed their paths; topiary golems carved into animal forms roamed the landscape; and hostile war trees stomped through the maze of vegetation like giant sentinels. And strolling through the land, master of all he surveyed, was Bayard, clad only in a robe of woven leaves and wearing a crown of flowers. After a fierce battle the cult of Eostre withdrew, beaten back despite their power over plants—whatever charms Bayard had woven proved too strong for

the combined might of the cult. Bayard seemed content to remain within his domain, and eventually he was forgotten.

The outer garden remains a deadly labyrinth of thick, thorny hedges, deadly fungi, and thorndarts, protected by aggressive moss men, hostile topiary golems, Unseelie woodland fey, and foul-tempered war trees. Animals of all forms are unwelcome here. At the heart of the garden is a stone tower, the cleric's former home. Thick ivy and brambles have suffocated all but the roof, its conical peak just visible above the greenery.

Former home may be a misnomer. Hunters in the High Moor claim to have spied from afar a figure matching Bayard's last description roaming through the accursed garden. Few believe their claims, for the priest lived three centuries ago, and no magic except that of necromancy could endure a human body to survive so long.

MORGAWR'S MARKET

Chalcians have long held the sea in high regard. Fish may not be a major commodity, but it has a long coastline and the sea is a veritable larder, not to mention a vital trade route. In the same way that some land dwellers favor the bounty of the ocean, so some sea creatures savor the fruits of the land.

The little traveled trail that winds along the coast to Dunvik takes a steep dip before rising steeply into the rugged Orcblood Hills. Along this short stretch it runs close enough to the Inland Sea to be submerged during particularly high tides. Standing between the sea and the road is a dolmen. Chalcian's know it as Morgawr's Market—*morgawr* being the Chalcian word for "sea giant." (Linguists will note the word is very similar to *margyr*, the Auld Saxa word for a sea giant.)

It has long been known that whoever brings cattle or sheep to the site and signals a desire to trade by blowing a large aurochs' horn will, within a few hours, spy a sea giant hauling a huge sack out of the ocean. Those coming here for the first time, while expecting a giant, are often awed at the creature's physical size.

Whether the visitor is the same one that always responds or just one of many is unknown. While quite prepared to converse with mortals in stilted and heavily-accented Chalcian, the giant only ever gives his name as Morgawr, which isn't very helpful. He gives the same answer even if spoken to in Giant.

The giant carefully inspects the animals before rooting through his sack for suitable payment. Pearls are common, though sometimes he offers handfuls of coins, pieces of jewelry, or slightly corroded metal ingots. These are invariably old, scavenged from ancient wrecks in the giant's undersea domain.

Morgawr does not haggle—his offer is final. If the seller refuses the offer, the giant scoops up his belongings and departs. Not that many opt to try and increase the price. The giant's payment is always more than generous—enough to cover the expense of buying or losing the livestock, the cost of the journey, and around 20% extra. Similarly, he does not accept claims he has paid too much. Most Chalcians just assume Morgawr considers the livestock is considered a delicacy, and thus he is prepared to a higher price.

On occasion, sellers ask for a specific payment—the bones of loved ones lost at sea. Morgawr only promises that he will do his best, for the sea is vast and his domain is small. Some grieving kin are fortunate enough to be able to give their loved ones a funeral, while others are left unable to bury their dead.

NUTTON

Population: 370
Ruler: Ridder Bassa Conewalchsunu

Nutton, as the name implies, lies on the outskirts of Nutwood. The inhabitants are mainly sheep farmers, who trade meat and wool with the local hearth elves in return for nuts. These are then used to make two types of ale, Acorn Ale and Mutt's (brewed by Mutt), and a strong spirit known as Bitter Nut. These are sold to taverns and inns in Sacros and Highmoor.

Every year in early fall, the elves allow the citizens to hold the annual nut gathering competition, a local holiday sacred to Eostre Plantmother. From dawn to dusk the villagers are allowed to roam the outskirts of the forest collecting nuts. Whoever collects the most wins a keg of ale. In return the villagers must participate in extra festivals to Eostre Plantmother to help renew the forest.

Although a Chalcian noble from a long and distinguished line, Ridder Bassa prefers to use the Saxa version of his title. Since Chalcian law does not distinguish between races, he is allowed to keep huscarls. Currently he has just three, who along with ten militia form Nutton's entire defensive force. However, the village is surrounded by a double ditch and palisade as ward against the Scavengers.

Two fey nobles rule Nutwood, though they have little to do with the nearby humans. The Oak King, a Seelie fey, rules in spring and summer, with the Unseelie Lady of Green Needles taking over in fall and winter.

SHAPRYR

Angmark Trade Mission: Angmark is one of Chalcis' major trading partners, importing great quantities of raw iron and exporting furs, timber, and whale oil. The king of Angmark maintains a trading mission in Shapryr, ostensibly to promote good trading contacts.

Merchants looking to trade with Angmark are pointed here, for cargos registered with the trade mission (a 1% fee) pay less import duty in the Saxa kingdom and have an easier time selling their wares. Angmarker merchants visiting Chalcis can stop by to get up to speed on the latest news and check prices. The mission contains a shrine to Farmatýr, the minor god of seaborne merchants and an aspect of both Neorthe and Var.

The Drunken Doxy: The seediest tavern in town, the Doxy is a den of gambling and prostitution. The owner pays his taxes on time, and the baron has had no reason to close it down. As he says, "It's easier to clean the well if the scum sticks together." What he doesn't know is the tavern is the headquarters for the local cult of Vali.

Signal Office: The Guild of Messengers maintains a small office in Shapryr, Leirvik, Port Helden, and Dargon. For the fee of 1 gs per word, short messages can be sent between the stations using *voice on the wind* by one of the clerics. For 75 gs per Rank, the Guild sells blank alchemical *voice on the wind* scrolls. The recipient's name and words to be transmitted are written on the scroll, which is then burnt to activate the enchantment. However, all scrolls must be burned at the signal office.

Temple of Neorthe: The largest temple to the sea god stands on a small island in the entrance to the harbor. Despite the frequent storms that wrack the Inner Sea, the flimsy driftwood temple has survived for centuries. Many mariners heading out to sea draw close to the temple, throwing gold coins into the ocean in return for a blessing from the priest. These coins are collected each Deep Diving Day.

At the seaward end of the island stands a tall tower with a spiral staircase running up the center. During bad weather a large storm lantern is lit to help guide ships into the safety of the harbor, while in thick mist the clerics take shifts blowing a huge horn.

Town Guard: In addition to the troops sent here by the duke, Shapryr has a strong garrison of 150 city guard. All are competent mariners and archers. Typically, 50 are stationed in the town, with the remainder crewing a longship. The longship never patrols far from land, limiting its duties to checking incoming merchant vessels for dangerous cargos, watching over fishing ships in case they are smugglers, and casting a weather eye out for marauding pirates.

The mariners are equipped with leather shirts, medium shields, and short spears, as well as a number of crossbows. The city watch wears chain shirts and carries long swords and medium shields. Crossbows are kept in the central armory.

In addition to the two catapults, Baron Loeg is raising funds to install new flat-topped towers, each of which will house a ballista on the upper level and a coldfire thrower at ground level.

Whaling Guild: Whaling isn't big business in Chalcis, and the guild hasn't fulfilled that function for decades. Instead, it serves as a recruiting station for marines and somewhere one can hire a small ship (max. size snekke) with no questions asked. Local authorities suspect the guild is involved in smuggling, but it lacks proof.

WOODTOWN

Population: 1,839
Ruler: Baron Gobert ap-Victor

Until a decade ago, Woodtown, then known as Holswithy, was a major smelting center, its chimney belching thick, greasy smoke day and night. Located in western Chalcis near the Granite Mountains, its furnaces serviced a dozen mines. Scavenger attacks caused the mines to close, and Holswithy lost its reason for being. Baron Gobert, who had predicted this would happen, had already laid contingency plans, and the town successfully switched to sheep and cattle rearing in just one year. Everyone moans they are poorer as a result, but most are just glad to be alive, for stories of the aftermath of Scavenger attacks grow more frequent.

In order to eliminate the risk of Scavenger attacks, the Baron ordered that all metal be removed from the town. Furnaces, anvils, tools, weapons, armor, and even nails were smelted down and sold off, the last furnace being dumped in a cave as an offering to Ertha. Jewelry was sold or donated to distant relatives for safekeeping, and coins were used to purchase vital provisions or gifted to temples in return for blessings.

Nails have been replaced by sinew threads, metal weapons and tools by flint ones, crossbows swapped for bows and flint-tipped arrows, and metal armor by leather and hide held together with knotted sinew. Bartering replaced the use of coins, with the Baron drawing up an exchange rate to ensure fairness.

All visitors are required to leave metal objects outside the main gates in one of a dozen strongrooms. Anyone found to be carrying a metal object is punished harshly, for even a single coin or nail could draw the Scavengers to the community.

As a result of the bizarre law, life has become harder for the citizens—while a flint knife may be sharper than a metal one, plowing has become more difficult, as has cutting timber. In many ways, life has reverted to that of the Chalcians' ancestors from a millennia ago. Still, the inhabitants are alive and have nothing to fear from the Scavengers.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons may be encountered in Chalcis, for the betterment or ill of the adventurers.

ASHEN BLADE ERIK AP-MILON

A fiery-tempered paladin of Kenaz, Erik wages a largely one-man war against the forces of Thrym. An itinerant preacher and agitator, he initially came to notice for rallying citizens against the expansion of Witchwood, convincing them to torch the forest before it engulfed their homes. He has repeatedly defied the duke's commands to cease aggravating the Ice Queen, believing his god's will and the popular support he enjoys outweighs any noble decree.

His fervor against Thrym has taken on a more sinister note in recent months, though, and he has begun preaching against frostborn and taiga elves. While Chalcis has no taiga elves, there are a few thousand frostborn living in the region, and mostly in the north, around Witchwood. Racial violence has flared, with at least two deaths directly attributable to his preaching and 50 or more assaults. As loyal Chalcians, the frostborn have petitioned Duke Howel to take action.

Unfortunately, Howel's hands are tied. The cult of Kenaz enjoys a great deal of support with the people, and to arrest one of their clerics could cause a backlash, not to mention future lack of cult support should he require their services. For now Howel plays the political game, gently trying to persuade the cult to police its own clerics. Sadly, Erik's opinions are not uncommon ones, and for now he has avoided censure.

BARON FROMONY AP-AXEILLE

Baron Fromony is a courtier of Duke Howel and responsible for entertainment. An effeminate fop, Fromony is always clad in the latest fashions from Aspiria or the Magocracy. It is common knowledge around court that his clothing expenditure exceeds his income, which has led to gossips hinting that he and the unmarried duke are more than just master and courtier.

Fromony has a high-pitched, nasal voice and squeals whenever he is excited or agitated, which is most of the time. He's also an accomplished musician and dancer, though that is by the by.

Fromony's demeanor is largely an act, though he does love his fine clothes and is easily excited. He's also the secret head of the thieves' guild and a priest of Nauthiz. As guildmaster, he takes a cut of all acts of theft in Highmoor, allowing him to increase his wardrobe without much direct risk. He only dirties his hands to avoid offending his deity, and his targets are usually visiting merchants and dignitaries rather than his friends and neighbors. As the old saying goes, you don't empty your chamberpot on your own doorstep.

DAGWALD THE ALCHEMIST

Dagwald never speaks of his past, and he never invokes magic in front of others. A scion of a major Magocratic house, Dagwald was accused of high treason by the Mage-King and sentenced to death *in absentia*. Tipped off by a friend in the Mage-King's household, he went on the run before the royal guard could kick down his door, changing his name, appearance, and mannerisms to avoid recapture.

A decade later he tired of running and set up shop in Chalcis, where he has lived quietly ever since. He recently learned the Mage-King still wants him dead, the bounty of 10,000 gs dead or alive still being active.

Although Dagwald was accused of high treason he knows that is a load of manure. His only crime was sneaking into the Mage-King's chamber on a dare and stealing a book from the king's personal library to prove his deed to his fellow pranksters. Dagwald knows the book must be of special importance. After all he, a Magocratic noble, was sentenced to death without trial and no mention of the missing book was ever made in his arrest warrant.

Whether for good or ill, the text has defied all attempts to translate it. Whatever charms protect it from *speak language* spells are extremely potent. To be honest, Dagwald has pretty much given up on it, for even looking at the spidery glyphs causes his flesh to crawl.

MAGE-COUNT PERATACUS INGENVINIX

A member of House Hergenald, Peratacus is the Magocracy's ambassador to Chalcis. Officially his duties are to ensure trade links between the two nations remain strong, provide a point of contact for citizens of the Magocracy who run foul of local laws, and promote the benefit of ties to the Magocracy. He is of course a spy for the Mage-King, but most ambassadors fill a similar role and he has no direct access to Chalcis' secrets.

Peratacus' true role is actually to locate and kill an enemy of the Mage-King, a former noble by the name of Mage-Baron Sudren of House Eastheath who has been charged with treason and sentenced to death in his absence. The Mage-King's intelligence network has indicated the traitor may be in Chalcis, though the ambassador has had no luck rooting him out yet.

REGIMENTAL-CAPTAIN MAMERT

Regimental-Captain Baron Mamert ap-Foilan is Duke Howel's cousin and commander of the Orcblood Hills regiment. A skilled strategist, Mamert also has political aspirations. He believes the duke has grown weak, pointing to the land lost to Witchwood and the Scavengers' unchecked advances as proof. Since over half the army is commanded by Knights Hrafn, whose political allegiance is to their paymaster, he has little chance of staging a military coup. Even if he succeeded he would also have to throw himself on the mercy of the people in order to be elected or risk civil war, and he has little love for the peasants. To that end, he has begun circulating rumors as to the Duke's incompetence. When the duke falls, he will nominate himself as a candidate to replace him.

COGLELUND

Having grown rich on the backs of others' labors, Coglelund continues to thrive by serving as a mercantile center. Coglelund promises status to anyone who can afford it, but for most it is a dream. While the rich play and the citizens toil, the cult of Vali feeds the corruption gnawing at the land's already rotten core.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Coglelund.

* **Buying Titles:** There are no true nobles in Coglelund. A native hero with the Noble Edge who wishes an actual noble rank has personally bought his status. He holds this title until his death, but it does not automatically pass to his children. Characters may begin as high as Merchant Count, but must have the Very Rich Edge first.

Unlike in other realms, a hero can buy a noble title here after character generation simply by forking out a sum of money equal to the weregild value of the title he wishes to hold. Once the sum is paid, the hero must purchase the Noble Edge with his next advancement. Until he does, he application is still pending. Note that the title of merchant prince cannot be purchased except as noted in the text, and the price *starts* at 125,000 gold scields. Typically it ends up at a final value 2d6 x 10% higher.

* **Fashion Trends:** Fashion in Coglelund is very important to the nobility. Unfortunately trends are set by Leon Cogle, a man whose tastes change as frequently as the wind. The Charisma bonus from tailored clothing lasts just one season in Coglelund.

* **Markets:** The markets of Halfway are bursting with all manner of goods. Special Availability items can be found in the Temple of Coin at double the regular price, though the GM has the final word on exactly what is available to purchase.

* **Money Matters:** In Coglelund having money matters—people want to be associated with the rich, for wealth equates to social influence. Characters with the Rich Edge have +1 Charisma in Coglelund. This has no effect on the Noble Edge, which grants its regular +2 bonus. Heroes with the Very Rich Edge have an additional +1 Charisma bonus, +2 if they also have the Noble Edge.

Much of this bonus depends on how the hero dresses. If he dresses to suit his wealth, the bonus applies. If he walks around in adventuring gear or otherwise acts to conceal his financial status, it does not.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Coglelund's social system is based not on hereditary bloodlines, but on wealth. The richest citizen in Coglelund is the merchant prince. The entire taxation system is set up to ensure this *status quo* remains firmly in place. This is the only hereditary position, though unless the incumbent ruler pulls his finger out, so to speak, and sires a child, the position could be up for grabs in his death.

By law, the heir must be the biological child of the merchant prince—this prevents unscrupulous courtiers from "persuading" brain-addled or infirm merchant princes from signing over the title to them.

Fortunately a system was set in place to cope with there being no legitimate heir soon after its first occurrence.

If the merchant prince dies without a legitimate heir, running of the state temporarily falls to the high priest of Var, traditionally the second richest person in Coglelund. On the next Profit Day, all citizens who wish to claim the title must attend the temple, where an auction is held. Whoever stumps up the most money becomes the next merchant prince. In order to prevent defaulting, the winner must pay from his own pocket within one month. Until he does, he has no access to the state treasury and no claim to wield the title. Shortly after Coglelund was founded it was decided to copy the basic structure of the Magocracy. Noble titles were introduced, and all were preceded by Merchant. Thus, there are merchant dukes and merchant barons.

Unlike their wizard neighbors, however, the titles came with no land and conferred no hereditary status. Rather, the titles were purchased for enormous sums of money. This practice of buying titles remains in use today. Because of this system, any citizen with wealth may carry a noble title. Thus, one might discuss trade with a merchant baron, but buy a sword from a master craftsman bearing the title of merchant count. Children of nobles carry no title, unless it too is purchased.

Those who possess titles are awarded higher social status in the eyes of their peers and the citizens, have access to the merchant prince, are very likely to gain better trade contacts simply by dint of already being rich, and are the sort of person less wealthy people want to be seen to be associated with. All told, these combine to produce a greater income.

A similar system operates in the temple of Var, with the high priest position being filled not by a nominated successor, but by whoever offers the cult the most money. Traditionally only priests may stand for this office. The high priest in Coglelund carries the title Lord Profiteer. Paladins of the faith may purchase the title Protector of the Treasury, the second most important title within the cult's ranks, at least in Coglelund.

Beneath the "nobles" are the citizens rich enough to stand out from the crowd, but not rich enough to purchase a title. Generally these are aspiring master craftsmen, merchants, clerics, courtiers, and military officers. Retired adventurers, at least the lucky ones, often fall into this category. Those with potential are often invited to attend social functions held by their social superiors. Those with the right attitude and promise may earn financial support, allowing them to climb to the higher echelon, but such favors always come with conditions.

On the next rung down are the middle classes, those with money enough to be comfortable yet without the contacts, income, or ambition to rise to wealthier status. For the most part they are of similar profession to those of the upper classes.

Most of the population falls squarely in the lower classes. While technically any citizen can achieve wealth enough to become a merchant noble, the great majority will live and die virtually penniless.

While slavery has been abolished, indentured servitude remains. Under this system, any person who cannot pay his debts or earn a crust may approach a wealthier citizen and pledge featly. In return for being treated like a dog and worked hard, the unfortunate cur is given a roof over his head and basic meals. Given that citizens of Coglelund are renowned for their lack of charity, this is a better option than becoming a beggar.

THE PERCEPTION OF WEALTH

Coglelund's inhabitants are a strange lot. On one hand they value money they have earned and are notoriously uncharitable. On the other, they are keen to demonstrate their wealth by splashing around money like it was going out of fashion. Thus, while a merchant baron might think nothing of buying a bottle of Aspirian wine for 50 gs or hosting an extravagant feast for 100 guests, he would not dream of giving a beggar even a single silver scield.

coglelund

Population: 39,431 (71% Anari, 25% Saxa, 4% engro)
Ruler: Merchant Prince Leon Cogle IV
Religion: Var (secretly Vali)
Imports: Cloth, gems, iron, luxury goods, timber
Exports: Clothing, jewelry, pottery



JUSTICE

Coglelund's nobles have no legal right to hold court or dispense justice. Four separate courts are responsible for maintaining law and order.

Civil law involving debts, contracts, mercantile activities, tax, duties, giving false measure, and property are dealt with by the temple of Var. Where a paid up guild member is accused of a crime, the council of guildmasters reserves the right to judge cases.

The cult of Hothar adjudicates criminal law cases, such as theft, arson, murder, and so on.

The military court handles all offenses committed by members of the army. The Commanders of Foot and Horse sit as judges, along with a major-captain chosen by lot. Punishment for lesser crimes involves public flogging, while more serious offenses, such as mutiny or desertion, are punished by death.

The religious court handles all crimes against the various faiths, such as desecration and sacrilege. Each year, the various clerics convene to appoint a jury of four clerics. A fifth member, who serves as chief judge, is always a cleric of Hothar.

As with most things in Coglelund, justice is easier for the wealthy than the poor. The cult of Hothar provides lawyers for a fee, though any citizen is free to represent himself. The sole exception is the cult of Hothar, which is not susceptible to bribes.

EDUCATION

Like social position, education is available to anyone with enough money. The only formal educational establishment is operated by the cult of Hoenir.

All children must attend school between the ages of five and ten. This costs 10 gold scields per child per year, with half the income going to the merchant prince and the remainder to the cult. During this time the youngsters learn Trader, the *de facto* language of Coglelund, how to read and write, and the history, folklore, and law of their homeland.

After this time education is optional. Due to restrictions imposed long ago, though, crafters are forbidden from providing apprenticeships to children, as is the norm elsewhere. Instead, all apprentices must be trained and approved by the cult of Hoenir. Since few crafters want to hire young adults with no skills, those who wish to learn a craft are compelled to attend advanced courses if they want to find work. All advanced education costs 100 gs per year per pupil.

While few other cults have temples in Coglelund, the cult of Hoenir has contracts with many clerics of different faiths. Those of Eostre, for instance, teach land and livestock management; Hothar's clergy provide instruction on the laws of neighboring lands; Freo's clergy, when they can be tied down long enough, teach the geography and customs of realms beyond Coglelund's borders; Kenaz's cult trains metalworkers; Eira's worshippers train healers and herbalists, and so on. Even Neorthe's cult provides academic courses on maritime lore and the basics of boating. Every deity is represented, though some more than others.

In order to boost relations with the Magocracy, Merchant Prince Cogle has allowed House Eastheath to open an alchemical school here. Clerics of Maera from the Magocracy also teach arcana. There is no formal educational establishment for mages. Each master takes an apprentice of his choosing. However, mages who wish to train their apprentice in Coglelund must be affiliated with the cult of Hoenir and pay a fee of 50 gs per year.

RELIGION

Var is the state religion of Coglelund. Although the Crystalflow Confederacy has a much larger population of clerics, there is a greater ration of clerics to population in Coglelund, a nation which also boasts the greatest temple to the trade god in Rassilon.

While few citizens directly reap the benefits of Coglelund's mercantile activities, Var remains their chief deity. This has little to do with religious persuasion, and more to do with taxation. Each time an adult attends the Marketdaeg service he is taxed 5 silver scields and given a token. On each Tally Day the tokens are collected and counted. If the tally falls short of the number of services held that year, the citizen is charged 5 gold scields for each missing token.

The monies raised from this religious extortion are divided equally between the cult treasury and Leon Cogle's personal coffers. It should be noted that even the priests of Var are subjected to this temple tax.

Var may be the state god, but he is not the only deity worshipped. In Coglelund, the gods are respected not by the number of worshippers, but their perceived social status. Eostre, for instance, is deemed to be a rich farmer, for she controls all the land and livestock. Ertha is associated with manual labor, as is Ullr, and thus ranks as lower class. Eira, Hoenir, and Hothar are middle class, providing useful services but having no real influence. Attending the wrong temple can have financial repercussions. If a noble attends a ceremony to Ullr, he is mixing with the wrong sort of people. Regardless of his wealth, his peers will think less of him and take their business elsewhere.

Of the less civilized gods, two hold great power in Coglelund. Vali is especially powerful, at least in his aspect of corruption. Driven by money and often wracked with boredom, the country's nobility are always keen to improve their finances or find ways to indulge themselves. These are both services the cult provides.

Nauthiz, Var's wayward brother, is both respected and despised. He is respected because the nobles of Var value wealth, regardless of how it is achieved. Being a merchant or running an estate or business is hard work, whereas theft, while it carries harsh punishments, is not. Similarly, any god that allows a man to grow rich merely with the throw of a dice can't be all that bad. On the other hand, those who possess wealth do not appreciate it being stolen from them by a slacker who refuses to work for a living. Although the cult is officially outlawed, everyone knows it operates in Halfway. Until they fall victim to its larcenous members, few care.

MILITARY

Coglelund's impressively large military, which accounts for 6% of its population, is very much a show army, more fit for ceremonial duties than combat. At best, only half the men have suitable arms and armor, though they boast fine uniforms. To help cut costs further, soldiers only work for 9 months a year. They receive no income during the other 4 months. Many resort to hiring themselves out as private watchmen and bodyguards to make ends meet.

The merchant prince has divided and subdivided his army, not to allow for more flexible tactics, but to increase the number of officers available. Since soldiers must buy promotions, the army is yet another moneymaking scheme.

At the top of the heap is the Lord Marshal of the Realm, the man who oversees all military activity on behalf of Leon Cogle. This is very much a court position. Beneath him are the Commander of Foot and Commander of Horse. Technically, they are the battlefield generals in charge of the two troops types in battle, but neither appointee has any real combat experience.

The 2,000 strong infantry and 500 strong cavalry are each divided into two divisions led by a Major-Captain. An infantry division breaks down into ten companies of 100 men led by a Captain of Foot, and the cavalry into five 100-man companies led by a Captain of Horse. These are still further divided into 10 man units led by a Sergeant of Foot or Cavalry, respectively.

While the officers, which includes sergeants, are virtually all dandies more interested in social position than war, Coglelund does have some veteran troops. In battle, it is extremely likely these common soldiers would provide battlefield leadership, leaving the officers to brag about their victory and socialize while the grisly work of killing took place.

Around half the army is stationed in Halfway. While they are responsible for maintaining security, much of their duties involve standing to attention outside key buildings and looking resplendent. The other half is garrisoned along Coglelund's borders and in the small, outlying villages.

COINS OF THE REALMS

Before the Blizzard War, Anari gold and silver Imperials were the standard coins used across the much of the Hearthlands. The few free Saxa realms continued to use hack silver (jewelry measured by weight) or bartering, and the Tuomi and Finnar markets operated solely on barter. Engro used whatever currency they could get their hands on or bartered, elves never bothered with coins, and frost dwarves used their own currency, known as Anvils (gold) and Flakes (silver).

In the chaos after the war, settlements turned inward, protecting their interests as trade dwindled, and minting their own coins. Then, around 50 I.R., traders from Drakeport began expanding their routes, bringing with them the now ubiquitous gold and silver scield. Diligence, the stability of Drakeport as a trading center, and the growth of the cult of Var quickly saw the scield become the *de facto* standard for coins.

Although originally minted solely in Drakeport, each realm controlled by a monarch or similar sole ruler now mints its own coins. Aslov has the only mint in the Freelands, a right earned by its importance as a trading center. Most coins are actually minted under license by the cult of Var, as this allows them to control inflation by ensuring kings don't go mad and mint thousands of new coins, and to control the precious metal content.

It is important to note that the name scield is merely a common term for a coin, and the notion of a uniform currency wishful thinking. Although the rules infer standardized coins exist, scields are not uniform in size, shape (few are perfect circles), or weight. There are also coins still in circulation that predate the advent of the scield. Coins are not stamped with any denomination, and their value is based purely on weight. Thus, a hero with 10 gs may be carrying ten small coins, five medium sized ones, or a few large ones. Regardless of quantity, his total purse has the purchasing power of ten gold scields across the continent.

A typical scield is round with a slightly domed center on the heads side and a similar indentation on the tails side. Embossed on the domed head is a stylized image of the ruler at the time the coin was minted, along with his name and title. On the reverse is the name of the realm in which the coin was minted. Regardless of origin or date, all coins are now known as scields.

Because coins are weighed rather than accepted at face value, clipping (slicing a thin sliver off the edge) is not punishable by branding or loss of limb (though it is still punishable by a fine or sound flogging). Forgery, though, is a capital offense in most lands, and at minimum results in banishment.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Coglelund sits on two trade roads. The first runs from the Magocracy through to Hellfrost Keep, forming the spine of a road system that dominates the southern and western Hearthlands. In Coglelund, this is known as the Prince's Road. The second is a smaller tributary that eventually terminates in the great city-port of Drakeport. This is still called the Silver Road, despite the silver trade all but vanishing in the last two decades. Through these two roads, Coglelund sits at the heart of the Hearthlands' trading routes.

While Coglelund is best known as a nation of middlemen who buy and sell commodities, it has a healthy manufacturing infrastructure too. Gems are imported from Spyre, where they are worked into jewelry. Much of this ends up in the Magocracy, Alantaris Isle, and the Vale. Clothing provides another valuable export. The tailors and weavers of Coglelund produce everything from peasant garments to outfits fit for an emperor, and they charge accordingly. While Coglelund's prices are always high, no one doubts the quality of their work.

Coglelund lacks many natural resources, forcing it to rely on imports to fuel its citizens' wants. Timber, while brought in by foreign merchants by the wagonload, is also illegally harvested from the edge of Angarion. This angers the elves, but they have not yet seen fit to act against the greedy nation.

Huge quantities of iron are imported from Spyre. Little of it is actually exported, and Coglelund has only modest requirements. Merchant Prince Cogle might be an arrogant dandy, but he is an astute businessman. Iron production across Rassilon is in a slump—Chalcis bears the brunt of the Scavengers' attacks, Nordmark is suffering as its miners mysteriously vanish, and Vestmark is consuming great quantities of the stuff in its seemingly endless war with the orcs.

As a result, the price of iron keeps rising. Sooner or later prices will reach astronomical values and production will be unable to keep up with demand. When that happens, Cogle will be able to sell his stockpiles at whatever price he sees fit. With any luck, his scheme will bankrupt Vestmark, allowing him to purchase chunks of the beleaguered nation from its desperate king.

Coglelund's other major export is pottery. The banks of the Hearthrun provide plentiful clay, which local potters turn into durable, inexpensive vessels.

Merchant Prince Cogle sets the taxation policies. Much of the income goes on funding his indulgent lifestyle rather than the infrastructure of his nation. Taxes are collected by the cult of Var, who act as the nation's bankers. Cheating them is unwise, for the Thieftakers are unleashed if fraud is suspected.

In addition to the standard taxes described below, there is a wealth of additional taxes. For example, a family pays Adult Tax when a child comes of age (14). Until the fee of 5 gold scields is paid, the child cannot claim adult status.

Border Tax: Crossing into Coglelund incurs a tax of 1 silver scield per leg and 5 silver scields per wheel. This is ostensibly used to maintain the paved trade roads.

Duty: Bulk cargos sold to or bought from local merchants are taxed at a mere 1% at source. Cargos not originating in Coglelund and passing through to foreign markets are said to be transitory goods. These are taxed at an exorbitant 7%. Cargo may be stored in a warehouse for 0.5% of its taxable value per calendar month.

Income Tax: All citizens are taxed at 40% of their annual income. This is paid quarterly.

Property Tax: Whether a property or land is owned or rented, a tax of 1% of its value is paid each year.

Sales Tax: Any transaction completed in the Trade Hall market is taxed at 5%. Outside the temple, the fee is 10%. This is collected weekly from the traders. The cult of Var receives one-quarter of this income.

PROPERTY AND LAND

When Coglelund was founded everything belonged to the first merchant prince. Little has changed today. However, any citizen may purchase land or property from the merchant prince. The typical fee is 20 years of rent income, payable in advance. For many, owning their own property is a dream.

Unlike noble titles, property belongs to the buyer and his family in perpetuity. When families fall onto hard economic times, as happens, they are entitled to sell their assets at auction. Half the proceeds from this auction go to the merchant prince's coffers.

ARCHITECTURE

When Coglelund was found it was a land of wooden buildings. Today, there are a plethora of stone buildings. Those with money prefer stone not only because it is more durable, and thus represents a better investment of money, but because it is expensive to import the raw building material and hire skilled masons—it is yet another display of wealth.

The homes of the poor are often cramped, for rents are based on floor space. Many steads and cottages, which would house a single family elsewhere, have been partitioned to accommodate two or three families. Because gardens and allotments are also rentable, over the centuries houses in Halfway have evolved without them, with homes being build adjoining neighboring ones.

At the other end of the spectrum are the homes of the wealthy. While still single-story structures, they cover more ground area, are spacious inside, and are well appointed with foreign furniture and tapestries.

Temples are nearly always of stone. The cults may prefer to spend more frugally, but displaying wealth is a sure way to attract worshippers.

MAJOR LOCALES

The city of Halfway, which houses two-thirds of the population, is the only true site of interest in Coglelund. This section expands on the existing information.

BORDER CROSSINGS

It has long an unwritten rule across civilized lands that import duties are collected only on entering a major settlement or when goods are being sold. Merchants merely passing through a realm to reach a distant market are thus not liable to taxation, save for any border tolls.

When Leon Cogle decided to impose a 7% transit duty and start charging border tax he immediately began construction of two border posts, one at each end of the trade road. A third post was planned for the river crossing into Vestmark, but that border is now closed to all traffic for the foreseeable future and Cogle sees no sense in spending money that could otherwise go into his private coffers.

Straddling the point where the northern and southern roads enter Coglelund is a large stone gatehouse. Each is home to 30 soldiers and a handful of customs officials. All traffic entering and leaving Coglelund is subject to a thorough inspection. All goods entering the realm are recorded on parchment, which is then stamped and signed. A duplicate copy is dispatched to the other gatehouse by fast rider each night in a bid to crack down on forgeries and tax evasion. The original document, which is given to the merchant, must be presented on leaving Coglelund. Any goods found to be in transit are then subject to taxation.

The customs officials are prone to making "mistakes" in the records. Merchants with transitory goods who pay an "administrative fee" (around 1% of their cargo's value) have the paperwork altered in their favor, typically saving them 3% on their cargo's true worth. Those who complain about lengthy delays due to inspections or threaten the officials find the record goes against them as the value of their transitory cargo is grossly inflated.

Cogle plans to construct a wall across both borders, thus preventing any attempts at circling around the gatehouses.

HALFWAY

Halfway boasts an impressive-looking defensive wall. While the merchant princes would have preferred to use the money for parties, the merchants using the city demanded adequate protection for their cargos. The wall looks strong, seemingly built of solid stone, but like much of Coglelund it is a sham. The stone walls are facings, only about a foot thick. The rest of the imposing structure is packed earth and rubble. There are two main gates, one at each end of the main highway, and six smaller gates located around the perimeter. Only the main gates can accommodate wagons.

The city of Halfway is often known as the City of a Thousand Streets, and for good reason. A broad avenue, part of the Prince's Road, cuts through the heart of town. Arranged along it are the great warehouses, the Temple of Coin, Leon Cogle's mansion (and the House of Pleasure), and other structures deemed important to trade. In order to save money, both on construction and maintenance, all the other streets in Halfway are narrow alleys, too small for horse-drawn wagons. The city, while boasting only single-story houses, is claustrophobic, not to mention filthy.

The Arena: In days of yore the Anari nobility would force prisoners to fight to the death for their entertainment. These days the Arena is a private business. Citizens can pit their luck against a range of champions in pugilistic bouts. The fights draw large crowds from among the city's poor. While few nobles attend the spectacle, most have agents placing bets on their behalf. For those with enough cash, the owners can organize armed conflicts to the death (this is illegal).

Brewery on the Hill: Wilhelm the Swift operates the city's largest brewery. While wines are imported, Halfway is largely self-sufficient in ale and beer. Among the brewery's best brews are Auld Money (3.5% ABV), Merchant's Tipple (5% ABV), and the potent Eira's Bane (8% ABV). The brewery currently has a clurichaun infestation. Wilhelm is offering free ale to anyone who can rid him of the drunken fey without it growing vengeful.

City Districts: Internally, the city is divided into several districts known as wards. Each ward is cut off from its neighbors by brick walls. These were raised not so much to foil invaders, but to allow the city watch to control the flow of traffic. The walls were erected with only a few gates, and in many cases with little regard for existing streets. Thus, one may turn down an alley to see it blocked halfway down.

The Market Ward is the central strip, where the main mercantile activities occur. Though regarded as an upper class district, during the day it is heaving with commoners. Cheap Ward takes its name from the Classical Anari word for a market. Many of the shops and businesses are located here. Although race and culture are not barriers to wealth and status, the Foreign Ward is home to many Saxa and engro, the minority populations. Silver Ward is home to the poorest citizens. The name derives from the belief the citizens are so poor they only possess silver scields. By contrast, the Gold Ward is home to the city's rich elite. Access here is heavily restricted, with commoners requiring a signed permit to pass through the city gates.

The Crypts: Untroubled by the Liche-Priest and the cult of Hela, Coglelund still buries its dead in the ground with their grave goods. The main cemetery lies outside the city walls, where a solitary priest of Scaetha maintains watch and intones prayers over the dead. Mausoleums stand in honor of the wealthy dead, though none are occupied. The wealthy dead are actually laid to rest in a necropolis excavated from the chalky soil. Lining the walls are numerous niches fronted by engraved stone panels, behind which corpses are laid to rest. While a common burial costs just a few silvers, a noble burial costs upward of 100 gold scields. Such is the price for being buried out of the grasp of tomb robbers.

No one has opened any of the vaults in decades, there being little need to inspect the dead. That most of them are empty would shock the population of Coglelund.

Frederick & Snare: Frederick ap-Marl is the head of the rat catchers' guild. Snare is his hunting cat, a mangy, vicious feline. Rats are a common problem in a city this size, and Frederick is kept busy, especially in the wealthy homes and warehouses. He professes to follow Veth, goddess of rat catchers, but is actually a cultist of Nauthiz. His access to rich homes allows him to scope out the contents and layout, information he then sells to the thieves' guild.

The Golden Die: Gambling is rife in Coglelund. The spin of a wheel, the roll of a die, or the draw of a card can leave a man penniless or raise him to nobility. At least that is the marketing used to lure citizens into the many gambling houses. The Golden Die, which is in the Gold Ward, caters to the wealthiest citizens. Although entry is free, as are the drinks, anyone wishing to step foot inside the door must be carrying a minimum of 100 gold scields in cash or gems and be wearing formal clothing. No weapons are permitted. Although not affiliated to the thieves' guild, the owners do pay them protection. As well a being a place one can gamble large stakes (the upper limit is 500 gold scields), it is a place where many of the rich come to do business they would rather keep unofficial. As such, adventurers looking for wealthy patrons are likely to be pointed here sooner or later.

The Grand Theater: While the city has several small playhouses where skalds can entertain the masses for a few silver scields, the Grand Theater caters to the wealthy. Depending on the entertainer, admission ranges from 3 to 10 gold scields. Skalds with a reputation can earn good money performing here, though there is plenty of competition.

Guildhall: An annex of the Temple of Coin, the Guildhall is the center of guild activity in Halfway. The resident guildmasters, all of whom are nobles, meet here each Marketdaeg to discuss business they feel needs to be brought before the merchant prince. The guild

masters have great power, being able to make or break merchants by awarding choice contracts or refusing to deal with them.

Halfway Investment House: Operated by the cult of Var, the investment house offers loans and savings. Money deposited here earns 1% interest per year, less a 50 gs administrative fee. Thus, it requires a minimum deposit of 5,051 gs before any profit is earned. Loans of up to 2000 gs require good references and 50% collateral, which is handed to the bankers in case of default. The loan carries a 2% compound interest per week and must be repaid within one year.

Herald Street: Located just behind Cogle's impressive mansion, Herald Street houses the residences of foreign dignitaries. The Magocracy, Chalcis, Aspiria, Vestmark, Royalmark, Spyre, and even the distant Crystalflow Confederacy maintain permanent ambassadors to Coglelund. Each vies to improve the interests of their home nation at the court of the merchant prince, creating a backdrop of political intrigue.

King Nagrat of Orcmark has recently sent letters to the merchant prince asking for permission to open an embassy. While the thought would be abhorrent to most citizens, Cogle sees Orcmark as another possible trading partner, not an enemy at his door. Besides, if he funds both Vestmark's and Orcmark's economies, the war is likely to drag on even longer, and war is profitable.

House of Mercy: Halfway's largest hospital is operated by the Sisters of Mercy. Their services are open to rich and poor alike—most of the city's population owes them some small favor, including Leon Cogle.

Matron-Sister Agatha ap-Bendrik, the senior official, is actually in league with the cult of Vali. Every now and then the cult causes an outbreak of disease, forcing the populace to flock to the temple for succor. The last outbreak was confined to the Gold Ward, placing many of the city's richest citizens deeper into the organization's debt. The cult of Eira, which runs a small clinic, is growing suspicious as to the nature of the outbreaks, though it lacks the staff to investigate more fully.

The Mint: Although the currency of Coglelund is the scield, the nation mints its own gold and silver coins. Out of pure arrogance, every coin stamped here bears the image of Leon Cogle. Security is extremely high, and even the thieves' guild refuses to try its luck.

The Rukh's Nest: Coglelund rarely sees visitors from Al-Shirkuh, though their expensive and exotic goods pass through its warehouses. The tavern proprietor, who likes to be called Sultan, a title he heard from a merchant, has decorated his inn in what he believes is the style of an Al-Shirkuh palace. Sadly his garish furnishings are way off the mark, though few locals know any better. The tavern offers fine wine, exotic foodstuffs, and scantily clad dancers for those who can afford the equally exotic prices.

Street of Wagons: Located in the Foreign Ward, the Street of Wagons contains no houses. Instead, brightly colored engro caravans occupy marked areas. While there are settled engro in Halfway, many maintain a nomadic lifestyle. While the ground is frozen they reside in the city, leaving for the open road when the winter ends.

Thieves' Guild: The resident thieves' guild is known as the Equalizers. While its members specialize in the "liberation of unattended wealth," they are not above extortion. In return for a yearly donation, the guild marks properties with its sign. No theft is permitted from these establishments on punishment of mutilation.

The guild also polices crime in the city, making sure outsider rogues do not ply their trade. Those caught are given a severe beating before being handed over to the city watch. If the thief has been particularly harmful to the guild, the watch may be paid a small bribe to ensure he meets with a nasty accident guaranteed to end his larcenous career. The guild is currently at war with the cult of Vali, who it sees as a threat to their gambling enterprises. So far the war has been waged in the shadows, but it is in danger of spilling out onto the streets.

Travelers' Guild: Coglelund isn't geographically central to the Hearthlands, but traders and travelers from across the continent pass through. The guild purchases information regarding various aspects of foreign lands and writes them up as a series of region guides. While the guild endeavors to ensure the information is accurate and up to date, it takes no responsibility for the veracity of its writings. Guides cost 1 gold scield apiece.

Workhouse: Families who cannot support their children have the option of giving their children to the workhouse. Here they are fed by the state at taxpayer's expense. In return, they are hired out to families and businesses as cheap labor. Recently, a number of children have disappeared from their cots during the night. A reward is offered for their safe return, and a lesser one for information leading to capture of the perpetrators.

INTERNMENT CAMP

Although the initial orc assault on southern Vestmark caused concern among the general populace, the people stayed loyal and remained in their homes even when the orcs reached the banks of the Elverun. But two decades of war has seen families stripped of their menfolk, the land left barren, and increasing hardship. Seeking a better life, peasants began to pack up their few belongings and flee east and west.

Those who managed to enter Coglelund before the border was closed were marshaled together into a makeshift camp. Conditions are squalid. Lack of sanitation has led to rampant disease, the tents offer little protection from the cold, and food and water must be purchased from the greedy merchants of Coglelund. Clerics of Eira do their best, but there are never enough provisions to go around. Emissaries from Vestmark have been repeatedly refused entry to the camp.

News of the camp's existence has been met with mixed reactions in Vestmark. While the peasants complain bitterly about the treatment of their kin, the nobility are largely unconcerned—in their eyes, the refugees are have forsaken their vows of fealty by running away in Vestmark's hour of need. Even if he were inclined to speak out, Vestmark's king cannot afford to alienate Coglelund, a vital trading partner.

MONTY'S TRAVELING TAVERN

One of the strangest sights on the trade roads is Monty's triple engro wagon caravan. Monty's business' name is actually a misnomer—since it provides sleeping accommodation, it is actually an inn (the engro thought tavern had a catchier feel).

A nomadic engro, Monty decided that he could make money while moving from settlement to settlement, where he plies his trade as a cobbler and his wife, Gladiola, sells herbal remedies. For a fee, travelers can ride in two of the wagons, sparing their legs and horses and, more importantly, cutting down journey times. Thanks to having three changes of horses and drivers, Monty's rumbles along the roads day and night, stopping only briefly to swap horses until it reaches a settlement.

The three wagons comprising the mobile inn are joined in a line with lynch pins, allowing a single team of four horses to pull them at a gentle pace. Typically, the wagon averages 3 miles an hour on trade roads, and is mobile for around 20 hours a day.

The first wagon belongs to the engro and his family (wife and nine children, three of whom are young adults). The second wagon is divided into three small but comfortable private rooms, each with a small wood-burning stove. The main rear door has been mailed shut, and three doors built in the right hand side, each leading to one of the private chambers. The last wagon is a communal sleeping area, capable of accommodating six adult humans in relative comfort and 12 at a squeeze. This wagon has no stove, but when fully occupied conditions are quiet warm, if a little crowded. Blankets and sleeping furs are provided.

Private room rates are 8 gs a day (defined by Monty as 24 hours or part thereof from the time of entry) and a berth in the communal wagon 2 gs per day. Guests must bring their own food if they wish to dine. Fellow engros are charged 6 gs and 1 gs respectively, while bludgeoners pay just 4 gs and 5 ss. Engros are usually invited to eat one meal with the family. Average quality beer is available at 3 gs per gallon barrel, and passable wine at 4 gs per half-gallon cask.

Monty's may be mobile, but the laws of hospitality still apply. Guests are under the engro's protection, but must in turn act respectfully, refrain from insulting their host, and help defend the wagons should the need arise.

Crystalflow Confederacy

The mighty waters of the Crystalflow cut through the central Hearthlands. At each end stand great cities, testament to the wealth trade can bring, while numerous settlements, bound together into a loose confederacy by trade agreements, line its banks. Yet the settlements are not clones of each other, and together they create a melting pot of ideas, cultures, languages, and beliefs.

Rules of the Realm

These setting rules apply in the Confederacy.

* **Languages:** Characters born in the Confederacy must take Trader as their second language unless they have the Outsider Hindrance.

* **Crimes:** Theft is a serious crime in the Confederacy, and thieves are typically branded on the cheeks for a first offense, lose a hand for the second, and lose their lives for a third offense. Piracy is a capital crime, and the navies waste no effort in tracking down and eliminating those who seek to plunder the merchant ships sailing the Crystalflow.

* **Trading:** City items in a town or town items in a village cost 25% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost 150% more than normal, if available. Special goods can still only very rarely be purchased outside the described location.

Selling goods is also much easier, as there is always a trader within earshot. Streetwise rolls to find a buyer receive a +2 bonus in any settlement with a population greater than 1,000, and +1 in smaller communities.

Social Hierarchy

Though no written laws enforce the choice of titles a settlement's ruler may adopt, out of tradition none ventured higher than baron, out of respect to the lords of Drakeport. The Barge-King's use of a royal title has offended many, but technically the Barge-Court isn't part of the Confederacy, its ruler having never signed up to any of the existing pacts and concords.

As a generalization, the rulers and their families are at the top of the social ladder, followed by important court or community dignitaries, then clerics of Var and Neorthe (in that order), other clerics, mundane merchants, master crafters, crafters, mages, soldiers, and then the peasants.

Exceptions to the rule occur in every settlement. These are normally based on the community's history or primary trade. In Drakeport, for instance, clerics of Sigel are ranked socially higher than those of any other deity, arkhwisards of the Convocation sit above the clerics of the less worshipped gods, while maegisters sit just below lesser clerics. At Scathmoor, clerics of the Unknowable One and skalds (magical or mundane) are ranked above clerics of Var and Neorthe. Farming communities hold clerics of Eostre in high regard, as well as wealthy landowners, and unless the community exports a lot of produce clerics of Var may rank alongside those of the lesser gods.

Education

The Crystalflow Confederacy boasts two major centers of learning outside of temples. The most well known is the Three Notes Academy in Scathmoor, though it caters only for skalds and musicians. The Drakeport Academy provides formal education for the sons and daughters of the town's elite, as well as those of families from elsewhere who can afford the tuition fees.

In general, education standards are much higher in major towns and cities than among rural communities. Literacy rates are high, children are offered basic education from the ages of five until 12 at many temples, and trade guilds offer apprenticeships to students with the right aptitude. Outside of the heavily populated regions, education is left to local clerics, who teach religious and cultural lore, and to parents, who generally focus on passing on what knowledge they have gleaned.

With the amount of trade flowing through the Confederacy, it is perhaps not surprising that virtually everyone knows a smattering of Trader, and most citizens are fluent in Anari or Saxa.

Religion

The Crystalflow Confederacy is first and foremost a trading realm. Every settlement of over 1,000 inhabitants has a temple to Var serving as a market and religious center, while all the smaller ones maintain a shrine, for even if they do not import or export they cater for merchants. Many of Var's clergy, and the Confederacy boasts the greatest number of any realm, operate as individual merchants, trading as they see fit in a bid to generate personal profits pleasing to their deity. Some have banded together to form mercantile partnerships, while others work for the nobility or serve small communities as trade representatives, earning a fixed wage for their work, and operating a market stall to generate extra revenue.

While there are minor roads along the banks, the majority of traffic sails up and down the mighty river. Drakeport and Bridgewater house temples to Neorthe, while every settlement along the riverbank has a shrine. With travel being a core part of life here, Freo receives plentiful worship.

The other deities are far from neglected. Drakeport boasts a marvelous temple to Sigel, the Unknowable One has a temple in Scathmoor, Eostre is popular in communities which farm the land or raise livestock, Hothar is worshipped in Bridgewater and Drakeport, and the generally lawful communities of the Confederacy pay him lip service. Of course, trade is a lucrative business, and Nauthiz has his share of worshippers, as does Vali.

Military

The Crystalflow Confederacy is bound together not just by trade agreements, but also by mutual defense pacts. To this end, each settlement maintains its own army and navy. The breakdown of the so-called Grand Army of the Confederacy is detailed below.

Bridgewater: Currently protecting Bridgewater are a total of 1,200 soldiers. Of these, 200 serve as the city watch. The remainder is divided into six infantry companies, two archer companies, and two cavalry companies of 100 men apiece. During the civil war in Nordmark, Bridgewater stationed half its army along the border to prevent any faction using the Crystalflow as a staging post. Although the fighting is over, Baron Gallandros has yet to gain the measure of the young king, and the army remains in its temporary barracks. Of the other half, two-thirds are stationed in East Bridgewater and one-third in West Bridgewater.

The city maintains a powerful navy. It commands four drakkars (240 crew total), three of which constantly patrol up and down the Crystalflow, while the fourth remains in dock. Supporting them are

Crystalflow Confederacy



Population: 107,330 (62% Anari, 35% Saxa, 5% engro, 3% frostborn)
Ruler: None
Religion: Var, Neorthe, Freo
Imports: Cloth, furs, glass, timber, trade
Exports: Fish, grain, trade, vegetables, wine, wool

three battle barges. Outfitted with a coldfire thrower, two ballistas, and a catapult, they are manned by ten artillerists and forty light infantry. Primarily used to fight against pirates, they are also capable of providing fire support for troops on the riverbanks.

Drakeport: The largest city in Rassilon, Drakeport maintains a sizeable army and navy.

Its army stands at 2,000 soldiers. Only 500 warriors are stationed in the city (known as the City Guard), and these are split equally between archers and medium infantry. The other three-quarters occupy a series of forts watching over the coast in readiness for an orc invasion and along the border with Midmark. The Outer Guard, as these soldiers are known, are split into six infantry companies, three archer companies, and six cavalry companies of 100 men each.

Each company is led by a captain and each five companies by a captain-in-chief. On overall command is the Dragon Marshal, though he answers to Baron Drogo.

Protecting the city walls are a number of tall towers, each broken into three levels and housing a ballista. Between the towers are a number of large platforms, on which stand catapults. Manning these weapon are trained artillerists, plus an equal number of laborers who serves as loaders. In a recent exercise, the judders of the catapults caused a section of wall to collapse, killing a number of citizens. As a result, Baron Drogo has ordered a halt to further live fire exercises.

Its navy consists of six drakkars (360 men total), which are responsible for patrolling the Crystal Sound against orc pirates and escorting merchantmen into harbor, and two snekkes, which patrol the river.

Rushton: With the troubles in Veermark spilling over into the Vale and Jarl Wulfmund of Royalmark branded a potential troublemaker, Rushton has recently increased its army to 400 soldiers. Of these, 50 are engro slingers, 50 are human archers, and the remainder are human medium infantry (50 of which are the town guard). Because the town lacks space, much of the army is garrisoned in makeshift forts outside the palisade.

Scathmoor: Located in a relatively stable part of the Crystalflow Confederacy, Scathmoor maintains a standing army of just 100 light infantry. A further 200 men are members of the militia, to be called up only to defend Scathmoor from attack. The town's charter requires all skalds knowledgeable in song magic, resident or visitors, to join the army should the need arise.

Others: The other settlements comprising the Crystalflow Confederacy can muster a combined force of 800 soldiers. Some 200 are permanent soldiers, the remainder being town and village militia. The combined naval force of these settlements consists of one drakkar, five smabyrdings (used for rival patrols), and six barges (used to ferry troops up and down the waterway).

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Trade is the lifeblood of the Confederacy and the sole reason for its existence. Although Bridgewater and Drakeport are the major mercantile hubs, every community buys and sells something, if only to passing ship crews. It is often said that if an item has a value, it can be found in the markets of the Confederacy. While this is an exaggeration, there is more than a grain of truth in such claims.

The Confederacy completely dominates trade in the east. Ships laden with goods from Aspiria, Chalcis, and the Magocracy were once common sites at Drakeport, as were those of the dusky denizens of the southern desert cities. Today the harbor is less busy, for orcs plague the Crystal Sound in growing numbers and merchants are willing to risk delays going overland. In the west, caravans from the Vale regularly visit Rushton, from where goods are shipped to Drakeport. Vestmark, once a major trading partner, has little to sell these days, and while Rushton suffers most, the entire Confederacy has suffered a slump in profits since the war began.

Due to the location of the trade roads, goods from Ostmark, Veermark, and southern Nordmark pass through the Confederacy, as do cargos from the eastern Winterlands and Freelands headed for these realms.

In order to foment strong and regular trade, the Confederacy charges low levels of import and export duty. Thanks to the quantity of trade, the coffers of the various communities are always well-stocked.

As well as being a trade hub, the Confederacy exports plentiful foodstuffs, locally produced wine, and wool, though none of its exports are a true threat to realms which specialize in these goods. Glass in imported from Aspiria, fur from the Winterlands, and timber (the Confederacy lacks any notable woodlands) from Midmark.

The Crystalflow is a well-traveled highway, with ships and barges constantly plying its waters. Two types of merchant ship sail its waters. The largest vessels belong to the merchant houses of Bridgewater, Scathmoor, and Drakeport. Heavily laden, they travel the entire length of the Crystalflow, bearing goods from foreign lands and stopping to pick up local cargos.

A veritable fleet of small ships from the smaller communities sails only to a handful of settlements, trading on a local basis rather than a regional one. By law, these cargos must be for the consumption of the purchasing community, and cannot be sold on to the major merchant houses as their ships sail past. This allows the smaller settlements to export goods the major houses have no market for, and prevents merchants raising from importing goods from a smaller neighbor and then selling them on to the great trading houses at inflated prices.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the major settlements of the Confederacy are covered in varying detail in the *Gazetteer*, this section expands on those entries and provides parties with new places to visit or explore.

THE ARKHWISARD'S TOWER

On the edge of Gnatmarsh, just before the Crystalflow takes a sharp turn to the west, stands a tall stone tower. Surrounding the edifice is a small village of 300 souls, self-sufficient in most basic goods, but able to harvest enough rushes from the marsh for export.

The tower is the domain of Arkhwisard Danti Calixis, a renegade member of the Convocation charged with stealing several rare texts, a relic of which the Convocation will not speak to outsiders, and the murder of two maegisters.

The Council of Four has demanded Calixis be handed over to them for judgment, but the Arkhwisard has officially joined the Confederacy and is thus protected under local law. While the Convocation has taken no overt action, beyond banning all members from fraternizing with the rogue arkhwisard on penalty of expulsion, they are maneuvering behind the scenes to have Baron Drogo lend his support to their demands.

For her part, Calixis rules her small domain with a fair hand and sound judgment. She gained her position not through force or threat, but by single-handedly defeating a bufomi raiding party. The villagers, who operated a cooperative, asked her to lead them, pledging loyalty in return for protection. Since she took control the village's defenses, formerly a simple ditch and bank, have been greatly augmented with a steeper bank and a palisade.

Calixis uses her powers to aid her community, summoning elementals to help with mundane tasks and using her limited healing powers to tend the sick. While she mixes with the locals, quiet happy to share a drink and story at the village's small tavern, she never deals with outsiders personally, for she is fearful the Convocation will send assassins to deal with her.

BJORRTON

Population: 425
Ruler: Master Hunter Ulfric ap-Gwannon
Religion: Ullr, Var
Imports: Strong drink
Exports: Beaver fur and meat

Bjorrton lies on the eastern bank of the Crystalflow, almost at the join of the Confederacy, Nordmark, and Midmark. Many of the inhabitants are involved in the trapping, skinning, and butchering of the giant beavers that live in the region. The work is dangerous, for while giant beavers are not aggressive by nature, they possess powerful jaws and sharp front teeth.

Although part of the Confederacy for well over a century, the town maintains a frontier feel. Its population, primarily Saxa, works hard and drinks hard.

A taiga elf husband and wife team, he a cleric of Ertha Animal-mother and she a druid, have recently taken up residence in the village. When not fulfilling their duties, they rail against the hunting of giant beavers. Acts of sabotage to the trappers' snares have been laid at the elves' feet, though they deny the accusations. Regardless of their guilt or innocence, they are unusually disliked for their views, though no one wishes them physical harm.

THE BLACK KEEP

Weathered but still strong, the Black Keep stands on the western banks of the Crystalflow. Despite its impressive fortifications, no lord rules from here and no village crowds against its towering, blackened walls for safety. The site is given a wide berth even by river traffic, captains risking collision with the rocks lying in mid channel rather than sail under the shadow of the tall towers.

Those who have ventured too close, on land or on water, speak in quiet whispers of terrible screams and howls that emanate from within the fire-blackened walls. Some claim the castle is haunted by the family of a deranged nobleman who had them walled up as punishment for some imagined wrongdoing. Others say it was a stronghold of evil during the reign of the Liche-Priest.

The Black Keep, named for the color of its walls, dates back before the Liche-Priest, to an age when Hela was a champion of the gods. Raised during the immensely destructive Demongate Wars by fell cultists, the deranged lord that once ruled from here was a powerful demon, for within its labyrinthine cellars and dungeons once stood a portal to the Abyss.

As the War drew to a close, an army containing clerics of Hela, the Norns, and Sigel stormed the keep, their souls hardened against the terrors within by divine blessing. The portal was sealed and the demon lord sent back to his native realm, but attempts to torch the keep repeatedly failed. After confirming no evil lurked in its dark corners, the keep was abandoned and left to rot, but even the weather refused to harm the stones.

While no demons live here in modern times, evil still lurks within the dark corridors and empty halls. So much pain, misery, and damnation occurred here that evil crept into the very walls, imbuing the keep with a life of its own. If this were not bad enough, several malevolent wraiths inhabit the site.

BRIDGEWATER

Although smaller then Drakeport, Bridgewater has grown to be the prominent trading center since the waters of the Crystal Sound became hazardous to shipping.

Docks: Both sides of the river are crowded with barges, busses, and smabyrdings. Great warehouses line the harbor side, each emblazoned with a merchant's mark on the large front doors. Merchants, laborers, hawkers, urchins, doxies, and customs officials crowd the wide street between the warehouses and the waterfront, creating a cacophony as they all out their wares.

DRAKEPORT

Baron Draconov's Library: Baron Draconov's private library has been built up over the centuries by the Draconov family. While it focuses mainly on mercantile activities, the wider collection is renowned for covering a large variety of topics. As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, the Draconov family has forgotten it once served as important clerics of Sigel. While the library has an invaluable collection of books and tomes on the faith, no one remembers why they are there.

Admission: No admission to the public. Draconov is inclined to allow scholars, clerics of the good gods, and nobles access to his collection, but only after he has personally vetted them.

Specialties: Al-Shirkuh (the desert realm south of Rassilon), Drakeport, mercantile activities, Sigel.

***Investigation Rolls*:** +1 general, +2 for specialties.

Fromondin's Maps: Fromondin, an Anari male and proprietor of this store, claims to be a cleric of Freo, though if this is true he has committed a mortal sin by residing in the same city for over twenty years.

He stocks a huge collection of maps dating back centuries. In many cases the maps show settlements wiped off the face of the planet during the Blizzard War. Most of his stock is of little great value, save to scholars, but occasionally a rare find surfaces from the disorderly piles of parchment and scrolls.

The Knight & Orm: A busy tavern in the Market Ward, the Knight & Orm is frequented by traders, elementalists, and adventurers. A brisk trade of questionable legality in alchemical devices operates from the tavern, though no one speaks of it publicly.

Adventurers seeking alchemical devices not commonly for sale, such as those containing *blast* and *bolt*, are discretely guided toward the tavern. So long as their gold is good, no questions are asked as to the intended use of the device. The Convocation knows nothing of this trade, which is made possible only by a small number of elementalists misusing its resources in the city.

Lock Gates: In order to control traffic along the Crystalflow and ensure taxes were paid, Baron Draconov's ancestors installed a series of locks in the northern section of the river, just upstream from the city proper.

Positioned at equal distances across the width of the river are ten artificial islands constructed of log piles with stone infill and paved surfaces. Between each island are two sets of heavy chains, one at each end of channel. Erected in the center of each island is a single stone building, which houses an office and accommodation for ten guards. Mounted on the flat roof is a coldfire thrower (the icewood is kept inside the customs house).

When a merchant sails down river or wishes to head upstream without docking in Drakeport, a pilot vessel meets it and guides the captain into the channel between a pair of islands. As the ship approaches the chains at the opposite end of the island are raised. When the ship is fully in the now blocked channel, the second pair of chains are raised, trapping the ship. Here the vessel is searched, its cargo checked, and taxes collected.

In the event of a major invasion, something yet to occur but more likely since the orcs conquered southern Vestmark, all the chains are raised and the mechanisms sabotaged, thus stalling the advance up the Crystalflow. Each community along the river pays a token fee toward the upkeep of the locks, since they form part of the entire Confederacy's collective defenses.

Rat Catchers Guild: Drakeport is a crowded city-port. Its rat population likely exceeds that of its bipedal residents. As a result, the Rat Catchers Guild has a thriving business here. Work can always be found at the run down shack the Guild proclaims as its headquarters. Many adventurers sign up as the guild is allowed to operate in the tunnels running under the city. Members are paid 1 ss for each dozen rats they catch, or a gold scield for every giant rat.

Thieves' Guild: Despite heavy penalties for thievery, Drakeport has two temples to Nauthiz. One is located in the basement of the Wheel of Fortune, a gambling den frequented by the city's rich and powerful. While the clerics must perform certain larcenous acts to appease their god, they are not professional thieves. The cult of Vali the Corrupter has recently expanded its business into gambling. This in turn has led to a violent turf war.

The second temple is located deep in the dank tunnels and is run by the city's sole thieves' guild. The guild operates a baker's shop as a front, from where small but valuable stolen goods are hidden in loaves of bread and smuggled out of the city, or, for goods stolen to order, delivered to the buyer.

The guild protects its monopoly by covertly aiding Var's Thieftakers in investigating crimes committed by non-members. Outsiders are given the choice of paying a finder's fee of 50% of the loot and

then leaving town before the next dawn or dusk, whichever comes first, or being handed over to the clerics of Var after a thorough beating. Outsiders who go to the trouble of locating the guild and asking permission to ply their trade may, after a brief but thorough investigation, be granted the right to purchase a temporary membership. This costs 50% of the items stolen. The guild reacts very badly to being cheated out of its share.

THE FLOATING TEMPLE OF NEORTHE

One of the strangest sites on the Crystalflow is the Floating Temple of Neorthe. A converted barge whose sides are covered in brightly painted seashells, the Floating Temple is home to Navigator Drumdar Storm-Nose and three novices. The cleric is a striking figure. As bald as a skeleton, he sports an eye patch (a shell) over his right eye and has a wooden peg in place of his left leg below the knee. Clad in weather-faded robes, he stands at the prow of the barge in all weathers, keeping a watchful eye over passing traffic.

Drumdar holds allegiance to none save his god, and is considered something of a maverick by his peers. Although he owes no community or mortal lord his oath, he is always glad to help out, for a suitable fee, when it comes to battling pirates or river monsters.

The temple continually sails the fast running waters, stopping off at villages so Drumdar can buy provisions, perform blessings, and catch up on the latest news.

Drumdar also blesses ships while in the river. He hails the captain and offers his services as a cleric of Neorthe, promising to bless the ship for a small fee (typically 50 gs). At some point during the negotiations he always pauses, sniffs the air, and proclaims a storm is brewing, no matter how clear or cloudy the sky. Should the offer of a blessing be refused, Drumdar wishes the captain well on his travels. Most captains who turn down the offer must weather a fierce storm within the next few hours.

While it is widely said these mysterious storms are the work of Drumdar, few dare to voice this belief openly, for Neorthe has a strong cult along the Crystalflow and, given his unruly nature, the weather may well be the work of an insulted deity.

GOLDSHEAF

Population: 880
Ruler: Elected council
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Var, Sigel, Thunor
Imports: Clothing, meat, metal
Exports: Grain, hops, barley

Thirty miles south of Scathmoor, where the western edge of the Tower Hills extends into the Confederacy, the terrain is swathed in fields of golden grain and barley. Nestled in the center of these bountiful fields is the village of Goldsheaf, one of the Confederacy's small but vital agricultural communities.

Dominating the small single-story cottages and longhouses are the grand temple of Eostre Plantmother, which also contains a



major shrine to Sigel, and the Sickle and Sheaf, the community's sole inn. Goldsheaf also boasts a baker, blacksmith, potter, weaver, and a general store, which doubles as a shrine of Var, and several granaries.

Goldsheaf is governed by a council made up of ten local farmers, each elected for a three-year term. The local high priest of Eostre Plantmother, currently Cultivator Verrine ap-Beranger, is automatically given a seat.

Goldsheaf currently has a few problems. Fungals, believed to be living in the Tower Hills, have been raiding the crops for the past few seasons. Since most of the hills are in Midmark, the local militia (20 medium infantry equipped with riding horses) has been unable to pursue them. The temple, which houses six clerics of Eostre, has been wracked by the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the three clerics of Sigel who normally reside there. They were last seen heading to a distant cornfield to perform a blessing.

ILLILIGRBY

Population: 207
Ruler: Mayor Thalia ap-Agidius
Religion: Var
Imports: Clothing, pottery, wine
Exports: Grain

Pronounced ILL-ger-by, this small village stands on the right bank of the Crystalflow. Structurally it appears little different to the countless other riverside settlements. It boasts an inn (The Trough), a small shrine to Var, small cottages, a few workshops, and a quay where trading ships can dock. What makes it stand out are the citizens.

The inhabitants of Illiligrby, every last one of them, is as ugly as sin. It is their unsightly appearance that gives the village its common name, for it translates literally as "the ugly village." Even the locals are forced to call it this, for they receive blank looks when they use its proper name, Flowby ("the village by the Crystalflow").

No curse befell the village, despite what some skalds may claim. Around 100 years ago the ruler of Drakeport, a vain man by any standards and more than a little mad, issued a decree banning all ugly people from living within the city. Scores of the ugliest inhabitants were dragged from their homes and outlawed for the crime of being too ugly to be seen in Drakeport. With nowhere else to go, they migrated north, eventually finding an unclaimed spot of land to call home. Although the law was repealed decades ago, their descendants have refused to return to the city. Over the generations, the inhabitants married and interbred, their physical ugliness carried down family lines to the present age.

The ugliness extends only skin deep, for the villagers are by nature good souls. However, the persecution of their ancestors and the ridicule they still suffer from visitors has left its mark on their psyche. While in Illiligrby, characters with the Ugly Hindrance or Attractive and Very Attractive Edge have the Charisma modifiers reversed.

THE MOOR UP AND COME INN

More often than not, unusual enterprises prosper in the Confederacy—in a realm where all manner of goods and services are regularly available, oddities stand out from the crowd. Once such oddity is the Moor Up and Come Inn.

This usual resting place is actually made up of twenty river barges bolted together into a rough square and moored in the center of the river on the bend below Scathmoor. Constructed on top of the barge is a two-story wooden inn large enough to accommodate 100 people in comfort. Those with limited budgets can remain on their ship or rent a space on the wide, covered deck. As well as accommodation, the inn serves a range of hot and cold meals. Located approximately halfway between Drakeport and Bridgewater, the inn also doubles as a convenient place to conduct business. Private meeting rooms can be hired for 5 silver scields an hour.

The inn has prospered over the years, though it has never grown in size. It is very popular with merchants—they don't need to find safe harbor on the shore and pirates have never troubled it. The owner, Old Tom, an engro of advanced years, charges only modest amounts for room and food. In return, all patrons are required to aid in defending the inn against pirates. He also has a garrison of 30 well-paid and very loyal mercenaries. Among the more notable defenders is a paladin of Neorthe. He is a paying guest rather than an employee, but he maintains a permanent room here and is a frequent visitor.

SCATHMOOR

The Fey Meadow: One of Scathmoor's many inns, the Fey Meadow is home to a boisterous clurichaun. Since fey are extremely reluctant to give their true names to mortals, the creature has been nicknamed "Fisty" due to its love of joining, and occasionally starting, fights. In return for strong ale the fey protects the inn, eating vermin, dealing with drunks in its own inimical way, and scaring off would-be thieves. Unusually for a clurichaun, Fisty wanders the main bar area, mooching drinks off the patrons. Those who refuse rarely do so again.

The Stage: A large inn popular with locals and outsiders, the Stage is named after the podium in the center of the main hall. Anyone can take the stage and regale or entertain the patrons with song, poem, or dance.

The patrons show their approval with rousing cheers and their disapproval with boos and the throwing of overripe fruit. Those who really offend the patrons (requires a critical failure on whatever Trait the GM deems appropriate to the entertainment form) are escorted to the door by the Stage's bouncer, a muscle-bound mute Saxa by the name of Enric, and thrown into the street, being banned from entertaining for a week in the process.

Entertainers who earn the crowd's rapturous approval (requires a raise on the appropriate Trait roll) are given free room, drink, and food for the next three days or until they leave, whichever comes first. This generous offer extends only to the entertainer, not his friends.

Three Notes Academy Library: The Academy primarily stores material concerning music and songs, though as a center of skaldic magic it has a decent collection of riddles and general folklore.

Admission: Only skalds, whether practitioners of song magic or not, are allowed inside.

Specialties: Folklore, history of musical instruments, music, riddles, song magic, songs.

Investigation Rolls: +2 for specialties only. No general Investigation can be performed here as the library contains no general reference books.

The Loyal Wife: The Loyal Wife is the name of a solitary standing stone that squats on the banks of the river on the outskirts of the town. Although this site is in the Confederacy, the myth behind it is of Saxa origin. Although Midmark escaped the Blizzard War with only minimal damage, its warriors bravely marched to war.

The legend goes that the huscarls boarded longships at Scathmoor, intending to sail north to help defend their kith and kin in northern Royalmark. Before one huscarl departed, he promised his wife he would return to her arms. From the day her husband left, the woman remained by the banks, casting her eyes north for a sign of his imminent return. Five centuries on she remains at her vigil, patiently awaiting an embrace that will not come. Some skalds say that Scaetha duly sent a herald to claim the woman's soul at the appointed hour, but it was so taken with her plea it allowed her to remain in the mortal realm.

One ending to the sad tale claims the stone will crumble to dust if the bones of the missing husband are laid at its base, releasing the woman's spirit from its self-imposed bondage.

Midmarker merchants visiting Scathmoor leave offerings of food and drink at the base of the stone to succor the woman's spirit in its long vigil. In winter, they drape cloaks and shawls around the stone to ward off the cold. Many Midmarkers embarking on long voyages bring their spouses here to swear oaths of fidelity, for it is said those who break the vow made at the stone will be claimed by Scaetha's heralds in lieu of the Waiting Widow's soul. The residents of Scathmoor claim that on still nights the voice of the woman can be heard, calling out her husband's name.

CUL, BARONY OF

Baron Frostweaver proclaims Cul to be a land of freedom and opportunity, but that gracious claim extends only to the frostborn. Members of other races are subjected to high taxes, harsh punishments, and severe beatings. As Cul grows stronger, the neighboring realms watch in anticipation, for many suspect the usurper plans to unleash his armies upon them in the near future. And yet at the same time they must play a game of appeasement, for Cul commands a small but important trade road.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Barony of Cul.

* **Second Class Citizens:** Non-frostborn are treated with disdain and contempt. All such characters suffer a –2 Charisma penalty while in Cul. Non-frostborn hrimwisards suffer only a –1 penalty unless they are in Frostweaver's service, in which case the penalty is ignored. Clerics of Thrym or any of his associated minor gods ignore these penalties, regardless of their race.

Prices are increased by 25% if there are any non-frostborn in the party. The law prohibits the sale of armor and weapons to non-frostborn, or those who associate with them.

* **Temperature:** Although Cul sits in the Low Winterlands, the presence of the great temple has an adverse effect on the weather. While spring, summer, and fall are unaffected, the winter temperatures use the High Winterlands entry instead.

* **Wanted:** Any worshipper of Kenaz or Sigel or any Hearth Knight discovered in Cul immediately gains the Major Wanted Hindrance. Those who honor Thunor receive the Minor Wanted Hindrance.

ATMOSPHERE

Cul is both a civilized realm, meaning that it is suitable as a hero's homeland, and a monstrous one. While the baron and his army of thugs treat frostborn moderately well, they beat, humiliate, and persecute the other races who inhabit Cul.

Visitors, such as the heroes, can expect an icy welcome (no pun intended) unless they are frostborn, hrimwisards, or servants of Thrym. While strangers are rarely attacked on sight, they are subjected to poor treatment, insults, and open displays of hostility, at least from the frostborn. At best, they may be treated with apathy, but such an occurrence is growing rarer as racial hatred eats deeper into the populace's hearts and souls. In many cases the insults are delivered by rote, displaying intolerance due to perceived persecution of all frostborn. While it is true many frostborn are mistrusted and mistreated, this is not a universal truth.

However, so powerful has been Frostweaver's indoctrination that few of Cul's frostborn will even listen to claims to the contrary, calling them malicious lies spread by servants of Kenaz and Sigel, gods who, the locals claim, demand the sacrifice of their kin. Servants of these heat-loving gods are fair targets for physical assault, for their cults are banned in Cul.

Among the Anari, Saxa, and tiny engro population there is fear and hatred, though not in equal measure. Many have had their wills broken and are now little better than slaves, obeying orders out of fear of being beaten, arrested, or killed on the spot. Such individuals will defer to any frostborn, calling him "sir" or "lord," never looking him in the face, and accepting any scolding for perceived wrongdoings without reply. Yet in others there grows a seething ocean of bitter hatred. Though they try to hide their loathing, it can be seen in their eyes and heard in the inflections of their speech. One spark might not erupt a powder keg of reprisals, but it may be enough to shatter the illusion that the frostborn have subdued the other races.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

In days of yore, when the Anari dominated the Hearthlands, slavery was institutionalized. And yet slaves were rarely treated that poorly, for they were a financial investment, not something to be squandered. Yes, there were always those who were treated better than others, and no slave had any real rights, but they were at least allowed a degree of dignity. Cul does not legally allow slavery, yet those not born frostborn are in many ways worse off than in the age of the empire.

Frostweaver has swept aside the old governmental system and imposed himself as an autocratic baron. That he chose the lowly title of baron tells something of his early personality, for he could easily have proclaimed himself count, duke, or king. Despite having a firm grip on power, Frostweaver appears to have little interest in a grander title.

The baron leaves much of the governance of the land to his lieutenants, each of whom carries the official title of knight. The baron allows them great leeway is picking their own titles, though none are foolish enough to elect a title grander than their overlord. They wield immense power over those they command, for so long as they enact the baron's laws and ensure society runs smoothly, they have a free hand to run their domains as they see fit.

Ranking below the new nobility are the clerics of Hrimheorte, who form a separate social class from the rest of the populace. The frostborn community accords them great respect, and even the knights are loath to treat them with anything less than deference, for the clergy have Frostweaver's ear far more than they do.

Cul's upper class comprises rich landowners, powerful merchants, master crafters, and hrimwisards. In the middle class sit the bureaucrats, clerics of other accepted gods, other mages, lesser landowners and businessmen, and senior military officers. The lower class is formed by every other frostborn, be they a soldier or laborer.

Non-frostborn, regardless of apparent wealth, are a sub-class ranking below the poorest frostborn. One of Frostweaver's first acts was to strip the Anari, Saxa, and engro of their status. New laws forbid them from running businesses or owning land, and give the state the authority to seize their holdings and distribute them to frostborn families. Although the seizures initially met with resistance, the recent massacre of 100 peaceful Anari demonstrators, and destruction of a row of shops through arson, has quelled talk of further rebellion.

While not quite slaves, they are paid a pittance, taxed heavily, allowed few rights, and subjected to violent beatings and verbal abuse much of the time. Even frostborn who lived happily beside Anari neighbors have now turned against them, for to show clemency to them is to risk being branded a traitor to Cul.

EDUCATION

Cul lacked a centralized population until Frostweaver took power, and as a result it never boasted much of a formal education system. Little has changed today, for the population is still widely dispersed.

barony of cul



Population: 14,048 (65% frostborn, 25% Anari, 18% Saxa, 2% engro)
Ruler: Baron Frostweaver I
Religion: Hrimheorte (Thrym), Ullr
Imports: Oil, salt, wine
Exports: Meat (wild boar)

Only frostborn are entitled to any form of official education, and that, for the most part, is limited to religious instruction and indoctrination into the hatred showered on frostborn by the other races. Frostweaver may have only been in power for seven years, but there are many frostborn adults who have already forgotten the truth of his ascension. Many see him as a liberator who freed them from Anari and Saxa domination, not a conqueror.

Frostborn children born to non-frostborn are taken from their families as soon as they are detected. They are raised in the state orphanage, where they receive intense indoctrination. Older children when Frostweaver became baron were immediately conscripted into the army, thus removing them from the "fell influence" of their biological parents.

The first children born under Frostweaver's harsh rule will reach maturity in two years, and they will grow to adulthood knowing nothing except the poison fed to them. A new generation of frostborn will emerge with nothing but hatred for the other races in their hearts, and a desire to expand their homeland.

While it is illegal for a frostborn to marry a non-frostborn, it is not illegal to sire a child with one. Frostweaver has recently introduced a law that allows frostborn to take (and the word "take" can be interpreted as far as the GM wishes) non-frostborn sexual partners, though only for the purpose of reproduction. Since all children of a frostborn will be of that racial stock, this ensures the survival of the species.

Most children learn from their families, though the Anari and Saxa take care to teach their children Frostweaver's version of history, at least until the children are old enough to be told the truth and trusted to keep their mouth's shut; speaking out against the official history is a serious crime.

RELIGION

Since seizing control of Cul, Frostweaver has promoted Hrimheorte, the supposed god of the frostborn, to the status of patron deity. Sadly for Cul and its neighbors, Hrimheorte is none other than Thrym in disguise, and the new cult is simply being used to further his aims. While many frostborn openly honor Thrym, even in Cul, the wintry god cares little for them, for his chief servants are the frost giants.

Hrimheorte's rituals vary immensely from those of Thrym. Rather than fixating on bringing about the Fimbulvintr or destruction of Kenaz and Sigel's cults, they promote frostborn as an unjustly persecuted race because they alone have been chosen to survive the coming end of the world, and call upon the faithful to claim what is rightfully their inheritance by force.

Frostweaver is high priest of the fledgling faith, though he is served by a number of priests and paladins. While any frostborn may worship Hrimheorte, only frostborn may take holy vows. Laity who openly support the cult and attend services are given tax relief as an added boon. Those who refuse to worship their race's patron are treated with great suspicion.

Cul's economy relies heavily on wild boar. As a result, Ullr alone has retained his status as an accepted deity among the inhabitants of the barony. Since much of the population is involved in meat production in some way or another, Ullr has plentiful worship.

Of the other deities, the cults of Kenaz and Sigel are outlawed. Rewards are offered for information regarding these cultists, who are regarded as the chief persecutors of the frostborn. Common worshippers of these despised gods are sentenced to hard labor for life, while clerics of the faith face summary and public execution for being "vehement enemies of all frostborn."

Despite the draconian laws, both deities have worshippers. Any day the sun shines, around any hearth, those who despise their treatment by the frostborn of Cul worship in secret. Worship remains very much individual, for to gather in numbers is to invite suspicion, and in Cul suspicions are acted upon with brutal efficiency, but the flames of light and warmth are not yet dead in this winter-worshipping realm

Worshippers of Thunor, the god who summons the south wind to battle the cold, is reviled, but his cult is not technically outlawed. Followers are routinely harassed, while clerics are arrested and sentenced to hard labor for the "crimes" of their deity.

Some worship of Eostre Animalmother and Var occurs, though the cults are small; the boars so vital to the economy are wild rather than domesticated, and Var's merchants see little profit in boar meat when there are more profitable trade routes close by. Neither deity has a temple. Eostre has shrines in most communities (those which rely on agriculture have one to her Plantmother aspect), while Var has only a single shrine in the town of Cul. Local merchants have petitioned the baron to erect a small temple in the trade god's honor, but the concerns of merchants are of little interest to Frostweaver.

Despite the large army, worship of Tiw is scarce. Hrimheorte covers a variety of aspects, one of which is armed struggle. The cult of Hela, while banned here, has its adherents. With executions commonplace, there is always a good supply of corpses. Furthermore, during the reign of the Liche-Priest, his armies held power in Cul. The Boarback Hills conceal many secrets, perhaps an old shrine or concealed temple in the dark queen's honor. Although Frostweaver knows Hela's cultist are active in his realm, he refuses to let the cult of Scaetha investigate, for Scaetha once served Sigel, his god's enemy.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Frostweaver preaches racial hatred, twisting facts to suit his needs and the wishes of his beloved deity. Some of the common misconceptions held among Cul's frostborn are given below. GMs can use these to verbally attack the party, whose beliefs are naturally misguided, if not downright evil. Notes in brackets tell the truth regarding these misconceptions.

* Some of the Kenaz and Sigel's rituals demand the sacrifice of frostborn. [This is totally untrue, though many clerics of these deities do mistrust, and often do abuse, frostborn.]

* The Hearth Knights, who honor Kenaz and Sigel above all others, victimize frostborn, burning their homes and deporting them from the civilized lands. Some even claim there are special camps where frostborn are gathered before being burned alive by fiery spells. [Frostborn are free to join the Hearth Knights, so long as they do not worship Thrym. Few do, but that is their choice.]

* The Hearth Knights have put a price on Frostweaver's head. [Untrue. While they greatly mistrust him, and fear he is an agent of Thrym on their doorstep, they have yet to decide how best to deal with him.]

* All frostborn are mistreated by others, who blame them for bringing about the long winters. [Sadly this is largely true, though it does vary immensely, and judging an entire nation by the actions of a minority is just arrogant to say the least.]

* The lengthening winters are a result of the other races' sins, the harsh winters being a divine punishment. [Untrue, though any talk that blames events on the other races and absolves frostborn wins him followers.]

MILITARY

Cul's standing army consists of a massive 21% of the entire population, an extensive military force by any standards. Only frostborn may serve in the army. The army is divided into two factions.

The barony has no independent militias. Instead, members of the 1,000 strong Home Guard are responsible for all internal security. From the largest town down to the smallest stead, members of the Home Guard handle law and order. Members have only rudimentary military training, for in times of war they serve as the reserves. They dispense rough justice, dishing out beatings on a whim, though primarily to the non-frostborn denizens of the realm. Treat members of the Home Guard as typical watch, but armed with clubs in addition to their other weapons.

The bulk of the army comprises medium infantry divided into five regiments of 400 men apiece. These regiments are in turn broken down into four companies of 90 fighting men and a 40-man headquarters group. Every headquarters group consists of a standard

bearer, a trumpeter (for issuing commands), four hrimwisards, four clerics of Hrimheorte, and 30 huscarls. A captain-at-arms commands each regiment, while each company is led by a captain. Every tenth man is a sergeant, responsible for overseeing the smallest military unit in Cul, the ten-man patrol.

Treat regular soldiers as common mercenaries, except they wear chain shirts instead of leather armor. Use veteran mercenary stats with the addition of the Command Edge for sergeants, and mercenary captain stats for captains. Cul's captains-at-arms use the stats for Wild Card mercenary captains.

Four of the companies are stationed along the borders of the neighboring realms of Heldalund, Trond, the Cairn Lands, and Heligioland. No army watches the northern border, for Frostweaver has nothing to fear from the inhabitants of the White Drake Mountains.

The fifth regiment is stationed in a fort outside Cul. While not trained to fight as cavalry, every member is mounted, allowing them to travel to any border with greater speed. They spend much of their time patrolling the Boarback Hills.

Frostweaver's personal guard, the White Cloaks, wear plate armor and carry heavy shields. Each rides a war-trained pygmy mammoth into battle. They are named for their polar bear fur cloaks. Members are replaced only rarely, and there is plenty of competition to join the elite unit. When a vacancy occurs, candidates gather together in the town of Cul. From here they must travel to the High Winterlands, kill a polar bear unassisted, and return with its fur. Many never return.

In addition to these regular forces, Frostweaver keeps a number of ferocious polar bears and mammoths. In times of war, these beasts are unleashed to wreak havoc on the enemy before the main army is set to work. It is widely claimed Frostweaver has a Hellfrost dragon mount, though if this is true he has yet to reveal it.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Only one trade road, known as the Boar Road, crosses Cul. It begins in Trondavoe to the east, eventually joining with the eastern trade road in Heligioland. Despite the trade road, Trond and Cul trade little with each other, and most merchants departing Trondavoe are heading for the richer markets in Heligioland and beyond. Still, the two nations do have trade links, as Trondavoe serves as Cul's port (among other places).

Cul imports oil (made from seal and whale blubber), sea salt (which is used by the meat producers), and wine. Most of these cargos arrive via Trondavoe, where Cul's merchants have a number of large warehouses.

In terms of exports, Cul offers only boar meat. A wide range of sausages, chops, ribs, steaks, and entrails are sold fresh, smoked, and salted along the trade road. Most of Cul's native merchants travel only as far as Myre in Heligioland, selling their wares to other merchants whose journeys take them up, down, and across the great trade network.

Goods passing through Cul, rather than intended for its markets, are charged 10% duty. Trond's merchants pay a mere 5% thanks to certain concessions granted frostborn in that realm. Exports are charged at a mere 3%. Frostborn merchants, regardless of nationality, pay half these rates. As a result of this policy, many merchant companies now appoint frostborn to oversee the Cul run. This pleases Frostweaver, as it means his people are being accorded greater positions of power in other lands.

Taxation in Cul depends on one's race and religious persuasion. Frostborn typically pay around 35% of their annual income in taxes, whereas those who actively support the cult of Hrimheorte pay only around 25%. Non-frostborn are hit for taxes in the region of 60%.

ARCHITECTURE

Before Frostweaver, Cul was a frontier land settled by just 6,000 souls, split between the Anari and Saxa in almost equal number. The landscape was dotted with traditional Saxa steads and small Anari villages and farms, none numbering more than 200 souls. Cul was an important settlement because of its location, but it was still just a village.

The frostborn, being descended from all the races and scarcely 100 years old as a race, have yet to define a unique culture. As such, new buildings in Cul borrow heavily from all the races. Many are of straightforward Anari and Saxa design, yet there are architectural elements from the frost dwarves, elves, and even engro in their architecture. Thus, the homes of frostborn elves (hearth or taiga) may sport leaf motifs, those of frost dwarf stock may be partially underground, and engro frostborn still reside in traditional caravans. What they all share is a distinct lack of insulation, for the cold affects them less and that, they claim, is one of the reasons they— and they alone— are chosen to survive the endless winter.

MAJOR LOCALES

The following locations expand the adventuring locales in Barony of Cul.

CUL

Hrimwisard Academy: Frostweaver's plan to open an academy devoted to teaching the art of hrimwisardry has reached maturity. All frostborn children in Cul are currently being tested for magical aptitude. Those who show promise are forced to attend the academy, where their true potential is studied further. Children deemed suitable are taken from their parents (who receive token compensation for "furthering the cause") and given full training.

Frostweaver hopes that within a few years his army will be swelled by masses of hrimwisards, giving him a vital edge in his plans for further conquest.

THE FICKLE FOREST

While much of the Boarback Hills is covered in light forest, the eastern slopes are more densely wooded. This area has long been known as the Fickle Forest. Paths that exist one day may vanish not just overnight but in the blink of an eye, leaving travelers stranded far from the beaten path. The trees, while never moving in front of visitors, do move, or so the story goes, for many a hunter has claimed to mark the bark so as to find his way through the dense vegetation only to retrace his route and find no trace of his marks.

The Fickle Forest is home to a powerful fey lord known as the Tusked King. He dislikes intruders, especially those who come looking for boars. While he could be a powerful ally to those opposed to Frostweaver, he has no interest in mortal politics. One legend concerning the Tusked King claims he has an albino boar, which roams the forest. In days past, a local hero captured the boar and demanded the king perform him a service, and it would be released. Should this be true, perhaps the king can be persuaded to help Cul's oppressed peoples.

HILLSVIEW

Population: 245
Ruler: Sir Glitterhrim, Knight of Cul

Hillsview stands at the base of the northern Boarback Hills. It owes its existence to the trade road it straddles, its large inn being a notable stopping point on the long journey from Trondavoe to the markets of Heligioland.

Business has suffered since Frostweaver's arrival. Although merchants still stop over, most are frostborn. Thanks to the baron's new policy, they are to be given accommodation at concessionary rates—rates that barely make the inn any profit. To add to the misery, taxes are set based on the full rate, not the lowered one. The owners, an Anari couple, are seriously considering selling up before the inn is taken as a fine for non-payment of taxes. They have no doubt the business would then be given to a frostborn, and the tax rates made more favorable. The same conditions are placed on the cartwrights, wheelwrights, and merchants' chandlers.



With income from the trade road dwindling and outgoings high thanks to the taxation policy, Hillsview's small population ekes a pitiful living from the soil.

Sir Glitterhrim, one of Frostweaver's new breed of frostborn knights. Typical of the brutes swayed to the baron's creed, he is arrogant, apathetic to the pleas of non-frostborn, and cowardly.

Overlooking the village is the broken remains of a small castle. Once an Anari outpost guarding the trade road, it has been abandoned since the Blizzard War. The villagers once mined it for building stone, but all the easy to reach material has been plundered. Until recently, the castle was a silent sentinel. In recent months, great swarms of bats and flocks of crows have been seen circling the battlements. The sight of them fills the inhabitants' heart with dread, though they cannot explain why they feel this way.

PARAXUS, LOST CITY OF

Although far from the center of the former Heligi homeland, Paraxus, which lies on the southern slopes of the Boarback Hills, was once an important city. It served as both a center of learning for scholars, priests, and mages, and as a retreat for those tired of the endless politics of the royal court. Amid the stone houses of the workers and scribes stood finely-sculpted marble edifices, temples, schools, and repositories of knowledge. Statues of the gods and kings lined the streets, a constant reminder that all mortals answered to two powers; one temporal and one divine.

Although it covered a square mile and housed a population numbering almost a thousand, the city lacked many of the industries required to make it self-sufficient. What few industries it claimed were focused on the needs of the scholars. Thus, while there were parchment and vellum workshops, inkmakers, and metalworkers capable of making jewelry and ornate book clasps, there were no foundries or smithies. Even common crafters like potters were in short supply. Paraxus imported virtually everything it required to exist, the city being funded by educational fees and donations from wealthy patrons.

The inner city, once protected by a stout wall, was the home of the rich and learned, while the citizens huddled together in the undefended suburbs. When a great and unknown army swept down from the north, Paraxus' small garrison was ill equipped to withstand the assault. Even the presence of many mages and priests could do nothing to stem the tide, and with the army ravaging the entire Heligi domain, no city could spare troops to aid in Paraxus' defense.

Seeking neither treasure nor captives, the invaders laid waste the city in a short-lived reign of destruction and terror. Thousands of innocents were butchered mercilessly, their bodies left among the ruined buildings which once formed their proud city. Of the great treasures the city once housed, the great majority were destroyed, for no one save the warriors or the icy army left Paraxus alive. Treasure hunters scavenged the ruins over the intervening centuries, finding the occasional relic or stash of coins. These days, as far as anyone is concerned, Paraxus is simply another ruin, a reminder of the ancient times.

Areas of Paraxus, including the subterranean ruins, are explored in greater detail in adventure *S2 Lost City of Paraxus*.

SALVATION

Population: 229
Ruler: Anrik Guthwulfsunu

Salvation is a new settlement, having sprung up just two years ago. Located on the edge of Temujin Marsh, it is home to self-imposed exiles opposed to Frostweaver's tyrannical rule. While its inhabitants refer to it as a village, Salvation is a shantytown of tents and lean-tos.

Life in Salvation is hard. Food is always scarce, sanitation is poor, and the marsh is home to many disease-carrying insects. What the locals need most are medicine and weapons.

Ruling here is Anrik Guthwulfsunu, a former army captain stripped of his title and position when Frostweaver seized control. The exiles could easily cross the border into either the Cairn Lands or Heligioland, but they refuse to abandon Cul. Anrik is slowly turning the villagers into warriors. While they know they cannot hope to stand against Cul's army, they can conduct hit-and-run attacks against patrols, raid merchant caravans, and murder tax collectors. So far they have achieved very little—Frostweaver has not even registered them as a threat.

Unfortunately, hatred of Frostweaver and his frostborn minions has turned into equally ugly xenophobia against all his ilk. In all likelihood, any frostborn, taiga elves, or frost dwarves who stumbled across Salvation would be killed on sight out of fear they were spies.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons of note may cross paths with the heroes during their time in Cul.

ASHEN BLADE METUNNIA STARFORGE

Until the end of the past summer the only violence in Cul was that meted out by the baron's thugs. So safe were the roads, that merchant caravans traveled with minimal escorts. But now things have changed. Attacks on caravans, army patrols, and remote steads have left dozens of frostborn dead, all scorched by fire.

Born to a noble Magocratic family, Metunnia felt the calling of Kenaz in her youth. Forsaking her magical studies, and earning the scorn of her family, she joined the priesthood, pledging loyalty to Kenaz and swearing to help defeat Thrym at any cost. After hearing reports of the persecution in Cul, she set out to see what she could do. What she heard from the lucky few who managed to escape before the baron's grip tightened appalled her.

For six months she wandered the surrounding nations, gathering evidence and slowly building up a small force of refugees who had lost everything they owned when Frostweaver's army seized power, or who had relatives trapped in the troubled realm. Then, when she felt ready, she began raiding.

Metunnia never liked frostborn, but now her hatred has reached deadly levels. She feels no guilt when killing them, and shows absolutely no mercy. Her actions have, in some instances, been extreme enough to frighten those who serve her, and they have little love for the frostborn. Many of her closest allies fear she will only cease her crusade, for such it has become to the paladin, once every frostborn in Cul is dead.

Frostweaver has issued a proclamation promising that for every frostborn killed, five non-frostborn will be executed. So far he has been good to his word. Metunnia uses his vengeful act as further proof of the evil nature of all frostborn, yet her soldiers think otherwise; it is their families that are suffering, not hers.

BROTHER ICESTORM

A drifter before being recruited by Frostweaver, Icestorm, a frostborn, became a cleric of Hrimheorte once the conquest of Cul was complete. At first he was dedicated to the baron's ideal of a homeland for the frostborn where they could live free of persecution. He believed wholeheartedly that the non-frostborn would be free to leave and start afresh somewhere new, leaving the frostborn to found a new nation. Instead, he has seen atrocities committed against people enslaved in all but name, and heard the rhetoric about enacting revenge for a century of hatred.

Icestorm isn't an idealist by any stretch of the imagination; he knows there will always be hatred of people different to one's own. What he cannot fathom is what Frostweaver wants to achieve, for preaching hatred only causes already open wounds to fester, fuelling the cycle of hatred and revenge to greater levels of barbarism.

Unwilling to speak out publicly, Icestorm does what he can to alleviate the suffering of the other races in Cul. He steals from the temple treasury and gives it to the poor, provides food and medicine when he can, and passes on information regarding loved ones in other settlements or beyond the borders.

SWORD KNIGHT CATHAL WHITEMANE

The Hearth Knights initially ignored Frostweaver's conquest of Cul. Once his reign was stabilized and his agenda made clear, the knights were spurred into hurried action. While emissaries conduct delicate negotiations with the Cairn Lands' government to build a new fort on their border with Cul, agents were dispatched to infiltrate Frostweaver's nation.

Sir Cathal, a frostborn of Tuomi heritage, was among the first to volunteer. He entered Cul three years ago, posing as a displaced frostborn seeking a home. Over the last year his reports have grown more and more sporadic, and no word has been heard from him in three months. The Hearth Knights suspect he has been captured, but they lack intelligence on his whereabouts.

Sir Cathal is in fact alive and well. After serving in the army and earning a position as a sergeant, he was accepted into Frostweaver's elite bodyguard unit, the White Cloaks, five months ago. Initially set on assassinating the renegade frostborn if the opportunity arose, he is currently unsure where his loyalties lie.

Like many frostborn he has suffered persecution, even during his early days in the Hearth Knights, where many questioned his motives. Frostweaver may speak of vengeance and bloodshed, but he is a charismatic leader, and Sir Cathal is close to being swayed to his side. If this happens, he might choose to reveal the identities of other Hearth Knights working undercover in Cul.

WHY COME HERE?

Cul may technically be a civilized realm, but it isn't one most heroes would chose to visit. The majority of the population will hate them simply because they are different, and the minority, with whom they likely share common cultural bonds, is too afraid to help them. So what could bring the adventurers to the Barony of Cul?

* Orders. The existence of Cul is a thorn in the sides of the Hearth Knights and the cults of Kenaz, who is opposed to all things winter-related, and Thunor, who is against any form of oppression. Heroes allied to these organizations may be ordered into Cul for a variety of reasons. They may be asked to gather intelligence, rescue a lost comrade, free an important non-frostborn, commit acts of sabotage or launch guerilla raids. In many instances, their mission will involve slaying frostborn— frostborn who may be innocent of any crime except believing the word of Frostweaver.

* Passing Through. Few right-minded people voluntarily pass through Cul. While it is the shortest route from Heligioland to Trond and Heldalund (unless one fancies crossing into the Liche Lands), it is far from the safest, especially for non-frostborn. Heroes prone to responding to threats with violence will quickly find themselves hunted by Frostweaver's army as enemies of the state.

* Personal Reasons. Frostweaver has been in power for a mere seven years. That means any hero, even one with the Young Hindrance, could have been born in Cul before the troubles. Even if a character was born in a more distant realm, his family might have extended kin living under the yoke of frostborn tyranny.

* Exploration. Never truly settled by any culture before or after the Blizzard War, Cul nevertheless has many ruins, such as Paraxus. The Boarback Hills and foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains could conceal any number of old structures worth an expedition.

DRACHENLANDS

For centuries the fierce tribes of the Drachenlands have resisted all who dare to invade their lands. In the past their expansionistic tendencies have been thwarted, but now they have a strong leader, and their eyes are again turning toward their more prosperous neighbors.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Drachenlands.

* **An Expensive Realm:** Voivode Ramel imposes harsh taxes on all goods. As a result, all items cost twice as much as standard outside Angrad. This has resulted in a low standard of living for most. A successful Streetwise roll, made once per week per settlement, allows a buyer to find goods priced at just 150% of normal, and on a raise he finds them at 100%. The purchase and selling of such goods is considered illegal.

Heroes wishing to sell goods must have a license. These cost 50 gs per settlement and are good for just one month. On the up side, the percentages for selling items are raised to 50% and 75% accordingly, though half of this should be paid in taxes.

* **Illiterate:** Native Drachenlander characters who are not clerics or mages, or who do not have the Elderly Hindrance, are deemed to be illiterate. They receive the Illiterate Hindrance for free, meaning it does not count toward their starting Hindrances or provide extra points during character generation.

* **Wanted:** The cult of Thunor has recently been banned. Any hero professing to the faith receives the Wanted (Minor) Hindrance in the Drachenlands, while clerics receive the Major version.

* **You're A Threat:** If Voivode Ramel gets wind of heavily armed adventurers in his realm he may declare them assassins or insurgents. Heroes are advised to keep a low profile unless they want the Wanted Hindrance.

ATMOSPHERE

Although technically a civilized realm, the Drachenlands are held in a grip of tyranny, oppression, and fear. Many skalds compare the realm to Orcmark. Given the voivode's penchant for torture, such claims are not entirely unjust.

The air is electric with paranoia and mistrust, something Ramel is only too keen to foment among his people. Rumors that he maintains a secret network of spies and informants, or has a priestess of the Norns who sees and hears all that transpires in the realm, circulate daily, though none has ever been proved (or disproved). In many cases citizens actively inform on friends, neighbors, and strangers to safeguard their own skin—if a conspiracy is uncovered, any who might have been privy to its existence are taken away for questioning. Even behind closed doors, citizens are loath to speak ill of the voivode or his laws. Those who do risk a slow and painful death.

Large public gatherings are banned unless authorized by the voivode. Although this doesn't prevent conspirators gathering, it forces them, and there are many who plot against the deranged nobleman, to act extremely cautiously and only ever in small numbers, thus limiting their ability to take overt action.

Strangers, especially armed ones, are often accused of being enemy agents or assassins, and thus harboring them, even in an inn, can bring serious consequences. Regardless of their intentions, most visitors are quickly reported to the voivode's local representative, if only out of fear of repercussions should they be discovered by an agent of the warlord.

Heavily armed patrols enforce the warlord's rule with an iron hand, meting out on-the-spot executions for petty infringements to remind the populace who rules the land. Citizens are dragged screaming from their beds at night and hauled to the dungeon in Angrad, never to be seen again.

All crimes are punished severely, especially theft. Unfortunately, high taxes are forcing price rises, and few citizens can afford even basic commodities, let alone luxuries. Rotting corpses swing from gallows in every settlement as a reminder that the laws must be obeyed at all times.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Tuomi loyalties lie first with direct family, then blood relatives, then clan, tribe, and finally the voivode. Of course, each unit is a cog in a much larger machine, but to a Tuomi, loyalty begins firmly at home, among those he trusts most.

The family is the smallest unit and comprises those related by close and direct blood ties. Typically, a family comprises the oldest living member and his direct descendants. While the elder may have siblings, they and their offspring are not part of the direct family. Instead, they share bonds through the clan. The head of each family has no specific title.

Beyond the family is the clan, which is led by a comes. Clans are formed from families bonded by a common but very distant ancestor. In many instances these ties are apocryphal, based on myth rather than provable facts. A Drachenlander clan typically numbers around 500 adults, divided into as many as 50 families.

By tradition, when a woman marries she severs all ties to her clan, becoming instead a full member of her husband's clan. Marriage within the same clan is permitted, so long as the bloodlines diverged at least two generations ago. Hence, a hero could not marry any direct descendants of his grandparents, but he can of his grand-uncle/aunt's line.

Clans bond together to form tribes, which are governed by a mormaer. Unlike clans, tribes are not bound by ancestry, but rather through oaths of mutual support. Clans may switch allegiance to different tribes, though doing so risks internecine disputes if not every family supports the decision. The Tuomi are rather pragmatic, though, and ancestral ties can be reworked to suit new political alliances.

SOCIAL ORDER

At the top of the social ladder is the voivode, a social title specific to the Drachenlands since the Blizzard War. Notoriously independent, the Drachenlander tribes elected a voivode during the crisis only to provide a central figurehead during the crisis. Although the title remained in use afterward, the voivode was granted no automatic respect—if he wanted power, he had to claim it through force and force the mormaers to accept his rule, no easy task.

Although the title is hereditary, the only one that is among Drachenlanders, few dynasties last for more than a handful of generations—one weak family member is enough to result in a coup. The current family has reigned for six generations, Ramel's ancestor strangling the previous voivode in front of the entire court.

Next are the mormaers and then the comes, who form the nobility. All offspring of a nobleman technically rank below a comes and share equal status, though in truth the children of mormaers are treated with greater respect than those of a comes.

In days of yore, when the voivode was largely a powerless figurehead, the clergy ranked next, then mages, merchants, master crafters, warriors, crafters, and finally the peasants. Ramel has altered this structure, placing the military above the priesthood and relegating merchants below crafters.

Social climbing is fairly easy at lower levels, for all one needs do is join the army, take holy vows, learn a trade, and so on to gain improved status.

EDUCATION

Ramel's father heavily restricted education, considered it dangerous for the masses to be learned in anything beyond the skills required for their trade. Ramel has since extended the ban to all members of society except clerics and mages, who must be literate in order to practice their arcane arts.

Clerics, the main teachers in society, are permitted to preach the doctrines of their faith (so long as those teachings support Ramel's views) and provide instruction in vital crafts and trades, but nothing else. The cult of Hoenir has voiced objection to this, for not teaching others is anathema to them, but their opinions have been silenced following several public executions for sedition. Braver members of the clergy continue to teach in secret, knowing that being caught in the act would mean certain death, but also knowing that they would die without being sinners.

Skalds are banned from teaching, but are permitted to sing songs of glory, so long as they praise Ramel. As with the clerics of Hoenir, many skalds consider this an affront to their art and continue to tutor in secret.

Possession of books is forbidden except for clerics and mages. Distributing written material is considered a crime, no matter who is handing out the texts.

RELIGION

Although Drachenlanders follow all the gods, albeit as dragons rather than the traditional forms, several receive more attention than others.

Dargar is now officially the state religion, though few outside the voivode's inner circle actually worship the foul deity. Freo receives much public worship, for the Drachenlanders consider him god of horses, despite protests by Eostre Animalmother's clergy. Many ceremonies and sacrifices revolve around horses. Tiw's faith is the most widespread, for the Drachenlanders are a warlike lot and settling disputes with violence is common practice across the social spectrum.

With its focus on freedom and civil liberties, the cult of Thunor the Storm Dragon has recently been outlawed in the Drachenlands, its clerics declared agitators and the faith branded subversive. The law is only a few months old, and at present many senior clergy remain at large. Bounties have been placed on their heads. Despite the outlawing, the faith remains dominant in rebellious areas, though it has been driven underground.

MILITARY

Two separate military structures operate in the Drachenlands—the voivode's personal troops and those of the various nobles.

Ramel's most elite troops are the Thunder Cavalry, a company of 100 ultra-heavy cavalry. Treat them as veteran mercenary cavalry riding pygmy mammoths. As well as serving as the warlord's personal guard, they act his army's shock troops. Every member is awarded the honorific ruiri, technically placing them among the nobility.

Also serving under the warlord's direct control are 300 heavy cavalry (treat as veteran mercenaries), 500 medium cavalry (veteran mercenaries equipped with long swords instead of lances), and 700 light cavalry (treat as common mercenaries with long swords instead of lances). Each is arranged into companies of 100 fighting troops led by a captain, and augmented by a standard bearer, a cleric of Dargar, a cleric of Freo, eight medics, four scouts (as light cavalrymen but with Notice d8), and ten stablehands trained in basic veterinary arts.

A total of 300 infantry, broken down into two companies of heavy infantry (treat as veteran mercenaries) and one company of light infantry (common mercenaries), and 200 foreign archers (veteran mercenaries), provide additional support.

One company of heavy, medium, and light cavalry, and all the archer companies, are permanently garrisoned outside Angrad—only the Thunder Cavalry and heavy cavalry are allowed inside the city while carrying arms except when the capital is threatened. The remainder is spread around the country, watching over settlements on behalf of the warlord, manning the hill forts that form the Drachenlands' defensive line, or patrolling the borders for signs of unwanted visitors.

Each mormaer commands his own army, made up of troops from the clans supporting him. Belligerent by nature, the tribes maintain a standing army equal to 5% of the population, a total of some 3,600 warriors. Broken down into 100-man companies, the tribes' collective armies consist of 17 companies of medium cavalry, 10 companies of light cavalry, 5 companies of medium infantry, and 4 companies of light infantry

In order to ensure nobles cannot rebel easily, one quarter of a tribe's warriors are left to guard their ancestral lands, one-half are stationed in a rival tribe's lands, and one-quarter man the hill forts or serve on distant borders. Ramel's authority is such that he can call upon these troops at his whim, and few have the stomach to resist his wishes.

By law, every able-bodied man and woman is automatically part of the army. This equates to some 30% of the population. However, the reserves are called up only rarely, never in large numbers, and weapons are issued only from the great armories in Angrad.

FORTIFICATIONS

Aside from Ramel's castle at Angrad, a stone structure based on Anari design (treat as a small castle), there are a number of hill forts dotted around the landscape.

Four of these are old, large structures, built many generations ago. These count as regular hill forts, as detailed in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*. Located on the edge of the Giant's Steps close to Tethilin, south of Iron Troll Wood, on the border with the Mistlands, and opposite Chalcis' Deepdale Fort, each is garrisoned by a company of the warlord's light cavalry and two companies of troops from among the tribes, the latter being rotated regularly.

Ramel has had a smaller hill fort (treat as motte-and-bailey) erected in each tribe's lands, ensuring a military presence across the land in case of invasion or uprising. These are manned by troops from rival tribes, augmented with a small number of Ramel's personal warriors to ensure loyalty.

WHY NO REBELLION?

The collective armies of the tribes outnumber the voivode's personal army by over three-to-one. While only the warlord has heavy and ultra heavy troops at his disposal, the odds are high enough to overcome this discrepancy.

Despite these favorable odds, the nobility is unable to mount a unified rebellion thanks to the fear Ramel has generated. An emissary from another tribe who talks of initiating rebellion might be speaking the truth, but he might just as easily be a spy or informer testing his neighbor for signs of treason. Unsure who to trust and fearful for their lives if caught plotting, the nobles are thus unable to mount any unified resistance.

This is not to say resistance does not occur. Many nobles are unhappy at Ramel's excesses, and bands of marauding cavalrymen roam the countryside, plundering trade caravans and burning small settlements known to be loyal to the butcher.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Voivode Ramel's taxation policy is harsh and strictly enforced, designed to keep the tribes firmly in check.

His unique way of setting tax levels for each village ensures that any potential rivals in terms of combat skill are dealt with before they can rise to become a true threat, and places the blame for a heavy tax bill on the shoulders of the citizens. In addition to coins and goods, the voivode also demands a number of young men as part of the annual tax. These are taken to serve in his personal army, weakening the clans a little more each year while strengthening his own forces.

While movement along the dirt trails that serve as the Drachenlands' road network is free, actually entering a settlement incurs taxes. Typically, visitors must pay 1d10 silver scields to enter a village, double that for a town, and five times that to enter Angrad. The revenue is used to help offset the settlement's annual taxes, as well as cover expenses such as fortification maintenance.

Outside of Angrad, imports and exports are hit with crippling taxation, thus ensuring foreign merchants visit the capital to conduct their business. This allows the voivode to keep a close eye on what goods are entering his country. Despite lethal punishments for tax avoidance, this policy has led to a thriving black market in all manner of goods considered common in other lands. The cult of Var, nominally an honest bunch, is behind much of the illegal trade.

ARCHITECTURE

Tuomi have long disdained the use of stone for building houses, a material even the Saxa have adopted in recent times. Regardless of the settlement's size and the owner's status, houses are round and constructed of wattle (hazel or willow) and daub (a mix of clay, straw, and animal dung). Roofs are high and steep pitched, ensuring rainwater quickly runs off the reed covering. A circular ditch around the house keeps excess rain runoff from turning the surrounding ground to mud.

With light filtering in only through the doorway or being cast by the central fire pit (the Tuomi don't use windows), homes are dark and often smoky places.

Unlike most Anari and Saxa dwellings, there are no internal divisions. Beds are distributed around the walls, with a place left for a loom or potter's wheel, as well as food storage and a quern stone for grinding grain into flour. Erecting a partition of any sort is considered extremely bad form, for it means someone has something to hide, a dangerous pastime in these dark days. None of the cultures across Rassilon are bashful about perfectly natural acts, even performing them in front of others without anyone batting an eyelid.

Houses vary from 6-10 yards in diameter among the lower classes to as much as 20 yards for the nobility. A low wicker fence, designed to keep animals in rather than intruders out, and to mark property boundaries, surrounds most houses. All settlements are surrounded by a ditch and palisade, to ward against rapacious orcs or ravenous trolls, and to allow the local watch to ensure all visitors pay the entry tax.

MAJOR LOCALES

Included below are some sites heroes may wish to visit while in the Drachenlands.

BLACK MEG'S BROCH

Every Drachenlander knows the story of Black Meg. A fearsome hag or giantess of immense power, she is a bogeymen figure, her name invoked in a dire threat made to children who misbehave to mend their ways—be good, parents say, or Black Meg will take you.

According to folklore, Black Meg lives in a crumbling black stone broch in the Giant's Steps. Her skin is black (hence her name), pulled taut over her bony frame. Her hair is bone white, her pointed teeth and long nails a ghastly yellow, and her eyes burning embers of malice. She roasts the flesh of wicked children, grinds their bones to make flour for bread, and uses their hair to thatch her home. That she can reach naughty children anywhere in the Drachenlands is down to her winged steed, Tromlaigh ("Nightmare"), who, it is said, can carry her across the realm and back in a single night, but has no power to fly during sunlight.

While it is a fitting tale to traumatize children into behaving properly, Black Meg is no work of fiction. Her broch does indeed stand in the hills, and it is given a wide berth. The unholy occupant only favors children over other flesh because they are easier to catch and less likely to fight back.

BLACK SKULL TOWER

A few miles inside Iron Troll Wood stands a dark tower whose stony surface is carved to resemble a pile of skulls. Many stories claim the site is sacred to Hela, an outpost from the days of the Liche-Priest. Several decades ago hunters and patrols detected pale blue light flickering in one of the windows, leading to rumors that a powerful undead had taken up residence. Wiser heads claim the light could have been thieves looking for relics, but no one has the courage to investigate.

BLACKTHORN GORGE

Close to the western border of Tethilin is a narrow, steep-sided gorge whose rough floor is overgrown with blackthorn bushes. Movement through blackthorn bushes is treated as difficult ground. Any hero who enters or begins his turn in a patch of blackthorns, who moves faster than half his Pace (even disciples of Freo), must make an Agility roll, –2 if running, or become snagged. Snagged heroes cannot move until they spend an action freeing themselves.

Fighting through the ensnaring vegetation, travelers eventually come to a large ruin inhabited by vicious orcs. Legends say that coins dropped by giants walking the Steps would roll into the gorge, where the mysterious inhabitants collected them. These same legends insist a vast treasure haul lies in a subterranean level, warded against thieves by dastardly traps.

GIANTS' HALL

Although the Giant's Steps take their name from a supposed footpath used by giants, none were known to inhabit the desolate hills, at least not until recently.

During the last cleansing, a scout reported spying a colossal hall in the far distance. He failed to note the exact location, and his commander executed him for incompetence without bothering to find out more information. The officer paid a similar price when Voivode Ramel was informed. Given the hills cover approximately 10,000 square miles, hunting even for a giant's hold is like finding a needle in a haystack.

The nobleman also failed to determine which sorts of giants called the area home. Such information is important, for slaughtering dumb cliff giants or brutish formorians is much easier than slaying the more malevolent and better organized frost giants, and the snow-capped peaks could support all three species.

ICEBERG FERRY

The only ferry service across the Whitedeath River lies at its narrowest point, about halfway along the Drachenlands' stretch of the turbulent waterway. Rather than use a boat, the ferry operator has sculpted a raft from a large chunk of ice, to which he has attached two large iron hoops. A cable spanning the river allows it to be dragged across the fast flowing river without being washed away. Travelers are cautioned beforehand that the surface is slippery, for anyone who falls in risks being swept away and frozen to death.

IRONFIST FORT

Built partly as an act of intimidation and partly to supply his troops in their war against the elves of Tethilin, Ironfist Fort is a massive wooden castle. It can hold a garrison of 200 warriors and

Drachenlands



Population: 76,560 (75% Tuomi, 10% Saxa, 10% frostborn, 3% taiga elves, 2% engro)
Ruler: Voivode Ramel the Berserk of the Argentocoxus tribe
Religion: Dargar, Freo, Thrym, Thunor, Tiw
Imports: Metal, wine
Exports: Furs, meat, skins

Winter Fern Hills
Sun Dragon Hill
R. Sigilrun
Black Meg's Broch
The Giants Steps
Giants' Hall
Blackthorn Forge
Hill of the Necromancer
Maera's Tooth
Tethilin
Black Sk Tower
Ironfist Fort
Skull Temple
Iceberg Ferry
Antrad
Drachenla
Two Dragon Inn
Glade of Frozen Death
The Glistening Caves
Whitedeath River
Deepdale Fort
Whitedeath Crossing
The Winter Palace
Red Boar Dell
Var's Folly
Forlorn Keep
Vich
0 10 25 50 100 200



100 horses. Unwilling to waste his personal troops, and ever wary of the threat of a rogue noble seizing control, Ramel ensures the warriors always come from four rival noble houses. The captain is always one of Ramel's personal guard whose loyalty is unquestionable.

SKULL TEMPLE

Soul binding (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*) is an ancient art. It fell into disrepute during the war against the Liche-Priest, when the cults of Scaetha and Sigel led crusades against its practitioners, accusing them of necromancy, and was outlawed afterward. Part of the reason for the outlawing was the discovery of Skull Temple.

Before the specter of evil rose far to the east, Skull Temple was known as Càirich-mu-Claigeann, a Tuomi phrase meaning "place of skulls." A major center of soul binder study, it was also a repository for souls bound by long-dead mages.

Carved into a large hill, the temple's corridors and chambers were lined with stone into which were cut countless niches. In each niche was placed a skull. Those in the corridors and common areas were merely for decoration, while those in the main "libraries" were soul-bound. Two columns of skulls glued together with blood and lime marked the entrance. Although a grisly place, shunned by those unlearned in the art, it was not considered in any way evil.

Sensing the miserable existence of the trapped souls, the Liche-Priest spread out his hand and corrupted the site. Formerly a place of learning, it is now a sinkhole of necromancy. Sentry skulls created from grisly trophies bound with souls flit through the corridors or sit quietly in niches, constantly alert for intruders. Some skulls possess single spells, being able to unleash bolts of necromantic energy (*bolt*, *blast*, or *burst*), shroud the surrounding area in darkness (*obscure*), or cause nearby skulls to leap onto unsuspecting intruders, latching on with their teeth and hampering progress (*entangle*). Others are suicidal traps, exploding in a blast of necromantic energy when living creatures wander too close.

The cult of Scaetha has made several attempts to destroy the temple, but without success. Finally convinced that whatever the skulls were guarding would make its presence felt sooner or later, the cult has adopted a waiting game. When the master of the temple emerges, the cult will fight him in surroundings of their choosing.

Unfortunately, they may have waited too long. Reports are circulating that swarms of skulls carried aloft on leathery bat wings have been attacking outlying villages. With Voivode Ramel preferring to keep outsiders at his borders or carefully supervised, the cult has been unable to verify these stories.

SUN DRAGON HILL

On the north edge of the Giant's Steps, overlooking the Sigilrun, lies the colossal skull of a sun dragon. Bleached after centuries of exposure to wind and rain and cracked by countless frosts and thaws, the skull is a remnant of the Blizzard War. Drachenlander legends claim the now extinct Volteporix tribe summoned the beast to aid in the defense of their homeland.

The dragon has just 13 teeth remaining in its gaping maw, and no mortal being can cause them to break free. It is also home to a spirit, and counts as a sacred place.

Spirit Name: Flame-Eye.

Ambience: Creatures of darkness or cold find the area around the skull painful to approach. Closing within 20 yards requires a Vigor roll at –2 to avoid gaining a level of Fatigue. This Fatigue is only removed once the intruder is outside the radius and the sun sets.

Deity: Sigel.

Senses: Notice d10 (d10 Wild Die).

Communication: Flame-Eye speaks only to clerics of Sigel, conversing only in Selari and then only on Sunnandaegs. When it speaks, the eyes of the skull shed golden light.

Sacrifice: Proof of devotion to Sigel as noted below.

Powers: Flame-Eye questions clerics of Sigel in depth on matters of faith and scripture, and about the life they have led and quests they have completed. A successful Faith roll at –4 causes one of the

remaining teeth to drop to the ground. Flame-Eye converses with an individual cleric only once per month.

The tooth is a imbued with divine power and holds a number of special bennies equal to half the cleric's Faith die at the time he earned the reward. These bennies can only be used to cast spells or resist cold, coldfire, or ice-based powers, whether spells or a monster's supernatural powers. They remain until used, but once a benny is spent it is irrevocably gone.

Flame-Eye can cast *aura* (on itself only), *banish*, *bolt*, *burst*, and *summon elemental* and has Spellcasting d12.

TWO DRAGON INN

No one remembers who built the stone structure or why, but its walls were carved to represent the 24 major gods in their draconic forms. Whatever its original purpose, Ramel's grandfather had it converted to an inn. Located just five miles from the border with Chalcis, merchants heading in either direction were forced to stop here in order for their caravans to be searched for contraband, a practice that continues to this day. Although officially it is known as Two Dozen Dragon Inn, most regulars shorten the name because it is easier to say.

Two local beers, White Dragon, a pale wheat beer named in honor of Thrym, and Dargar's Blood, a ruddy, hoppy ale named for Dargar, are brewed here.

The owner, Elodacht Foam-Lips, is strongly opposed to the rule of Ramel and his family, as was his father and his father before him. While excavating a new cellar, Elodacht's grandfather, Senach, accidentally dug into a natural cave system. After much exploration he discovered it ran clear across the border into neighboring Chalcis. Ever since that day the tunnel is used by black marketeers to smuggle goods into the Drachenlands past border patrols (Elodacht is well paid for his role), and by the innkeeper, a closet Thunor cultist, to smuggle wanted people out to freedom.

Unfortunately, the cave system is treacherous to navigate, and many of the side tunnels are unexplored. Goblins are known to live in parts of the system, as are giant centipedes.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Warlord Ramel's personality is described in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Presented here are a handful of other individuals the heroes may have reason to interact with while exploring the Drachenlands.

MARYSIA VOLTEPORIX

Marysia Volteporix is an enigma. She claims to have no memory of her past, seemingly having awoken from a dream a mere four years ago, yet is clearly of Tuomi stock and speaks with a Drachenlander accent. Her tribal name, which she claims she always knew, is that of a tribe completely eradicated during the Blizzard War, when its members chose to stand and fight the advancing horde. The tribe was devoted to Sigel and routinely interbred with the now extinct Selari, with whom they maintained good relations. Marysia sports a golden tattoo in the shape of a sun dragon up her entire right arm and speaks Selari fluently.

Still only 17, she is a warrior seemingly without peer, a master of all weapons and fighting styles, an instinctive killer, yet one who slays not for glory, recognition, bloodlust, or vengeance. Her name is legendary in the Winterlands, and her personal war against the creatures of the Hellfrost and Thrym's minions has earned her praise from the Hearth Knights, whose offers of membership she has turned down many times.

Marysia may ask to join adventuring parties, but only if they are acting against Hellfrost creatures or the cult of Thrym. Other quests simply do not appeal to her.

PROFITEER JUSTYNA AP-HAYLON

On the surface Justyna, a Chalcian whose father was a marauding Drachenlander soldier, is a law-abiding merchant running a regular caravan carrying copper and iron ingots from Chalcis to Angrad. She pays her taxes to the last silver scield without question, speaks well of Ramel to all she meets, and makes regular gifts of expensive luxuries to the voivode on behalf of her cult.

She secretly desires to open a trade route between Lakeland and the Borderlands through to Chalcis, creating a trade loop around Witchwood and opening new markets to the cult in Chalcis. Naturally, such a venture would boost her personal income as well. Since Ramel has no love for merchants, she knows he must first be removed from power and a more amiable, or weaker, ruler placed on the throne.

Justyna is actually in overall charge of the black market in the Drachenlands. The profits from her illegal activities are being used to equip and train a growing group of ex-patriot Drachenlanders in Chalcis. Knowing that any one of the rebels could be a spy, Justyna is careful never to deal with the rebels directly.

WHY COME HERE?

The Drachenlands are held in a tyrannical grip and outsiders are rarely welcomed with open arms. Given that adventurers might be proclaimed assassins and handed over to the voivode in the hope of currying his favor, what might bring a party of heroes to this godsforsaken land?

* Orders. While Hearth Knights stationed in Chalcis might be ordered here to keep an eye of the borders with Witchwood or check out rumors the voivode is seeking an alliance with the White Witch, most heroes ordered to come here are likely to be clerics.

Those of Thunor might be dispatched to organize a coup against Ramel's tyranny; Var's clergy may try to forge new trade routes or open a new black market; Tiw's clergy may be called upon to support a war against the trolls or orcs living in the north; and those of Kenaz or Sigel may, like the Hearth Knights, act against Witchwood.

* Glory. Trolls are fearsome foes, and the Drachenlands has plenty of them on its northeast border. Less powerful heroes might fancy taking action against the orcs and goblins of the Giant's Steps before working their way deeper into the hills in search of giants.

* Revenge. A powerful motive, and one driven by campaign events and backstories for the most part. Ramel's troops raid the Borderlands and Chalcis, torching, murdering, looting, and raping. The warlord also treats his own people with equal contempt. Any hero from the Drachenlands or its neighbors may hold a grudge against the Drachenlanders and seek revenge.

* Passing Through. From Chalcis, the quickest way to reach the northern wilds is through the Drachenlands. Similarly, the realm also shares the longest, most accessible borders with the Mistlands, meaning many adventurers pass through the realm on their way to the accursed realm of mist and shadow.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A cleric of Var is seeking guards to protect a caravan heading into Drachenlands. The merchant claims he is transporting grain. Unfortunately for the heroes, his cargo is actually a consignment of weapons destined for a rebel group. When this is discovered during a routine custom's inspection, the characters are accused of treason and sentenced to death. Far from the borders, the characters must try to escape the realm before they are hunted down and executed.

* Voivode Ramel is offering foreign heroes a chance to earn rewards by fighting against the orcs of the Giant's Steps. The big question is, is the warlord being open and honest or is he merely gathering potential threats in one place so he can kill them with a single stroke?

* A relative, a close friend, a former mentor, or some other individual important to the party has been reported arrested in the Drachenlands on charges of treason. The victim languishes in Angrad jail awaiting torture and sacrifice to Dargar. With the fortress heavily guarded and populated by the insane clergy of Dargar, stealth and cunning will be more useful than swords and courage.

DWARVEN CITIES

Beneath the mountains of Rassilon, in magnificent, sprawling cities carved out of the living rock, dwell the insular frost dwarves. Their realms are a mystery to other races, for dwarves do not welcome guests into their homes. Several of these mighty realms have been lost to outside forces, and two are currently besieged. It is these dark corridors that heroes are most likely to walk.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in dwarven cities.

* **Courage Nobles:** Courage nobles are military commanders. Every courage noble must have Knowledge (Battle) d6+ and the Command Edge. At the GM's discretion, the Noble Edge (with the above requirements) may be taken after character generation to represent promotion to courage noble status.

* **Nobility:** Dwarf characters who take the Noble Edge must decide if they are courage nobles (see above) or true nobles. For the latter, the player should discuss with their GM whether they are the child of a clan elder or the ranking noble. The former use the title ridder, the latter that of lendmann. Promotion through the ranks of true nobility is impossible unless the hero succeeds their parent.

ORIGIN OF THE DWARVES

Before the age of man, when giants and the fallen elves walked the surface of the world, Ertha shaped a race out of the living rock of the planet, breathing life into her creation. Ertha invited seven other gods to bestow gifts upon the new race. Eira turned their stony bodies to flesh so she could heal them, but gifted them a strong constitution in return, as befitted their origin; Hothar instilled in them social order and the ability to work together; Kenaz taught them how to build hearths; Maera tutored them in powerful magic and how to bind magic into physical objects; the Norns wove them into the tapestry of life; Tiw instructed them in how to create and wield weapons; and Var taught them the secret value of metals and gems, and how to negotiate contracts. Sigel was not invited to provide a gift, and so the dwarves had no resistance to sunlight—when exposed to rays of the sun the magic used to create them was negated, returning them to the stone from which they were born.

Quite how the frost dwarves evolved from this ancient stock is unknown, for the transformation occurred long ago and the ancient records are sketchy (some believe deliberately so). Most agree that curiosity as to the nature of the surface world was the key factor leading to their creation. One story concerns Thrym, who offered resistance to sunlight to a clan of dwarves. Thrym fulfilled his side of the bargain, though the dwarves would forever be uncomfortable except in the coldest realms. Because of this subterfuge, the dwarves became bitter enemies of frost giants. Another tale speaks of the Unknowable One, who offered them the gift of immunity to sunlight, but at the hidden cost of losing their ability to forge magic into physical object.

Regardless of how it occurred, the change did occur. The clans' curiosity to see what lay on the surface world was anathema to the majority of their race. The traitors, as they were known, were outlawed from the deeper depths of the world, banished close to the surface world they loved so much. The pure dwarves, known as moðsognar, sealed off the hallowed depths with magical doors, denying their former kin any hope of return. While frost dwarf cities extend many miles beneath the surface, their old home remains firmly off limits.

Whether this creation story is myth or fact shall perhaps never be known. That other races of dwarves inhabit the Underearth is largely unknown to the surface dwelling races. Perhaps if contact could be made with the survivors of the original dwarf race, the truth could be revealed. But the moðsognar have no wish to open dialogue with anyone, and refuse to discuss their former kin even among their own number.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Every dwarven city is an independent state ruled by a single noble. Ancient tradition dictates that only the ruler of Karad Khan be permitted to use the title of king. The ranks of other ruling nobles were set down long ago, and have remained unchanged ever since. Every city is made up of a number of clans.

These rulers always hold the rank of thegn or jarl. Regardless of their title, their children always use the title lendmann. They will retain this title until their family is deposed or they inherit their parent's office. Each clan within a city is also ruled by a noble. His title is always one step lower down the social chain than his lord, the minimum rank thus being hauld. The children of these clan elders hold the title ridder.

Lordship over a city is not hereditary. When the ruler dies or retires, the Noble Council gathers to appoint a successor. Although the new ruler is often a true noble, this is neither tradition nor law—any dwarf may be elected to govern. Courage nobles (see below) have been promoted to rule over a city on more than one occasion.

Ranking below the true nobility are courage nobles. They are the military commanders of a clan and are granted their title by their lord. Unlike hereditary nobles, the title does not pass to children, but reverts back to the bestower, who may hand it out as he sees fit on the death of the holder. The family loses its status, though there is no shame in this, and reverts back to its original standing.

The position comes with several key benefits, including the right to have an entourage of bodyguards. These form the key element of the clan's standing army. Indeed, it is a rare warrior who is not attached to a noble household. Courage nobles inherit one or more parts of the clan's mines, which are theirs to do with as they please so long as they hold the title. A portion of the income, variable depending on the status of the individual, is kept to pay his retinue, while the rest goes to the central coffers. A typical courage noble can expect to keep around a fifth of the income. Courage nobles may fly their own standard, hold their own court, and dispense justice among their followers as they see fit.

It is important to note that courage nobles do not lead a clan. They control a portion of the military within a clan. Small clans may have just one or two nobles, whereas the largest clans may have a score or more. Courage nobles may hold any noble title below that of their lord. To differentiate them from true nobles, they add the prefix Ur- to their title (from the dwarven for "courage").

Below the courage nobles are the master craftsmen, whose skill distinguishes them from the bulk of the craftsman class. One cannot be born a master craftsman; one must achieve the position through hard work and recognition of one's social superiors. As with courage nobles, the position is not hereditary, though most fathers ensure at least one child followers in their footsteps and adopts the family craft.

Next are the clergy. They are the first of the traditional social classes, those based on occupation rather than merit or birthright.

BEARD ETIQUETTE

Male dwarves are expected to wear beards and a dwarf is considered an adult when he grows a full beard.

The style of beard and its length denotes many factors in society. A good rule of thumb is the longer the beard, the more important the dwarf. Of course, beard lengths can be hard to judge on sight and dwarves dislike other races trying to measure their facial hair. A non-dwarf should be very careful when using beard length to judge social rank. Calling a dwarf "my lord" may be amusing to a commoner, but addressing a jarl as a ridder is downright insulting. Even within the same social class, beard lengths vary according to status.

As for style, this is actually easier to spot. Nobles wear five-stranded beards bound gold and silver threads. Clerics have four braids, three to honor the three major gods and one for the other deities collectively. Leather straps used to fix the braids are marked with the holy symbol of the cleric's deity. Mages also sport four braids. These are adorned with mystic runes.

Warriors wear their beards braided into three separate strands. Courage nobles do not wear the five strands of the nobility, but the triple plaits of their profession. Huscarls and other soldiers wear green straps, whereas nobles sport blue ones.

Craftsmen have forked beards, which makes it easier to throw the beard over one's shoulder when working. There is no differentiation between trades based on beard style, but most craftsmen wear runes denoting their craft branded onto their leather ties. Miners wear their beards untethered and bushy, which helps keep dust and small chippings out of their mouths. Other commoners wear a single braid.

Outsiders should be very careful about insulting a dwarf's beard, for great reverence is attached to them and touching one without permission is insulting. Cutting or burning it, even unintentionally, can lead to violent retribution.

Social status is bestowed on the individual, his spouse, and children until they reach adulthood and enter whatever social class fate has in store for them. A priest may hold this rank while his father is a lowly miner and his son a courage noble, for instance.

Ranking just below the clerics are the mages. Rune mages always rank higher than other magicians.

Below the wizards are the warriors. Although every dwarf male is expected to serve in the militia, only professional soldiers, those who serve a noble, belong here.

The craftsmen, a social class that covers any profession that actually produces a tangible, saleable finished product from raw materials, come below the warriors. Finally there are the masses, everybody from miners to apprentices who have yet to learn a trade to entertainers. Smelters, who produce metal ingots from raw ore, count among the craftsmen social class.

GOVERNMENT

By tradition, nobles cannot rule alone, and few have the expertise necessary to control every aspect of the domain anyway. Instead, the noble lets his advisors run the domain under his overall guidance. For the most part, he avoids interfering in day-to-day affairs and concentrates on the larger picture.

Whether a jarl ruling a twenty-clan kingdom or a thegn with just one clan to control, dwarf rulers rely on their councilors to keep things running smoothly. The ruler retains the power of veto of any decision they make, but most are content to let the government do its job.

By tradition, a dwarf may only sit on one council. In this way, dwarves reduce the chance of a single individual influencing multiple spheres, as well as giving other dwarves a chance to prove their mettle. The four advisory councils are presented below.

Noble Council: In any domain where there is more than one clan there is a noble council. Comprised of every clan elder, they meet every new moon to discuss matter affecting the entire domain. Collectively, they are the ruler's right hand man, keeping him isolated from petty issues.

Military Council: Every courage noble is entitled to sit on this council. They discuss upcoming military endeavors, set militia training schedules, check weapon stocks, hear reports on enemy activity, and so forth.

Religious Council: The religious council is formed from the high priests of every accepted religion within the domain.

Guild Council: Formed from the master craftsmen of the domain, the guild council handles all matters of craft production and trade.

In addition to the councils, the ruler retains his individual councilors, such as a treasurer, chamberlain, and lawspeaker, as well as diplomats and other courtiers. Members of his military retinue are always present at his side, even in the most secret meetings. Such individuals' honor and integrity is beyond reproach.

EDUCATION

For the first five years the child is kept at home, surrounded only by its family. The strong familial bond that permeates dwarven society is formed during this time.

Language skills develop around the same time as the child walks. The child is taught basic words and, more importantly, the names of his relatives and parts of his lineage. This is repeated parrot fashion until the child grasps the basics. Once the child has a sense of who its family are, it is allowed to mix with other children. Playing with other children not only develops social skills and a sense of kinship with clan members, but it also helps boost the child's immune system by introducing it to new environments.

Children play rough and tumble games that would scare a human parent witless. Few suffer any real injuries as compared to more frail humans, who would undoubtedly break a limb or two during these friendly games.

Schooling begins at 14, when the child learns the history, culture, and laws of his race. Schooling continues during adolescence, but the curriculum changes. Between 25 and 30 the child is introduced to basic craft skills with a heavy emphasis on stone and metalworking skills. Tuition begins with theory, and only when the child nears the end of this period of his schooling is he allowed to develop his practical skills. Recognition of the value and properties of stones, metals, and gems is also conducted during this period.

Regardless of sex, all children must undergo military training for three years. Initial training involves stamina building, with the child taught to move quickly wearing armor, though no actual training in its use is given, and bearing heavy loads. What seems savage by human standards is a fundamental survival skill for dwarves, who rely on armor and endurance to make up for their lack of numbers. Basic weapon practice is not designed to teach the youngster how to become a killing machine, but to develop a sense of recognition and prepare him for the hard life ahead.

For the last seven years before adulthood, the child can either return to more traditional schooling, with only periods of crafting and military training each week, or become an apprentice. For those who remain at school, advanced history and geology, geography, engineering, languages, politics, and a myriad of other subjects are available. By the time the child reaches adulthood, he has enough basic knowledge to survive in the world.

Rune mages and clerics are no exception to the basic rules. Except on rare occasions, those with the talent to learn the ancient ways receive training starting at age 14 and continue through the rest of their youth (starting rune mages may only learn one actual rune, but they must still study the others). Regardless of the runes they learn or god they honor, regular military training remains compulsory.

RELIGION

While dwarves honor most deities as and when the need arises, their core religious beliefs are centered on a very small number of gods and goddesses.

Except in the besieged city of Karad Marn, Ertha's cult is the largest and most powerful. The wife of Tiw, she is the senior deity in

their worldview, creator of the race, and the great provider of mineral wealth. Regardless of their profession, every dwarf, even clerics of other deities, is considered a lay member of the cult and attends important ceremonies. Dwarves see nothing strange in clerics honoring two gods, though they are devoted to just their patron.

Tiw usually ranks second. Although frost dwarves are not belligerent by nature, they have weathered orc and giant attacks for millennia. It was he who taught the dwarves how to defend their homes.

Niht, whom dwarves believe is male, ranks third most popular. Niht's more murderous aspects are never venerated, for "he" is viewed only as the Father of Darkness. As such, worship is more lip service than true devotion.

Scaetha, a child of Ertha and Tiw, receives very little mainstream worship, though as protector of the dead she is honored through funeral services and prayers to the ancestors. Only in Karad Dahn is worship more commonplace, and then only to ensure the ghosts that haunt the ruins are placated and their bones left undisturbed by servants of Hela.

Hothar is popular in Karad Marn. While most dwarves are lawabiding (or at least not oathbreakers) by nature, those of the orc-besieged city have sworn sacred oaths to liberate their home.

FUNERARY PRACTICES

Death is always a great mystery, for what truly lies beyond the mortal life can be learned only by dying. While dwarves lament their mortality, they do not fear death, for as the old saying goes, "He who fears death is already dead, for he is afraid to live." So long as a dwarf has lived well, there is nothing to fear in death.

Dwarves understand that the body is temporal and the soul eternal, but they treat the corpses of their fallen with great respect. No matter where he falls, a dwarf is taken back to his family, where the corpse is prepared for death. He is dressed in his finest clothes or armor, complete with weapon, his beard and hair groomed by grieving relatives, and his wounds (where applicable) sewn closed. He then lies in state for seven days, in honor of the seven great cities. During this time, family and friends pray over the body, say farewells, and leave small gifts. Although dwarves do not believe in grave goods *per se*, the tokens are ones of remembrance, not for use in the afterlife.

On the morning of the eighth day, the body is taken to the temple the deceased favored most in life, where the clerics say prayers and sing ancient hymns to aid the passing of the soul, which at this point still resides in the body. For this reason, dwarves react badly to creatures that feast on the dead or seek to mutilate them.

After the temple ceremony, the corpse is taken to the catacombs that lie beneath the city. Nobles are usually buried in stone mausoleums, where their remains lie for eternity. Poorer dwarves must make do with a wall niche in one of the common cemeteries. Because dwarves do not believe in physical reincarnation and rarely gift their dead with valuable items, they do not protect their dead with traps or magic. Indeed, any metallic offerings are taken away and sacrificed back to the earth as a final act of honoring the dead.

MILITARY

Dwarven armies are well motivated, well equipped, and well led. The realm's ruler serves as supreme commander, the clan elders are the senior commanders, and the courage nobles the unit commanders.

The bulk of a city's standing army is made up of huscarls, professional soldiers loyal to their ruling noble. Generally speaking, the majority of huscarls within a clan answer to the clan elder. His courage nobles are then awarded a lesser number of huscarls as befits their rank. Although these units are known as companies, they vary in strength from a mere handful to many hundreds.

As well as huscarls, most dwarven holds boast two elite forces. More details on both types can be found in the *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*.

The most numerous (though they are found in far less number than huscarls) are the Hall Guard. They are the first line of defense, doughty warriors whose task is to delay any attacking force long enough for the army to muster. Heavily armored and carrying large shields, they are a wall of living steel through which an enemy must penetrate if it is to threaten the city.

The rarest elite troops are the giant killers. Despite the name, they are trained to fight any large creatures, from giant centipedes to colossal dragons. They work alone or in small units.

The cults also serve with the military in times of need. Separated from clan politics and duty, paladins are answerable first to their temple, and then their mortal lord. Regardless of in which clan's Hall they are stationed, they take orders only from their religious superiors.

Although every dwarf is taught rudimentary martial skills, only around 10-20% of the population are members of the militia. In order to ensure cohesive strategies, all militia members are assigned to a noble. They train with the noble's huscarls on a regular basis.

Huscarls and most elite soldiers favor chain mail, medium shields, and axes. The preferred missile weapon is the crossbow, the flat trajectory of the bolt being better suited to indoor combat. Throwing axes are popular for similar reasons.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Trade with other races is something most dwarves do begrudgingly. Exports almost always take the form of metal ingots, metal goods, armor, and weapons. In return, dwarves purchase icewood and timber as bulk commodities, and smaller quantities of cloth, pottery, food, and such like.

Dwarves do not give discounts, not do they haggle when selling (though they do when buying). Unfortunately, this practice has proven detrimental over the ages, as it encourages humans to start their own mines. Despite the loss of trade and the stripping of metal by other races, dwarves hold true to their tradition.

Within a realm, the nobles control mineral production. Ore is sold to the smelters, who extract the metal and in turn sell it to the craftsmen and armorers. Finished goods are taken to the central stores, where they are evaluated and priced according to ancient rules. From here, goods are sold to the smaller clan warehouses, or markets, where they are marked up and sold to the consumer.

Clan leaders receive a portion of income from each market, and in turn pay a tax to the realm's ruler. A portion of all ore is sold to merchants for sale outside the realm, with the seller keeping the profit. Strict export quotas limit the quantities of each metal that can be sold according to its rarity.

Possessing an ordered society, it is only natural dwarves pay tax. Taxes are usually paid to the clan or realm leader. By law, maintenance of tunnels, water systems, and defenses within a clan's holdings are the responsibility of the clan ruler. Since the ruling noble also governs his own clan, he must also maintain his holdings. Nobles also equip their huscarls, pay their room and board, must ensure mines operate safely, and so forth. In addition, they must pay their non-craft workers. Miners, for instance, are paid directly by their employer based on production quotas and the value of the goods they excavate.

ARCHITECTURE

Although dwarves possess no special ability to see in darkness, they prefer to live underground.

Most realms are located beneath the highest peaks in a mountain range. Access is limited to usually only one pass, which still requires an arduous climb with an ever present risk of being caught in storms or buried beneath avalanches and rock falls. During the winter months, many settlements are cut off from the surface races, which suits the inhabitants.

Frost dwarves maintain small bunker complexes along the path, both for defense and for housing visiting guests on the long march. Only a few are ever shown to visitors; the majority remaining hidden

and permanently manned. Inside are barracks, armories, kitchens, guardrooms, and sometimes there are small workshops for making repairs. Access is gained via secret doors carved into the rock face.

As one near the entrance, the pass opens (either naturally or excavated) into a plateau or ridge dotted with small buildings. Some are guardhouses and warehouses, but most are designed for visitors. Dwarves seldom welcome strangers into their realms. Beyond the plateau, built into sheer rock faces, stand massive gates decorated with inlays of Maerathril and runes of ancient power, a symbol of dwarven power and wealth. Many of the runes have become so worn their magic is lost, but those that survive contain powerful charms to keep the gates closed and safe from attack. Even giants have difficulty battering down such doors.

The first part of any city is always a military zone. Hostile forces can often be held here long enough that they retreat, usually with heavy losses. While the passage to the main city seems safe, hidden guardrooms, barracks, armories, and traps are plentiful. Most visitors never see these workings and consider dwarven strongholds poorly defended compared to the subterranean lairs of orcs. Such misinformation serves the dwarves well. Soldiers are posted to defend areas on a rotating basis, with each clan being responsible for the safety of one or more parts of the realm.

Each clan maintains its own Hall, a term which refers not to a single chamber but a sprawling network of tunnels and rooms that make up the clan's living area. While most Halls have a central avenue, smaller tunnels lead off to houses, barracks, storehouses, wells, and other features. As always, hidden guardrooms and traps protect these areas from intruders.

Beyond the Halls are the workshops, those these are usually spread over many levels to reduce pollution and stop a single determined attack destroying the entire productivity of the stronghold. Vast storehouses come next, though these are reached via concealed side passages. Everything from food to gold bars is kept here under heavy guard.

Toward the core of the city are the main temples, though smaller shrines and chapels exist in the housing areas. Clerics and higher status member of society have chambers in this territory, even if they reside among their clan. Lastly, one reaches the heart of the city, in which are located the ruler's throne room and private chambers, the council chambers, the vast treasuries, and so forth.

Agriculture may not be a renowned dwarven trait, but they have to eat. While shepherds maintain herds of goats and mountain sheep, farmers look after vast caverns of vegetable crops. For the most part these are fungi and mosses, for most vegetables require sunlight, which is lacking in dwarven realms.

The mines, which comprise as much as half the area of the city, lie deep beneath the core living areas. Dozens or hundreds of miles of passageways and tunnels zigzag through the stone, following the veins of minerals. Many tunnels are disused, having been mined dry, but new ones are always appearing.

Passageways vary in size considerably. The main avenues through the city may be as wide as fifty feet with arched ceilings towering dozens of feet overhead. Columns provide support and decoration to otherwise bland corridors. In the main habitation and housing areas, passageways narrow to ten feet with ceilings of similar height. Arches are again prominent, but columns less so, as buttresses support the walls. Oil lamps provide light, though little traveled areas are kept dark.

Only in the mines can one find truly narrow passages, for weak veins may only require a single dwarf, who works in a five foot passage, often kneeling or crouching in the low workspace. Of course, large veins may extend over several hundred feet in height, with the entire area opened into a vast cavern with workers using scaffolding to work every available inch of the rock face.

MAJOR LOCALES

The major dwarven realms known in Rassilon are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. This section expands that information for a select few fortress-cities (as opposed to smaller settlements) so as to provide the GM with more adventure material.

KARAD AZGUL

Besieged by orcs for two decades, the dwarves of Karad Azgul have drastically retrained their small army, placing a focus on a strong defense. Large numbers of huscarls have been trained as Hall Guards, the city now boasting 600 sturdy warriors. This has left them with just 100 huscarls for offensive actions. Twenty rune mages and 3,000 permanent militia back up the army. Added to that are a further 6,000 reserves who could be called up in an emergency, though doing so would seriously cripple the city's infrastructure. The reserves have only rudimentary combat training, being craftsmen and miners for the most part.

Although a large army of orcs and goblins has penetrated the lower levels, the dwarves have held strong, the switch to defensive tactics proving a wise decision. Dwarf numbers are being whittled down each day, but new recruits are being trained to replace the fallen and Thegn Jorvik is confident he can hold back the orcs for many decades to come.

What Thegn Jorvik does not know is that the orcs are tunneling toward the city. Progress is painstakingly slow, but the orcs creep closer with each passing day. Should they penetrate the upper levels, it is likely the city would fall. King Nagrat could then pull soldiers from his southern flank and send them north, tipping the balance of power against Vestmark in his favor.

Were a group of heroes to discover the existence of the tunnels, perhaps from an orc captive, and thwart the scheme, the stubborn dwarf lord just might be convinced to end the city's isolationist policy and openly throw his armies into the fray. An aggressive foe on the orc's southern flank would likely cause them to divert troops from elsewhere, granting Vestmark the small but much needed opening it needs to launch a fresh offensive.

KARAD MARN

The battle to liberate Karad Marn from orc invaders has ground on for six decades, the tide switching first one way and then the other. Currently, the dwarves hold around a third of the city.

The city currently boasts a population of just under 18,000 dwarves under the command of Thegn Rungar Hammerhand. Of these, a full 12,000 are classed as warriors. Huscarls account for 4,000 of the soldiers, Hall Guards a further 500, and paladins of various faiths some 250. A little over a quarter are natives of Karad Marn—most are reinforcements sent from Karad Zor. The remainder are technically militia, though years of bitter fighting in the tunnels have honed their combat skills, and they are better equipped than standard reserves. Added to these forces are 600 taiga elves recently arrived from Rimeholm and 400 mercenaries.

The crusade recently suffered a bitter blow. Hauld Austri Giantbane, a clan elder and renowned giant killer, was killed by goblins while on a mission to recruit mercenaries (see adventure *S1 The Siege of Watchgap Fort*). Deprived of their leader and with no clear line of succession, the clan has splintered into rival factions, weakening its collective military might and distracting it from the greater problem.

Thegn Rungar's biggest problem is one of logistics—feeding and equipping such a large permanent army in mountainous terrain while fighting a constant war is not easy. While kinfolk in Karad Zor send supply trains, the vast distance involved, close to 1000 miles as the axe flies, means shipments are far from regular and are limited in the quantities they can transport.

While the dwarves have managed to recover some stocks of gold and metal to purchase supplies, the nearest trade routes end in Shattered Moor. (Rimeholm supplies what it can, but the elves' hunter-gatherer lifestyle limits what they can spare.) Between the markets and the dwarf city are several hundred miles of uninhabited terrain. The thegn is currently working to shorten his supply lines (see Warriors' Landing, p. xxx). Until then, the noble is forced to use a goodly portion of his army as guards to safeguard against orc attacks. Vast sums have also been promised to mercenaries, though only a handful of companies have made the arduous trek to the very extreme of the High Winterlands so far. Even so, they are another drain on the coffers.

ERTHA'S REALM

Skalds' repertoires are full of stories concerning Ertha's Realm, also known as the Underearth and Erthaheim. Tales of a subterranean realm of vast caverns all interlinked by countless miles of tunnels, warnings of a race of exiled elves who seek nothing more than total domination of the surface world, and yarns involving great cities with populations in the thousands, echo around inns and drinking halls the length and breadth of Rassilon.

This section explores the truth and opens up underground exploration beyond the confines of the "dungeon." Rules for subterranean exploration can be found in *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*.

DISPELLING THE MYTHS

Sadly, almost skalds' tales relating to Ertha's Realm all are fanciful, a mixture of half-truths and unchecked imagination.

Ertha's Realm is not an interconnected continent-spanning domain. It is true that every cave, whether a single hollow or a mammoth sprawl stretching for dozens of miles, is considered part of Erthaheim. A small few do connect to form larger systems, but most often the tunnels between them are inaccessible, being river courses or minute cracks. In most cases cave systems are isolated from each other, mere pockets inside the earth. One can most definitely not walk from the Icewall down to Sutmark without ever seeing sunlight, despite what one might hear in the taverns.

While talk of impressive cities and subterranean empires is commonplace, the truth is less exciting. The Underearth is populated by many species, but few form large communities. Orcs and goblins dwell here, though neither is truly adapted for total darkness—caves simply serve as convenient lairs and require little to no construction work. Bears make their homes in caves as well, though they rarely travel far underground. Several species of giant spiders, cliff giants, bats (giant and regular), small lizards, giant centipedes, gargoyles, and other such creatures also dwell in the darkness, but again their lairs are scattered and rarely are such monsters found in the darkest depths.

However, certain tales hold more than a grain of truth. Two species of fey, kobolds and pechs, are adapted to live in total darkness, though they are most often found in mines. Earth elementals rumble through the sunless realm, transported to the mortal world through elemental loci. Fungals, crop raiders on the surface, tend caverns full of unusual fungi. Shadow trolls, a species which abhor sunlight, are perhaps the most terrifying denizens, for they are well adapted to utter darkness and possess the regenerative powers of their surface cousins.

Stories of evil dark elves are rife, and, while there is some truth to the tales, the name is based on a misunderstanding. In Auld Saxa, the world "elf" was applied to any mysterious creature. Døkkálfar ("dark elves") and svartálfar ("black elves"), two common terms bandied around by subterranean explorers, refer to the same creature, a type of dwarf. Distantly related to frost dwarves, these mean-spirited creatures live in rudimentary communities where metalworking in unknown. They rarely venture to the surface, for sunlight is deadly to them, and they certainly have no plans for global conquest.

And there is talk of things so ancient and evil they have no name dwelling in the fathomless depths. No one has ever given a clear description, for those who stop to gawk never return to the surface world of sun and open skies.

Yet knowing the truth does not make Ertha's Realm a boring place. It remains a wondrous place to explore and takes "dungeon crawling" to a new level.

ATMOSPHERE

While a cave system shares many similarities with a "dungeon," such as passages equating to corridors and caves equating to rooms, Ertha's Realm is far less mundane than even the most wondrous dungeon. It is the GM's role to get this across to the players through his descriptions of the subterranean expanse.

The Underearth is a realm of utter darkness. Whereas dungeon explorers might well be able to guess a room's dimensions upon entering, those delving into the depths of the earth might be faced with a cavern hundreds of yards across. Outside their feeble sphere of light the darkness presses ominously, concealing the presence of pitfalls, tunnels, and monsters. Should the light fail, the darkness hits home like a hammer blow, instantly depriving the heroes of their primary sense and disorienting them.

In some areas there is utter silence, making it easier to detect approaching foes and harder to sneak up on them. Whispers reverberate like thunder, shouts become deafening, and echoes make communication between separated groups difficult. In others, waterfalls, turbulent rivers, or the steady dripping of water from high above effectively mask sounds, leaving the characters subject to ambush. Here one must shout oneself hoarse just be to heard by a comrade a few feet away.

Surface ruins are rarely that large. While the heroes may grumble about walking a few hundred feet only to encounter a dead end, those venturing into the earth goddess' domain may walk, crawl, or climb for miles, only to find the passage ends suddenly.

Dozens of tunnels at different height levels may branch off from a single chamber, making it almost impossible to ensure no enemies are creeping up from behind. Trying to draw a map is painfully

READY TO EXPLORE?

Exploring Ertha's Realm is not the same as exploring a dungeon or ruin. It is an entirely different environment, complete with its own dangers. Before you set foot beneath ground, make sure you're equipped to survive.

Useful Skills: The caverns of Ertha's Realm are not worked "dungeons." Climbing and Swimming are vital skills if one is going to overcome the many hazards and obstacles. Healing, Notice, and Survival are also important.

Useful Spells: The following spells are among the more useful for surviving in Ertha's Realm: *boost/lower trait* (Agility, Vigor, Climbing, and Swimming), *bridge, environmental protection (water), feast, fly, growth/shrink* (mainly the latter), *leaping, light, refuge, sanctuary, teleport, wall walker, wandering senses, water walk, wilderness step*.

Useful Equipment: Most of the equipment listed here is standard adventuring gear, but it's worth double checking your party is properly tooled up—there aren't any shops in Erthaheim.

As a minimum, the party needs the following gear: backpack, climbing gear, crowbar, firewood, flint and steel, flasks, grappling hook, hammer, lantern, oil, pick, rations, rope (and plenty of it), waterproof satchel or scroll cases, waterskins, and whale blubber.

Recommended Viewing: Players and GMs should really watch *The Descent* and *Sanctum* before venturing into the unknown. Plot asides, they graphically portray the natural hazards of spelunking and the sorts of conditions found in Ertha's Realm.

slow, for elevation plays a crucial role, and while accurately pacing 20 yards down a straight corridor is easy, plotting a passage that rises and falls, twists and turns, is not so simple.

While some caves are vast, much of the time the heroes will be in claustrophobic corridors, forced to squeeze through narrow gaps that seem intent on crushing the explorer for his trespass. Armor, beloved of all adventurers, must frequently be removed in order to fit through a narrow gap, depriving the character of his protection.

Slick, glittering walls must be scaled or descended; flooded sumps must be traversed; gaps over dizzying falls crossed; narrow ledges over bottomless pits inched around with backs pressed to the walls; forests of towering fungus navigated without disturbing their spores. Slippery floors force travelers to advance slowly, and deep, dark, cold waters flood many passages, forcing those who wish to advance deeper to swim into the unknown with just a lungful of air between life and death.

Water is often plentiful, but it is not always potable. Mineral salts and toxic chemicals taint much of the water, and even boiling it cannot remove all the taint. Near the surface one can find rats, bats, small lizards, and edible fungi. Deeper down, food becomes virtually non-existent unless one happens to find a forest tended by fungals. Similarly, there is no firewood for cooking fires or branches to make torches. Heroes expecting to have an extended stay below ground need to ensure they are well equipped, or doom awaits.

These many hazards and natural obstacles do not bode well for injured party members—any injury causes impairment in a realm that punishes those not at their peak. Help can be a long way away with magic, miracles, or a very talented healer. Worse, trying to maneuver an incapacitated comrade back to the surface can take as much as ten times longer as the descent, placing a heavy drain on provisions.

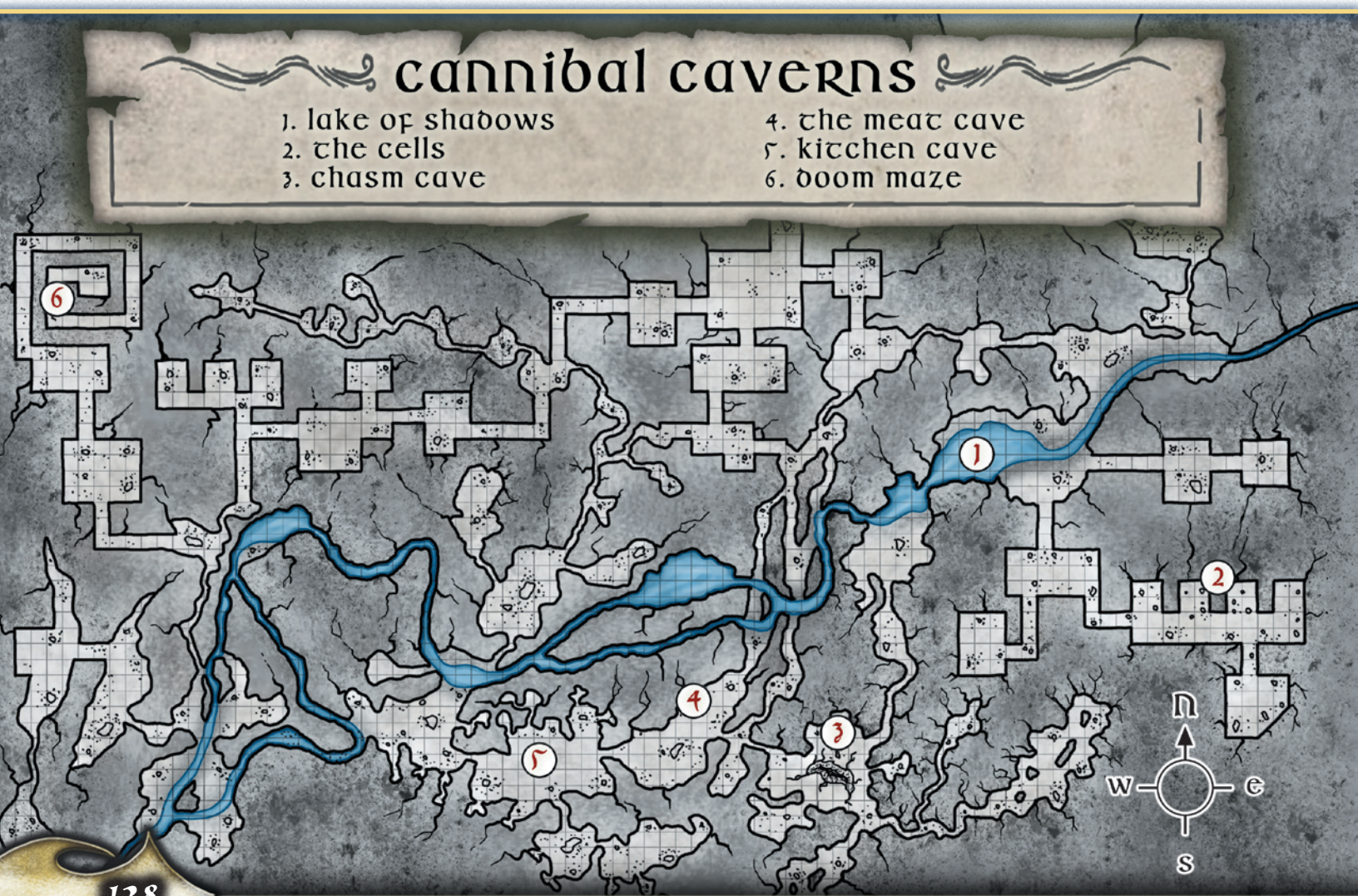
MAJOR LOCALES

THE ABANDONED CITY

Far beneath the surface is a magnificent city. It is not a city as men would know it, with building clustered together behind a defensive wall. It takes the form of passageways and chambers, some natural but many carved by expert hands to a high degree of precision. The city was not undefended, for a colossal unadorned door of unknown metal marks its entrance. Alas, it seems that not even this mighty protection was sufficient to safeguard the inhabitants, for the door has been ripped from its mountings by some immense force. At the far end of the city stands another door of similar construction. This one, though, is protected by runes of power unknown to any race save the city's builders.

Almost as ancient as time itself, the city is built on a grand scale. Colossal towers rise up from the floors of immense chambers and caverns, spiral stairs circling around them to allow access to higher and lower parts of the city. Great machines with no obvious source of power or purpose rise and fall in steady rhythm, occasionally belching great gouts of steam and fire. Immense statues, some free-standing, others carved in bas-relief, stand as silent sentinels to a forgotten age.

And yet, there is a marked simplicity running alongside these features. Living chambers are remarkably small, undecorated, and contain stone beds. That someone lived here is obvious, but no traces of kitchens or storerooms can be seen. Nor are there any hearths or obvious recreational facilities. The great statues, which would shame even the decadent inhabitants of Imperial City in its heyday with



their scale, are not clad in the garb of kings and warriors, but in the leather apron common to craftsmen. None of the statues are colored and the aprons extend to the floor. Save for the lack of martial gear, they look very much like frost dwarves. The city is devoid of writing, and thus the statues are all explorers have to go on.

The city was once home to a colony of moðsognar (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*), the only race that understands how to permanently work magic into material objects. Alas for those who discover the city, the magic that could be removed was carried away during the exodus. Some artifacts, such as the great machines, were left behind, for they would run for untold millennia without needing outside intervention. Explorers can walk away with undecorated bowls, plates, tankards, and hammers cast from unknown metal, but there is little gold or silver (either as coins or worked goods).

Though wielders of great magic, there are things in the Underearth even this most ancient of races fears. When one such horror broke into the city, the moðsognar were reluctantly forced to abandon their home. Having built a new city, and leaving few secrets behind, they have never bothered to return. In time they might, but time is something the moðsognar have in abundance. Until then, the abandoned city is home to competing tribes of primitive døkkálfar and vicious shadow trolls (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion* for both races).

Blind Spider Cavern

As the name implies, this cavern systems is home to a species of sightless spiders. Unfortunately, not only are the spiders of a giant variety, they can sense the movement of potential prey and threats through the hairs covering their bodies up to 24 yards (12") away. They are distantly related to web-throwing spiders, and also have a venomous bite (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion* for rules on creating variant spiders). Aside from their blindness, the key difference is how they use their webs. The sticky net remains attached to the spider by a thin yet strong thread (Toughness 8). When prey is ensnared, the spider reels in the thread and quickly injects it with its venom.

Cannibal Caverns

The caverns that lie beneath the Bleak Hills have long had an evil reputation, even among the cult of Foldardróttann. Surface dwellers avoid camping near caves, believing that a terrible evil comes forth at night.

The region is the subject of two different folk tales. One says that the Liche Priest hid servants deep beneath the earth as the war turned against him. Another says that a group of villagers were tricked by a charismatic cleric (some say he was evil, others a misguided follower of the Unknowable One) into venturing into the bowels of Erthaheim, whereupon they perished. Their angry spirits still haunt the caverns, unable to reach the Afterlife until their physical remains are discovered and buried properly. Like most legends, these stories are based on a kernel of truth, albeit it one corrupted by centuries of retelling.

During the Blizzard War, several villages nestled against the base of the hills abandoned their surface homes in the face of the advancing Hellfrost horde. Gathering their belongings, they sought refuge in the dark caverns, where the raging coldfire of Hellfrost dragons could not reach them and orcs would not bother to search. While they escaped the dragons' wrath, they became trapped, the entrances sealed above them by landslides. Many died of starvation, being unskilled at surviving in the harsh realm. Those who survived did so by resorting to cannibalism. Five centuries on, the descendants of the original villagers still occupy the caverns.

Their physical form, while still human, is notably different from their surface-dwelling kin. Their eyes are large and dark, adapted to seeing in dim lighting but easily blinded even by lanterns; their skin is a pale as a corpse, and feels cold and slimy to the touch, like that of an eel; and they are completely bald. Their language is a heavily debased form of Auld Saxa. With resources scarce and their environment harsh, they have developed a faith that merges aspects of Dargar and Ertha.

Fungi of the Underearth

* **Bread Balls:** A spherical, gray fungus closely related and nearly identical to "brown water" fungus. A Survival roll is required to tell them apart. Bread balls can be eaten raw, having a similar texture and equivalent nutritional content to bread. Fungals grow large crops of bread balls, along with other edible fungi.
* **"Brown Water" Fungus:** Anyone ingesting this fungus must make a Vigor roll or suffer severe diarrhea and be Fatigued. A Vigor roll may be made every four hours, with success curing the problem. Fatigue is recovered once the diarrhea ends and the victim gets a square meal and a quart of water.
* **Glow Moss:** Not technically a fungus. Glow moss is bioluminescent. A pound of it sheds Dim light (–1) in a Small Burst Template. If picked, it retains this property for only one hour.
* **Matchstalks:** When dried, the stalks burn like a torch for two hours.
* **Milkcap:** Milkcaps store large quantities of water in their caps. The milky-white fluid is released by pulverizing the fungus. Every 2 pounds of fungus provides 1 pint of water.
* **Pipecap:** When dried, the stalks can be smoked as a pipeleaf substitute. The smoke tastes odd but is not harmful.
* **Smokecaps:** Dried smokecaps produce a lot of thick smoke when burnt. A pound produces a Small Burst Template of smoke on the first round. This expands to a Medium Burst Template on the second round, and a Large Burst Template the third round. The template remains this size for two more rounds before dissipating. Strong winds reduce this time accordingly.
* **Tinderstalk:** The fibrous stalks of this toadstool, when dried, make excellent tinder. A related fungus, stalkwood, burns like firewood once dried.

The Dark Sea

Water is plentiful in Erthaheim. Most caves have wet walls, the result of rainwater trickling through yards or mile of rock, and icy streams and rivers are not uncommon. Indeed, there are watercourses whose waters flow only beneath the ground. Unbeknownst to most casual travelers in the sunless realm, there are also large bodies of water.

Clerics of Foldardróttann exploring deep beneath the central southern Hearthlands have had their southerly exploration halted by a vast sea whose water have never been illuminated or warmed by the sun.

Much of the time the water laps against the vertical rock face. However, there are small sections of the shore with pebble beaches, onto which boats can be pulled. A few hardy explorers have sailed more than 300 miles south across the underground sea, but so far the opposite shore has eluded them. The height of the ceiling varies between 200 feet and half a mile (proven using *fly* spells), while the depths extend as much as 1,000 feet (proven using *environmental protection (water)* and *boost Swimming* spells).

The lack of deep penetration of the sea is not because of a lack of rations, as many might think—*feast* spells make carrying extensive rations unnecessary, the sea water is palatable, being only mildly salty compared to the surface oceans, and edible blind fish are plentiful in the cold water. The great problem so far has actually been the weather. Howling winds, crashing lightning, and rolling thunder continuously tear through the great cavern in which the sea lies, relentlessly battering small boats and defeating all magical attempts to lessen their effect or propel a craft through the gale. The presence of hostile air elementals, including the mighty storm and thunderstorm variants, has proven a further barrier. Many clerics of Foldardróttann believe there is a huge air elemental locus here, possibly a true gateway to the elemental realm of air. Only further exploration will verify their claims.

The Dark Sea actually extends far south of Rassilon's coast, its opposite shore lying beneath central Al-Shirkuh, the desert realm that lies to the south. Certain caves in the Firebarrier Mountains and Mountains of Malice wind down to the far shore.

FUNGUS PATCHES

Fungus patches use the rules for plant patches (see *Hellfrost Expansion*).

* **Burnbloom:** Excretes a powerful acid. Creatures who walk through a burnbloom patch suffer 2d4 damage at the end of their movement. Assuming the hero is walking, all damage is taken to the legs.
* **Flash Fungus:** When a creature enters a patch of flash fungus it throws up a cloud of spores in a 1" square. These ignite on contact with flame, producing a brilliant flash. Any creatures within a Medium Burst Template of the fungus must make an Agility roll or be Shaken as it is momentarily blinded.
* **Glue Cap:** This small fungus grows in thick clumps. When crushed (such as when walked upon) it exudes a strong gluelike substance. Movement through glue cap is difficult ground. Any character who remains stationary in a glue cap patch automatically becomes stuck. He must make a Strength roll as an action before he can move.
* **Slick Mold:** Found growing on floors, slick mold is extremely slippery. It counts as difficult ground. A character who runs through a patch and rolls a 1 on his running die slips and falls prone on the first patch of slick mold he enters. Fungals treat it as normal terrain.
* **Witch Bane:** The spores of this toadstool inhibit spellcasting by a preventing a mage weaving the magical threads. Anyone entering a square containing it must make a Smarts roll or be unable to invoke magic (but not miracles) for 1d6 rounds.

ERTHA'S SAUNA

As a rule of thumb, the temperature inside cave systems, assuming one is away from the entrance and the walls are not made of ice, hovers around 50°F (10°F) all year round—chilly, but not cold enough to require specialist winter clothing. In Ertha's Sauna, though, the temperature is closer to 90°F (32°F). Hot steam fills the air and every surface is slick with moisture. Explorers must be wary of the many pools, for some descend hundreds of feet and the water is scalding hot. Periodically, these erupt as geysers (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*).

Few clerics of Kenaz or fire elementalists enjoy spelunking, but those who have heard of the cavern theorize there must be a powerful fire locus somewhere nearby. The presence of steam elementals, and occasionally fire elementals, would seem to confirm this.

FUNGUS CAVERNS

Countless miles of tunnels and caverns exist below the Jagged Peaks, etched over eons by the slow trickle of water through the soft limestone. Some are accessible to hardy explorers, reached through caves or wide fissures. Others are completely cut off from the world above, their geological wonders unseen by surface dwellers and, on occasion, even by the creatures that burrow beneath the feet of men.

The Fungus Caverns once fell into the latter category. During the Blizzard War, the magic wrought in the region caused sinkholes to form in the thin crust covering a network of immense caverns and winding tunnels, allowing sunlight to penetrate into the bowels of the earth for the first time since Ertha carved them from the living rock. Where weak shafts of sunlight fell into the moist interior, fungus began to bloom.

Reachable only by lowering oneself a hundred feet down into one of several sinkholes, the Fungus Caverns are a maze of interconnected chambers spread over a twenty mile length. Areas directly exposed to the sun are covered in dense fungal growth, the slick floor shaded beneath mushrooms and toadstools taller than a giant with caps wider than a cottage's roof. Further out, the fungus becomes less prolific, reduced to normal sized growths and slimy molds. Where darkness dominates the fungus ceases, leaving only the bare, natural rocks of Ertha's Realm.

Unsurprisingly, the main caverns are home to competing colonies of fungals (see *Creature Guide Compendium 1* for more details on fungal lairs and society). Although they pose no danger to nearby surface dwellers, being unable to leave their subterranean halls, they aggressively defend their territory against all intruders.

Numerous tunnels branch off from each main chamber. The great majority is part of the greater complex, while some end in dead ends. A small few end in sumps or pools. Beyond these may lie realms never before seen by the surface races, areas clad in utter darkness and inhabited by things that exist only in fevered nightmares or the ravings of madmen.

One particularly long and hard to navigate tunnel ends in a colossal door cast of solid Maerathril and adorned with runes. The runes are archaic, simpler and yet somehow more complex than those used by frost dwarves, whose language they closely resemble. They defy translation, even by magic, and even those who can read the dwarven tongue find the meaning stuck at the tip of their tongue, as if the words do not want to be repeated. Still, the meaning seems to burn into the minds of those who cast their eyes upon them—go no further!

No force can open the portal from the outside world, for the inhabitants have no wish to entertain visitors. Yet there is hope for those who desire to venture beyond the place where the rational mind screams stop and turn back, for on occasion the door opens, allowing fungals to carry their crops to whatever lives behind the portal.

THE ROOT OF THE EARTH

Travel deep enough, so frost dwarves claim, and one will discover the home of Ertha. Travel deeper still, they whisper, and one will find the Root of the Earth. The realm is never spoken of lightly, and never in the company of outsiders.

Within caverns measureless to man lurk dark things, elder things, some of which are as old as the gods. It is said they either fled or were imprisoned here during the God War. The surface races should be grateful that these things shun even the weakest light, for they are terrible to behold. Even Niht, the dwarves say, fears to tread in their ghastly halls.

The cult of Ertha knows the tales well. Some clerics hold them to be true, for in the same way the heavens contain dark gods and celestial beings so the Underearth is home to many fell things. Others argue they are myths, stories told to young dwarves to keep them from straying too far from their homes—the caverns and passageways of Ertha's Realm are dangerous places, even without slithering and crawling ancient evils.

Within this abyssal realm is said to exist a winding staircase that leads up through the earth and sky to the realm of the gods. Stories of heroes who made the arduous ascent to petition the gods in person abound and then returned to the world of men, but few believe them to hold a grain of truth—only the dead may enter Godsheim, and they rarely return to the realm of living as anything other than undead.

WHY COME HERE?

* Orders. When the master calls the dog barks, as the Saxa say. Heroes beholden to an organization or feudal superior may be ordered to enter Ertha's Realm. Clerics of Ertha need little persuasion, of course, and any excuse to go spelunking appeals to them automatically. Freo's clergy are just as interested in travel beneath ground as above, for much of the realm is unexplored. Clerics of Sigel may be sent underground to cleanse a temple of Niht, while Scaetha's worshippers might be hunting down an undead lair.

While the journey may not require a laborious descent into the center of the earth, any hero called to hunt down marauding orcs, cliff giants, giant spiders, or other beasts might find himself having to venture into a gloomy cave system.

* Adventure. Ertha's Realm draws curious and adventurous souls like a moth to a flame. The chance to be the first to venture into a new cave system, to see sights never viewed by human eyes, to find a path between two separate cave systems, to travel deeper than anyone else, is a lure by itself.

FREELANDS

The Freelands are a sea of grassy hills and small woods, its scattered communities are islands of civility in a land plagued by orcs, giants, and undead. It is a land where mighty heroes can carve out a fief and be master of their own destinies, for no sovereign holds sway over the Freelands; or meet a painful death at the hands, teeth, and claws of the many horrors that haunt the land between settlements.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Freelands.

* **Land Grab:** Since there is no central ruler, heroes wishing to found a new settlement are free to do so, and will encounter little opposition unless they try to claim someone else's lands. New rulers may receive emissaries from neighboring villages looking to form mutual defense alliances, but those of the Freelands' major towns may look on them only as potential rivals.

* **Prices:** For every 50 miles a settlement is from one of the major trade roads, the price of goods; especially weapons, armor, and unusual items, increases by 10%. Thus, if a village is 100 miles away, prices are 120% of normal. Goods manufactured locally (GM's call, but use common sense and the settlements imports and exports as a guideline) are not subject to this price hike.

* **Suspicious Minds:** With each settlement being independent, and military help largely unavailable, the citizens of the Freelands tend to view strangers with distrust, at least at first. This is especially true in smaller settlements, where strangers tend to stand out.

Heroes entering any settlement with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants suffer –1 to Charisma, –2 if the population is 500 or less. Typically, the penalty drops one point every day until it reaches zero. Good roleplaying, a friendly and polite demeanor, generosity, and other such behavior can hasten the penalty reduction. Of course, the reverse is equally true and rude heroes will be shunned for longer.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

In Heligioland, another realm of independent states, the majority of rulers are elected officials. In the Freelands, nobles tend to wield power, each settlement being their personal domain. Except in one or two rare cases, the feudal system is dominant, with the peasants beholden to their nobleman in return for protection and fair justice. No one has yet had the audacity to claim a title higher than count, but it is only a matter of time before someone thinks above their station. In other realms such titles are honored, but here those lofty names are mocked, for this is the Freelands, and Freelanders bow to no dukes or kings.

Below the nobility, village council, or elected official are the upper classes—rich and influential in their own right but lacking any formal titles. Many are merchant princes, landowners, senior clerics, and important mages, having earned, inherited, or been awarded their station.

It is important to note that a member of the upper class in one community may not enjoy the same station elsewhere. A merchant prince in a town of 1,000 souls may be the richest man in the town, but in Aslov or Spyre, for instance, his wealth may rank him only as middle class. Being exalted as high priestess of Eostre Animalmother in a farming village carries little weight in a mining community where Ertha is honored above all other.

Next are the master crafters and regular merchants, clerics, and mages, wealthy enough in their own right, but still lacking the social connections, title within the community, or birthright to climb the social ladder except through marriage. Senior military commanders may fall into this section of society as well.

Last are the masses, including soldiers (except for Saxa huscarls, who rank as middle class by dint of being well-fed, well-paid, and having their lord's ear), laborers, farmers, and so on. Lastly there are the poorest of the poor, the wood and dung collectors and the charcoal burners who live on the edge of society, and the homeless beggars.

EDUCATION

Formal education is a rarity in the Freelands. Aslov boasts an academy, though it is open only to the children of the wealthy. The Entertainers Guild at Spyre trains skalds, both magical and mundane, but have little interest in teaching others anything beyond songs and poems. Only in Nara is education freely available, the clerics of Hoenir teaching the masses while the House of Lore caters to those with money or important connections.

Most children are home schooled by parents and grandparents, learning the skills they will need in adult life; basic history, culture, folklore, and law, and the major tents of their families' patron deities, but little else. Gossip and news tend to spread slowly, and rarely goes beyond the next settlement unless carried by merchants. Indeed, few Freelanders know much of the world beyond the next village or two, and the thought of ever visiting another realm, unless one happens to live near the border, is as realistic as grabbing a rainbow or sunbeam.

This shouldn't be taken to imply Freelanders are stupid or backward in any way—it's just that the wider world is a distant place and has little impact on their daily lives.

RELIGION

With no central authority, no religion has claimed dominance over the entire Freelands. Instead, each settlement honors the gods most suited to its purpose. Thus, trading towns honor Var first, those involved in agriculture or animal husbandry look to Eostre in either or both aspects, mining settlements favor Ertha, and so forth. Most deities receive worship somewhere in the Freelands, even Neorthe, for the many small rivers and streams that cut through the land are home to edible fish.

Cults tend to be more fragmented here than elsewhere. Two neighboring farming communities may each have a cleric of Eostre, if not a small temple, but neither cleric has authority over the other. Cooperation is quite normal, though as mortals there is often an element of one-upmanship at work. Temples in the great towns sometimes try to impose their authority over nearby villages and steads, but most often a mutual pact is agreed, with all parties benefiting from the union.

The dark gods receive plenty of worship in the Freelands. Orcs serving Dargar and Thrym haunt the foothills of the Icebarrier and the Jagged Peaks, as well as the lesser hills. Hela is honored in the Withered Lands, and the Ashen Veil actively works to spread its insidious message across the realm. Vali has long plagued the land, for its many farming settlements are a blight to his eyes and, with no central authority or mutual defense pacts, they are easier prey than those of other lands.

MILITARY

While Heligioland and the Freelands are both realms of independent communities, the settlers in Heligioland have formed a mutual defense pact, ensuring no community stands alone. Unfortunately, petty jealousies, the lack of trade roads in the north and northeast, and the scattered communities have thwarted all attempts to replicate this in the Freelands. A few neighboring communities may band together, but generally a settlement stands alone, isolated against threats.

The military forces of the major towns described in the Hellfrost Gazetteer are detailed below, along with basic guidelines for communities the GM creates.

Aslov: The largest town in the Freelands, Aslov maintains a permanent city watch of 200 men and women, divided into ten watches of 20 soldiers, with an additional 20 artillerists for operating the ballistas mounted on the gate towers. Each watch is led by a Watch Sergeant (treat as watch captain Extras). In overall command, albeit under the auspices of Baroness Olivia, is the Constable-at-Arms (treat as a Watch Captain). Many merchants and well-to-do citizens have private security forces to protect their property. The town charter requires them to help defend Aslov should it ever be attacked.

The Citadel: Two hundred members of the Arcane Guard, along with numerous magical traps, elementals, and other summoned creatures, provide protection for the Reliquary.

Crase: Baron Triath has 30 men-at-arms (treat as common mercenary infantry). The town also has a basic militia of 100 citizens who operate under the command of the Master of the Muster. Each day, ten citizens are drawn by lot to patrol the town, earning a small stipend for doing so.

Deathwatch: The temple-fortress of Deathwatch and the forces of Scaetha's cult are detailed in *The Withered Lands* chapter.

Guard: Upper and Lower Guard each have a force of 30 heavy cavalry and 30 heavy infantry, all members of the Iron Guild. At any one time two-thirds of these are out protecting caravans. Should either outpost be attacked, clerics of Scaetha are close by to lend a hand.

Nara: The cult of Hoenir maintains a force of 50 paladins here, ostensibly to protect its great temple and the House of Lore, which are located in the same compound though are two separate structures. They answer to the Master of Scrolls, the senior paladin.

Count Froech has a personal army of ten knights (treat as veteran mercenary cavalry), 20 archers, and 50 light infantry. He can summon a militia of 400 men-at-arms at short notice. Thanks to the annual jousts they are competent, if not exactly talented, combatants.

Sanctuary: A force of 300 Swords of Necessity are stationed here at all times. Only 50 of these, Mother Felise's personal guard, are permanent residents, the rest accompany Sisters of Mercy on their travels as required. Only Swords may carry arms (except for daggers) in Sanctuary, all other weapons must be surrendered at the gates.

Spyre: Easily defensible against attack, Spyre has 30 artillerists, divided into pairs manning a single ballista, and 200 constables. The former are commanded by the Master of Artillery, a pompous title given that the city has never fired its ballistas in anger since the Blizzard War, and the latter by the High Constable. The frost dwarves have vowed to supply troops should it be required, but no one is exactly sure how many would answer the summons or what their specialties may be.

General Guidelines: Any settlement ruled by a noble has a minimum of five men-at-arms. Because of the many dangers, most will actually have an army closer to 1% of the total population, though this might be as high as 5% in some areas. A further 10% of the population can be called to arms as the fyrd, though in general half of these are just peasants armed with spears (treat as citizens with a long spear) and the other half village militia.

Feel free to ignore these guidelines as required, but if you need a quick village or small town, they'll make your life as GM a little easier.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The lower part of the Freelands is a crossroads. Any caravans heading from the Hearthlands to the eastern Winterlands must pass through its lands in order to reach Hellfrost Pass, as must cargos bound for ships heading to Aspiria or Chalcis from the northern Hearthlands. Naturally, the reverse is true for cargos being imported from these diatant realms. The Freelands has four trade roads, three of which are major ones.

The Great North Road, which links the Winterlands to the Magocracy runs through the city of Aslov, as does the Eastern Trade Road, which carries goods between the Winterlands and the Crystalflow Confederacy. Lastly there is the Coast Road, which branches from the Great North Road to the port at Leirvik in Angmark. A smaller road, the High Road, snakes through Sanctuary to the mountaintop retreat of Spyre.

The Freelands buys and sells no one commodity, for every settlement has its own needs and wants, and few are self-sufficient in everything required for daily life. Typically, the great caravans stop at Sanctuary, Aslov, Nara, and Deathwatch. Local merchants then take up the reins, transporting goods to the markets of the many scattered rural villages and smaller towns, and returning to the main market towns with goods bought along the way.

Independent merchants based in the rural communities move goods between neighboring settlements, forming a microcosm of the greater trading network that covers the land. Competition is stiff, and more than one trader has been forced out of business after a series of unfortunate accidents.

While a settlement far from the great trade roads may have to wait longer for foreign goods, such cargos will reach the market eventually. Extra transportation involves more expense, of course, so prices for goods produced elsewhere tend to be higher off the beaten track.

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are some of the Freelands many other settlements and adventuring locales.

BEORGTON

When Thegn Aethelred Horsasunu decided to build a village atop a long, tall hill, the surrounding locals warned him against it. The hill, they said, was a barrow, an enormous burial mound raised long ago, when the world was younger and unknown cultures ruled the land. They could not say who, or indeed what, lay inside, but the place has always been treated with intense superstition and fear.

Thegn Aethelred, a veteran of the Saxa rebellion who had since fallen out with the newly appointed kings because of his urging to push onward and eliminate the entire Anari race, ignored them, for the hill was a strategic site and easily defended. Here he would rule, free from the authority of others.

So it was the village of Beorgton, whose name means "the enclosure on the barrow," was founded. For two generations the village prospered, and talk of living atop a grave was quickly forgotten. Being located within a day's march of the Withered Lands, Thegn Erik Aethelredsunu, the founder's son, chose to erect a shrine to Scaetha to show his support for the cult.

As the clerics began the blessing ritual, a thick fog rose. Two days later, a merchant entered Beorgton to find it completely deserted. It was clear the village had not suffered fire, plague or attack, nor had the villagers seemingly packed up and left, for meals were laid on tables and personal belongings and valuables were still stored for safety.

No one lives in Beorgton today, and most travelers give the rotting ruin a wide berth, even in daylight. Different stories circulate the taverns of the Freelands as to the fate of Beorgton's inhabitants, but none have a happy ending. Most involve the vast barrow and the possible horrors it may contain coming to life and dragging the settlers down into darkness.

DALSETTER

Population: 283

Ruler: Mayor Agdi Skulisunu
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Var
Imports: Cloth
Exports: Apples, cider, grain, vegetables

Dalsetter is a small farming community about a day's hard ride (two days by wagon) due west of Aslov. Oval in shape, the village sits behind a wooden palisade. The gates are open during daylight hours. The two guards on duty give travelers only a cursory glance. At night, the number of guards outside the gates is doubled, the gates barred from the inside, and two additional guards stand on duty behind the gate.

Governed by an elected mayor, the town grows and exports grain and a variety of vegetables. Much of its grain is turned into flour elsewhere, since Dalsetter has no mill. While the mayor is in charge, he must placate the landowners, whose crops keep the village prosperous. All of the land claimed by the villagers belongs to ten landowners, with most other citizens working the land in return for a wage. During summer, when the fields need little attention, the citizens earn a living by producing handicrafts. Two areas of common land are used for grazing small herds of sheep and goats, which provide the locals with milk and cheese.

Located in a moderately trouble free region, it has a dozen full-time watchmen answering to the village constable. An additional 35 villagers are members of the militia, though their training is limited and their morale questionable. The small settlement also boasts a healer and herbalist, a chandler, and a general store.

Part of the adventure *N1 Lair of the Vermin Lord* takes place in Dalsetter.

The Spilt Tankard: Until a few months back Dalsetter's only inn was named the Four Sheaves. Travelers and merchants would make frequent reference to the "other" Four Sheaves, claiming that establishment was much nicer. After some research it was discovered there was an inn in a small village outside Aslov with the same name. To avoid future confusion, Dalsetter's inn received a new name in honor of the innkeeper's typical response when the quality of his establishment is slighted.

DEAD MAN'S PASS

Ask any person living along the Icebarrier Mountains and he will tell you the only path through the mighty peaks is Hellfrost Pass. A few scholars, sages, and frost dwarves know of another route, though it is not one of which they speak openly. Known as Dead Man's Pass, it is regarded as being impossible to traverse, even for creatures accustomed to life in the mountains or arctic conditions.

The pass begins in the Jagged Peaks, winding and snaking upward to a height of some 9,000 feet before beginning its equally arduous descent. Too narrow even for sledges, the route is greatly feared for the demon that is said to inhabit it. This is no mundane scion of the Abyss, no meager entity that can be dispatched with cold iron and magic. The demon, so it is whispered, is the very mountain itself.

Through its fell will it can call up raging blizzards with winds strong enough to pick men off their feet and throw them to their deaths far below, raise fogs so dense one cannot see more than a few feet ahead, call down heavy snow that rapidly impedes movement, and cause the rock faces to collapse.

DEADWOOD FOREST

Standing halfway between Deathwatch and Angarion is the remains of a forest. The trees have not grown leaves in countless generations, and while the trunks still stand strong against the wind they are dead inside. While easy to hew, the crumbly wood burns to quickly to be used as firewood (but is ideal tinder).

Once part of Angarion, the forest has been steadily dying for many centuries. Little of its life force remains now. This is reflected even in Alfheim, where the local Seelie court has grown aged and lethargic. Even the Unseelie are suffering, their dark mischief turning to bitter spite. The hearth elves have tried to revive the forest using ancient and potent charms of rebirth, but all have failed. Some dark taint prevents the magic binding to the trees. Were the darkness lifted, there would perhaps be hope for Deadwood Forest.

FAT RAT

Population: 259
Ruler: Baron Landri ap-Rabel
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Var
Imports: Grain, pottery, timber, vegetables
Exports: Mutton, sheep, wool

Ask anyone living within 50 miles of Fat Rat to give you directions to the place and they'll do so without hesitation, but search for it on a map and you'll draw a complete blank. Officially known as Castle Fordagarde, named for its purpose rather than its builder, Fat Rat takes its more common name from its famous inn.

Fat Rat stands atop a large, rocky outcrop rising sharply out of the flatlands between the Citadel and the Withered Lands. A wide river, a tributary of the Crystalflow now called the Rat Run, surrounds the hill on two sides. In order to reach the ford, the only crossing point for many miles, travelers must follow the road up the hill into Fat Rat, pay the toll, and then descend out the other side of town.

Fat Rat is dominated by its castle, a small stone structure built by Baron Landri's ancestors. The barons grew so wealthy they could afford to encircle the entire town behind a deep ditch, inside which rise strong stone walls. Wooden bridges positioned at each of the two town gates can be pulled down with little effort in the event of trouble.

Inside are some 35 houses, a mixture of Anari and Saxa design. The early barons exploited the natural roughness of the hill, and all the houses are constructed on elevated ground. The main road curves along side the base of the castle and lies some 10 feet below the level of the houses' floors. When it rains, the road quickly becomes a raging stream, fed by run off from the higher ground. Each year, the baron orders logs, which are used to line the road and provide stable footing.

Most of the town's income comes from tolls, for the route is a busy one. Flocks of sheep and goats roam the hill and nearby grasslands, which provide the villagers with a steady income.

The Castle: Extended over the years, the castle now comprises three wards, each protected by sturdy gates and high walls. The upper ward contains the baron's keep and a squat, round tower, home of his court wizard, Maegister Damorex. The middle ward is home to the town's garrison, 30 medium infantry trained as archers and 10 light cavalry. The lower ward serves as the town market. Surrounding the courtyard on two sides are accommodation blocks for merchants and stables for their beasts of burden.

The Fat Rat Inn: This large inn consists of a central hall, the owner's private abode, and a separate guest wing. No provision is made for stabling—the only stables are in the castle's lower ward.

The innkeeper, Tymos ap-Mainet, is an eccentric. A mercenary in his youth, he served the cult of Eostre as a granary guard. That's where he met his wife, Jeanne, a cleric of Veth, minor goddess of granary protection. They retired and bought the Fat Rat, then called the Castle Inn, twenty years ago.

Tymos accepts rats, dead or alive, as payment for ale. A normal rat is worth a pint, while a giant rat earns a gallon. Such is the popularity of this scheme that hundreds of dead rats hang from the ceiling. Every year, Tymos organizes Rat Catch Day, a local festival to Eostre in which the entire town gathers to purge the town and surrounding countryside of rats between dawn and dusk. Naturally, much ale flows once the sun sets.

Tymos doesn't like dealing with money, so half-gallon jugs of ale (he has no wine or spirits), light meals, and sleeping space all cost 1 ss. Clerics of Veth are treated as honored guests and have their expenses covered by the house for up to three days, so long as they do not return within the same month.

The hearth is always kept blazing, yet no patron sits within five feet of it. Occupying the honored place before the roaring fire, is a single bar stool. Locals warn strangers that it belongs to "His Lordship," and caution against sitting on it. While most visitors think the baron sits here when he visits the inn, in truth the stool is the personal domain of Tymos' large ginger tom, a hulking brute of a

the Freelands



Population: 149,492 (45% Anari, 28% Saxa, 12% dwarves, 10% hearth elves, 3% engro, 2% frostborn)
Ruler: Independent settlements

Karad Iarn
Icebarrier
Rotting Wood
Grove of Seasons
Sciedvollr
Stone Bridge
Overtheim
Odda
The Nine Sisters
Stone Forest
Engroton
The Giant's Avenue
Hill of the Ancestors
Wudusmoca
Anvmark
Freeland
The New Barrows
Woolacombe
Leirvik/Estvik
Leirvik
Draugr Hills
Black Towers
Shapryr/Leirvik
Torvik
Rindal
Deadwood Forest
Deathwa
The Temple of Bound Plague
Stonesthrow
The Pinnacle
Summer Vale
Orc Nest
Spyre
Beorgton
Dale
The Dragon Tooth
Orc Nest
Temmelos
Lesser Hills
Tincinhai
Border Crossing
Anvarion
0 10 25 50 100


Mountains
Dead Man's Pass
Ramshorn Peak
Oakstead
Raedbur
Castle Graystone
New Dawn Grotto
The Secret Garden
Devils Finger
No Moon Valley
Whispering Stone
The Giant's Trapdoor
Hunters' Rest
Temple of the Sundered Sword
The Citadel
Philosopher's lair
Fat Rat
Dalsetter
Temple of Ertha
Hela's Garden
Scaetha's Hold
Blood Mire
Workshop of Damnation
Black Heath
Mead Hall of the Damned
Aslov
Necropolis of The Princes
Upper Guard
Sumorton
King's Hill
Deathspider Hall
Radhylrby
Upper & lower Floxton
Darkwood Forest
Hall of the Pale Lady
Sanctuary
lower Guard
Nara
Salnorr
Hereford
longrass Meadow
Crystalflow River
Egmund's Stead
East & West Ockster
Brisingaton
Sun Spire Temple
The Refuge
Ravensburg
Moot hill
Dreamwood
Royalm
Dora

feline, heavily scarred from countless fights with rats and dogs (all of which it has won).

As vicious as a servant of Dargar and twice as mean, the cat tolerates no intrusion into its domain. So fierce is the much-feared cat that it is immune to *beast friend* spells and even heroes with Beast Master cannot befriend the creature. Technically the cat's name is Socks, after its white paws, but everyone just calls it "His Lordship" out of a healthy mix of respect and fear.

Although Socks is technically a regular moggy, treat it as a Wild Card hunting cat. This represents its aggressive nature and helps confirm its fearsome reputation. Despite Socks being universally feared, the villagers would quickly take up arms and enact bloody vengeance against anyone who hurts him.

GEMMELOS

Population: 2,719
Ruler: Count Julian ap-Humbert
Religion: Ertha, Var
Imports: Cloth, food, pottery
Exports: Stone

Gemmelos' story is one of rapid growth and almost as rapid decline. Founded 128 years after the Blizzard War when gems were discovered in the Lesser Hills, the town grew from a prospecting camp to a walled town in just a single generation. Vast quantities of precious and semi-precious stones were exported, and the town's coffers filled to overflowing. Then, 80 years ago, the gems dried up. The town, which once boasted a population of over 6,000, suffered terminal emigration.

Perhaps it could have survived, had its rulers been prudent spenders. But vast sums were spent on luxuries and the coffers were empty. The old nobility was overthrown in a bloodless coup and a new dynasty installed.

Once known as Gemmeton, the name was changed shortly after the decline began. Many locals still use the original name, though with bitter irony in the voices.

Count Julian's grandfather tried to reinvigorate the town by turning the miners over to quarrying stone. While there is demand for stone, Gemmelos is simply too far from any major towns to make transporting heavy stone worthwhile. Every day another family or two packs up and leaves in search of a better life.

The town walls are crumbling, as are the suburbs. Much of the population now lives in the center of town, huddled around the temple of Ertha. Orcs and giants, once afraid of the impressive fortifications and brave defenders, are growing bolder as the town empties.

One rumor currently circulating is that the gems did not run out. Rather, the miners tunneled into a hidden chamber, releasing something evil. Should the evil be slain, mining could resume and the town would rise from its ashes. Most sensible folk believe such talk is wishful thinking and a refusal to face the reality of the town's desperate situation.

THE GROVE OF SEASONS

Deep within the heart of Stone Forest is a grove considered sacred to both species of elves (though few taiga elves visit more than once in their long lives), druids, clerics of Eostre Plantmother, and most forest-dwelling fey, regardless of their court.

In the dead center of the clearing in which the grove stands is a massive oak of indeterminable yet obviously advanced age. The tree is actually a truly ancient tree man (or possibly woman—no one is quite sure), its roots now so deep in the earth it could not move even if it had reason to wander.

According to the elves, who have tended the site since its discovery and know of the trees' true nature, the oak has stood vigil since before men rose to sentience. Most elves believe it was one of the first tree men created by Eostre Plantmother, and likely the last of its generation. It has stood here for millennium after millennium. It last awoke from its slumber during the Blizzard War, using some powerful enchantment to protect the forest from the ravages of Hellfrost dragons.

Spaced around the oak at regular intervals are 13 smaller oaks. Carved into the bark are glowing fey letters bearing the name of one of the months. Hanging from the branches are an eclectic mix of items—woven crowns and necklaces of flowers, carved wooden objects (such as spoons or trees), rope made from twisted vines, and such like.

While the central oak is affected by the changing seasons (tree men are not immune to seasonal changes), those surrounding it keep their own time. Like a living calendar, they mark the eternal passage of time. The trees bearing the current month's name is in full bloom, as if it were summer. The tree marked with the previous month is as in fall, its leaves turning shades of yellow, orange, and red, while the next tree in the cycle looks like it is enjoying spring. As the seasons pass so the trees blossom, bloom, and wither in turn, each enjoying a short period of growth and life.

The lesser trees are each home to a skogsra, the true guardians of the grove. Bound by ancient oaths, each is able to leave its home only when its tree is enjoying summer. Those in spring and fall are awake and able to cast spells, but cannot venture into the mortal world.

Elves, clerics, and druids come here to worship at the sacred place as the seasons change in the wider world, while wood wights go about their business of tending the trees on a daily basis. Further defense is provided by a small army of wood warriors dedicated to protecting the ancient oak at the cost of their own lives.

Spirit Name: The ancient oak has never been named. Each of the skogsras bears the name Daughter of <season carved into their tree>.

Ambience: The presence of the elder tree person, a creature that may have directly felt the touch of a goddess, causes mortals to feel utterly insignificant when first entering the grove. They must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken by the fleeting nature of their short-lived existence. However, this soon passes.

Deity: Eostre Plantmother.

Senses: Notice d10.

Communication: The skogsras may only speak when their tree is in spring, summer, or fall, and may only adopt physical form in their tree's summer month.

Sacrifice: Being chosen to receive a spell requires the candidate to tend the tree during the entirety of its spring season, watching over the resident skogsra while she wakens from her months-long slumber. Hopefuls may only leave the grove for four hours out of every 24, time enough to gather food, and must complete 12 hours of work, prayer, or rituals out of each 24 hours.

Once able to manifest, the fey questions the resident wood wights as to the supplicant's behavior during his time in the grove. Any transgression of Eostre's sins, even by druids, results in the student being sent away without any new knowledge.

Assuming he maintains his vigil and has not offended Eostre Plantmother, the supplicant must then give the skogsra a suitable gift. They have no need for material wealth, preferring simple, handmade objects carved from wood or woven from leaves. Some even accept something as fleeting as a title bestowed upon them, though they have no love for sycophants.

When the gift is accepted, the student must spend an entire day and night singing Eostre's praises. If he remains awake until dawn, he is blessed with the skogsra's spell, and can add it to his repertoire.

Powers: During its short summer awakening, each skogsra can teach a mortal one spell common to both druidism and the cult of Eostre Plantmother. In order to learn the spell, the recipient must be either a druid or cleric of Eostre Plantmother, of sufficient Rank to learn the spell, and complete the sacrifice.

The spell taught by each fey, in order of the tree's summer season, are Snaermonan (*refuge*), Frostmonan (*wilderness step*), Eostremonan (*healing*), Plohmonan (*boost/lower trait*), Sowanmonan (*entangle*), Werremonan (*animate war tree*), Sceranmonan (*barrier*), Hegmonan (*sentry*), Haerfestmonan (*feast*), Falmonan (*summon wood elemental*), Huntianmonan (*bolt*), Fogmonan (*bridge*), Wulfmonan (*environmental protection*). All have a plant trapping.

HUNTERS' REST

Population: 10 (permanent)
Ruler: Huntsman Eofric ap-Renier
Religion: Ullr
Imports: None
Exports: None

With most settlements extending their authority only a handful of miles from their walls, the Freelands is a hunter's playground. For much of the year, the small stockade of Hunters' Rest is home to just 10 people. During hunting season, the population swells as much a tenfold with hunters who use it as a temporary base of operations and a safe refuge.

The settlement is mostly self-sufficient, though it imports a few goods, trading horn, meat and skin for what little it cannot produce locally. Despite the trade, Hunters' Rest boasts few luxuries—it is very much a frontier outpost, and its occupants are hardy hunters used to life in the wilds.

The settlement comprises a central longhouse, which serves as the home to the permanent residence and acts as a communal feasting hall, a small workshop where anyone can fix their bows or craft new arrows, a smokehouse where hunters can preserve meat in preparation for the journey to their distant homes, a tanning shed, and three smaller longhouses for the transient population. A shrine to Ullr stands outside the main hall.

Huntsman Eofric is ruler only in name. He proclaims no authority, but expects those who reside here to obey his simple rules (such as no fighting or hunting out of season). Much of his time is spent blessing the hunters, settling minor disputes, and leading rituals to Ullr.

NEW DAWN GROTTO

Conventional mythology holds that the gods are at war. Should Thrym emerge victorious, the world will be locked in a winter without end. Victory for Kenaz and Sigel will see things return to normal. The Children of the Second Dawn, a radical sect, believes otherwise.

Followers of the *Vision of Gangleri*, an obscure text written by a Norn cleric shortly after the Blizzard War ended, they hold that Thrym must win the war. While the Fimbulvintr will be long and countless people will die, the misery will not endure forever. As normal winter gives way to spring, so the Fimbulvintr will eventually give way to a new age of mankind, a paradise in which man can start afresh.

The Children are violently opposed to the cult of Kenaz. The fire god's victory, should it come to pass, might end the war and warm the land, but it will deprive man of a glorious new future. While none of the Children worship Thrym, they do support his cause—the sooner the Fimbulvintr begins, the sooner it will end. Many Children are Iceblades, assassins prepared to strike down perceived or actual servants of Kenaz.

An odd cult that embraces doomsday to guarantee a better future, the Children have few adherents as yet, but their popularity is growing. Though spread thinly across Rassilon, their headquarters is a cave complex in the Jagged Peaks. While members evangelize, aid Thrym, and attack Kenaz, they are slowly storing a truly enormous quantity of provisions. Come the Fimbulvintr, they will retreat deep into the earth. In time, their descendants will emerge into a new world, a world full of promise and hope rather than misery and suffering.

The cult of Kenaz has heard of the Children. Reacting with typical fiery temper, it has declared them a heretical sect of Thrym-supporters who threaten the safety of the entire world. Like all enemies of the cult, it intends to eradicate them and their misguided creed with holy fire.

NO MOON VALLEY

The Jagged Peaks are a jumbled landscape of steep, broken hills and rubble-strewn valleys. Among the most feared locations is the cursed depression known as No Moon Valley. No traveler can mistake when he has entered the valley, for no moonlight ever penetrates its depths and the threads of magic are utterly absent. Looking heavenward, the moon is completely invisible, regardless of its phase.

Folklore says that long before the Blizzard War a powerful wizard made his home in the valley. Here the wizard used magic for perverse and fell ends. Maera, in what can only be seen as a direct breech of the Compact, cursed the mage for misusing the threads and refused to shine her radiance upon him. What became of the wizard is unknown. Some believe he still haunts the ruins at the far end, desperately seeking to complete his experiments though doomed to forever fail. The cult of Maera accepts the Compact was broken, but the act was with the approval of the gods, for the insane wizard and his minions created the portals that led to the Demongate War.

The ruins are in fact the remains of a temple to Null, the insane goddess who wishes to unravel the whole of creation and the antithesis of magic. Although the cultists were slain, the temple was never ransacked. Time has brought it to ruin, but many strange treasures may yet lie inside.

Game Mechanics: Night is always Pitch Black (–4) in the valley. No form of spellcasting works here. This extends even to relics and alchemical devices—heroes effectively have the Magic Forbiddance Hindrance.

THE PHILOSOPHER'S LAIR

Many centuries ago, a priest of Hoenir, god of knowledge, was posed a philosophical question by a colleague ("What is truth?"). At first the priest thought little of the conundrum, but as time passed its solution began to gnaw away at him. Eventually, he forsook his daily duties and dedicated his life to solving the riddle, for that in itself was a test of devotion and faith.

Time passed, and the priest's body succumbed to the ravages of old age. Yet so strong was his desire to find the solution that he refused to ascend to the afterlife when his time was due. While his physical remains rotted to nothingness, his spirit continued to mull the seemingly unsolvable problem posed to him many decades before. The priest was not undead, for he retained his soul, yet his comrades grew fearful of his continuing existence in the mortal realm.

Unwilling to slay someone they saw as doing their god's work, albeit beyond the point of reason, the other priests simply prayed for their comrade's soul and abandoned the temple.

The original temple was constructed centuries ago. The main structure was above ground, while beneath were carved tunnels and chambers for additional storage. When the time came to abandon the structure, the clerics did so without haste. All the furnishings were carefully removed, along with the sacred libraries. All that remained were empty chambers—and the ever-seeking philosopher.

Unsure as to what might occur if the philosopher ever reached the end of his train of thought, and wary that others might disturb him with unknown, and possibly dire, consequences, the clerics secretly hired artisans and wizards to create a series of traps designed to keep the philosopher in and intruders out.

The clerics' plan was to make periodic checks on the temple to ensure the defenses had not been breached and the philosopher was still bound. Rightly fearful of what their colleague had become, the Gray Sages were still curious as to how events would unfold—such an event had never been recorded, and this was a chance to study history in the making.

Alas, the new temple fell to orc raiders decades ago and the occupants slain or dragged off into slavery. Having told no one outside their inner circle of the philosopher's existence, all knowledge of the entity was lost when the second temple fell. Yet details were duly recorded, kept locked away in a secret chamber in the new center of worship.

Meanwhile, the cogitating priest's logical thought and reason drifted into insanity as the years drifted by. Driven to utter despair by his failure to find the solution, the priest's spirit transformed into something new—a soulbound philosopher, a spirit trapped in the mortal realm by his eternal quest.

The years continued to tick by, unnoticed by the philosopher, who remained sealed within the ancient temple. A month ago, two adventurers located the warded entrance and, their minds filled with images of lost treasures beyond measure, breeched the barricade. Although the soulbound philosopher was no longer capable of motion, his insane thoughts had become semi-corporeal and independently willed. The treasure-seekers died and the philosopher's madness was unleashed into the world.

At sporadic intervals, the philosopher lets loose an insane howl, which carries on the wind and tears at the sanity of all who hear it. Not many miles away from the temple lies a small, inconsequential hamlet. Affected by the howling wind, most of the inhabitants are now completely mad.

The lair of the philosopher is detailed in adventure *S3 Descent into Madness*.

RADHYLRBY

Population: 368
Ruler: Mayor Diderik Wildhair
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Var, Freo
Imports: Clothing, pottery
Exports: Livestock, vegetables

Raðhlyrby ("wish pool village;" pronounced "rath-el-bee") lies on the trade road between Nara and Aslov. A farming community with a large, fortified inn catering for merchants, it is named after the small pool in the center of the market square.

Local tradition has it that anyone who throws a scield into the pool and makes a wish will, if of good soul, have it come true. Exactly when fortune may strike is vague, the locals claiming it depends on the strength and purity of one's desire. Gold coins are said to produce better results that silver ones.

Such is the inhabitants' belief in their "magic pool" (which radiates no magical aura), they frequently toss a coin in the still water to demonstrate the veracity of their claims. Glancing into the pool reveals a pile of glittering coins at the bottom.

The wishing pool is actually a scam, invented three generations ago by the then-mayor. The pool is nothing more than a former watering hole for livestock. Each week, the pool is dredged and the coins collected. At the end of the harvest, the money is used to provide a big feast in honor of Eostre and purchase communal winter supplies. The coins left at the bottom are fake—copper disks with a thin veneer of precious metal—as are the ones the villagers make great display of throwing in. Each of their wishing coins is slightly nicked in a different spot to mark the identity of its owner, allowing them to reuse the same "coin" over and over.

ROTTING WOOD

Rotting Wood is actually part of the Stone Forest, though it is now separated from its parent by a mile of scorched ground. Eight years ago, wood wardens noticed blight on the trees and ground vegetation. Within a few years, the taint had spread, leaving in its wake a decaying, rotting forest strewn with fungus and disease. Druids and clerics of Eostre Plantmother tried to stem the spread, but their spell and miracles proved useless. Even the great and ancient magic of the elves failed.

Though it pained them greatly, the elves elected to take immediate and drastic action. As a surgeon must sometimes cut away healthy flesh to prevent the spread of infection, so the elves took axes and spells to the trees surrounding the tainted portion of the forest. As a further barrier, the ground in between was scorched with mundane and magical fire, leaving it sterile. Every year, in late spring, the ground is subjected to further treatment to ensure nothing spawns here.

While this has saved the greater forest, it condemned what is now Rotting Wood. The ground vegetation has been replaced with fungi and slimes, the trees are withered and sickly, and no animals call it home. In a bid to prevent trespassers carrying the infection to other forests, the elves have declared Rotting Wood off-limits. Any creature caught leaving the blighted land is subject to immediate execution and its body incinerated.

Corrupted moss men, pus oozes, excrementals, orculs, and even plague demons haunt the woodland. The elves believe an adult marsh dragon has taken up residence in the heart of the wood. Whether it is the cause of the sickness or just taking advantage of it is yet to be determined.

THE SECRET GARDEN

When Freelanders wish to label something as a flight of fancy, they often refer to it as being "about as likely as the Secret Garden." A place believed in only by storytellers and fools, the first recorded mention of the Secret Garden occurred in 323 IR. So the story goes, a lone traveler staggered into a hunting camp at the base of the Jagged Peaks. Stricken with fever, the hunters could do nothing for the man but make him comfortable and pray for his soul. While he waited for Scaetha's heralds to collect him, the traveler recounted his tale.

He had been exploring the Jagged Peaks when he came across a cave. Venturing inside, he was led deeper and deeper, until he eventually emerged inside a fabulous cavern. Growing there were trees with leaves of solid pure gold or silver, and on whose branches emeralds and rubies hung like ripe fruit. The hunters thought his words the product of his fevered mind, but when the man died soon after, they searched his belongings for suitable grave goods. Inside a leather pouch they found four oak leaves, each made of pure gold, and a small uncut but perfectly round ruby.

Skalds have since expanded on the basic account. While widely known as the Secret Garden (because the traveler took its location to his grave), storytellers prefer more poetic names. Those who think it is a gateway to Alfheim (or an actual realm, the traveler having crossed over to the fey land on his downward journey) refer to it as the Garden of Summer and Winter. Other holds that iSigel and Maera planted it when they were married, and thus it is the Garden of the Sun and Moon.

Skalds don't like loose ends or mundane deaths. In order to protect the garden, the fey or deities, as applicable, placed a curse on it—any mortal who stole one of the leaves would succumb to fever and die. Whether it is true or not, audiences prefer it to talk of a traveler who just caught a fever and died. As skalds are fond of saying, "mysteries and magic make for good stories."

SPYRE

The Freelands' second largest city by population, Spyre holds the honor of being both the most difficult to reach and the most unusual. An ancient and remote fortress, it is now a bustling city with much to offer merchants.

Though it is off the beaten track due to the difficulty of reaching it, Spyre is rapidly developing a reputation as a center of skaldic learning. Indeed, among skalds it is considered second only to Scathmoor, though it has a leaning toward Saxa tales and poems that does not appeal to everyone. Most taverns have a resident storyteller to entertain patrons, and several shops now cater to their needs.

Limited land for building forced the builders into certain choices. Aside from the avenue that cuts through the city, the streets are too narrow for carts. Houses are small, even in Old City (though they look nicer), and built two or three storeys high. The last major building project saw houses extend downward, though the sewers have limited them to a single subterranean level. Lacking natural light, they are dingy holes occupied by the poorer end of the social spectrum. The homes of rich citizens have glass to keep out the constant wind. Those of poorer folk have wooden shutters.

Spyre's elevated position isn't enough to have a dramatic effect on the temperature, though it is colder than the surrounding land. On most days, the temperature is at the lower end of the scale for the season. When the wind gathers strength (1 in 6 chance per day), treat Spyre as being in the Low Winterlands.

Axe and Hammer: A popular stop for adventurers, this small shop in Lower Dvergdelf is owned by Balin Deepdelve, the best weaponsmith in Spyre. Locals refer to the establishment as "Slash and Smash." Balin sells only axes, hammers, and maces. These cost

10% more than normal, but the workmanship is exquisite and the weapons are very durable (+2 Toughness).

In addition, Balin will sharpen any axe to a fine hone for 35 gs. This gives the weapon a flat +1 damage bonus, but only until the wielder rolls a natural 1 (regardless of Wild Die) on his Fighting die, at which point the edge is blunted. A weapon cannot be sharpened again until the edge is blunted.

Cisterns: Spyre's elevated position makes it impossible to dig wells into the water table. Concealed beneath the city are huge cisterns linked together by stone pipes. They are filled with rainwater, either funneled from roofs or dropping through grates in the streets. The grates have a very fine mesh to prevent contaminants entering the water supply, but require frequent cleaning to prevent them becoming clogged. Above each cistern is a well.

City Granaries: Until 414 IR, all food shipments belonged to merchants, who stored them in private granaries in Old City. Following the infamous Grain Grab, a bloody riot caused by food shortages and price rises that left 54 dead and hundreds injured, the city constructed its own granaries in New City. Merchants selling shipments of food are not charged import duty in coin. Instead, a percentage of their cargo is taken by the city and stored in the granaries. In times of crisis, this is rationed out to the citizens. This is not a free handout—every adult citizen pays 13 gs a year to compensate the city for lost tax revenue.

Dvergdelf: Also known as Dwarf City (the citizens of Spyre are far from imaginative), Dvergdelf is home to the majority of Spyre's 2,100 frost dwarves. Built entirely into the mountain, it is divided into three distinct zones. Grand stairways lead between the levels. Reluctant to allow outsiders into their private domain, the stairs are guarded by surly huscarls.

Lower Dvergdelf is essentially an indoor market. It is one long U-shaped tunnel with small shops on either side. Here one can purchase all manner of dwarven goods or negotiate for specific services. The next level, Middle Dvergdelf, is a place of work and storage. The highest level, Upper Dvergdelf, is the residential district.

Although technically part of Spyre and thus under the authority of Count Baldar, the dwarves have been granted many concessions over the centuries to earn their favor. They are permitted to maintain a private army of huscarls (there are 50, plus as additional 100 hall guards of which the Count in unaware), Spyre's courts have no jurisdiction over crimes committed in the halls, and the dwarves are permitted to worship whatever gods they see fit. Lendmann Gloin Brittlebeard, the aged head of Clan Deepdelve, is the *de facto* ruler of Dvergdelf. While Gloin remains typically insular, his eldest son and heir, Dvalinn, is more open toward the dwarves' neighbors and is keen to strengthen the relationship.

The Hammered Head: Instantly recognizable by its sign (a hammer smashing down on a bare head), this New City tavern sells the strongest drink in the city, a potent wine known locally as Hammer. Most people can manage only two small flagons before they begin to stagger like they've taken a serious blow to the head. The drink is so well known that it has spawned a local expression—anyone staggeringly drunk, regardless of the drink they have consumed, is said to be Hammered.

Hord's Hall: Argon Aalfsunu of the Entertainers' Guild is not the only person in Spyre who knows old stories, songs, and poems. Hord Wordsmith, a venerable frost dwarf song mage, spent almost two centuries wandering Rassilon before he retired to Spyre. Hord now owns a small tavern in Lower Dvergdelf.

Popular with all Spyre's inhabitants, patrons are encouraged to take to the small stage and regale audiences with stories and poems. The proprietor is always found at the back of the tavern, away from the roaring hearth, when the tavern is open, but it is a rare night he takes to the stage.

Hord's knowledge of stories is vast, but far from complete. In order to impress the grumpy dwarf, prospective students must make a Knowledge (Folklore) roll at –4. Success means they have taught Hord a new story, something he rewards with passing on one from his repertoire. If the GM has the *Legendary Endeavors* supplement, Hord counts as a mentor skaldic school.

Legendary Endeavors Errata: The Entertainers' Guild counts as a moderate center skaldic school, but the Story Points can only be spent on tales with a Focus directly related to the Saxa, such as a specific Saxa dominated settlement, a specific Markland, or the Saxa culture as a whole.

WINDY GAMES

The citizens of Spyre have learned to use the wind that blasts across the plateau for recreation.

Dye Ball: A popular pastime, dye ball involves standing atop the Windbreak and throwing light wooden balls soaked in colored dye into the wind. Caught by the wind, the balls fly back toward the city. Part of the skill is throwing the ball so it comes back in the direction of an opponent.

Contestants may dodge the incoming projectiles, but are disqualified if they drop below the level of the parapet. Anyone struck by a ball is eliminated from the contest.

Kite Fighting: On high holy days of Thunor, the market square hosts the Dragon Duel, a kite fighting contest involving as many as 200 contestants. A typical duel involves anywhere from five to ten kites in the air at the same time, though there are fewer kites as the competition goes on. The final is always fought between two kites. The cult of Thunor offers a prize of 50 gs to the eventual winner of the knockout competition.

Kite fights involving player characters can be handled by a simple opposed Agility roll—highest roll wins the bout, all losing kites are wrecked. Clerics of Thunor and elementalists who know air can use their arcane skills if they prefer.

The Wind Run: Held on a day in summer in which the wind is sufficiently strong and gusty to impair movement, the Wind Run is considered the city's premier sporting event. To outsiders it is an act of lunacy.

The aim is simple—to run as far along the top of the Windbreak as possible before the wind knocks you off. For obvious reasons, the wind must be blowing into the city. The crowd follows along at ground level to catch those whom the wind overbears. Even with the crowd, serious injuries can, and do, occur. The wind can be capricious, and several contestants have fallen to their death when the wind suddenly switched direction.

Whoever gets the furthest without being blown off the wall is declared the winner. There is no prize, only public adoration and free drinks from well-wishers.

Kevil's Kites: This small shop mainly sells prayer kites for use in festivals to Thunor. A basic model sells for 1 gs, while one painted with Thunor's holy symbol costs 3 gs. Kevil Halfdansunu, the proprietor, also makes "dueling kites" shaped like dragons. Citizens use the fragile kites to stage aerial combats—whoever destroys his opponent's kite wins. A basic model costs 2 ss. Nimbler and sturdier models (+1 to operate them) cost 5+ gs, the price varying with the level of decoration and the design.

Lutes and Flutes: Run by Pip (real name Pipbert), a mostly retired engro song mage, this shop sells musical instruments. Pip has developed a reputation as a master craftsman, and it is well deserved. While most of his stock is fairly mundane, if well made, his best pieces grant a +1 bonus to appropriate rolls when used to accompany storytelling or purely for musical purposes. Prices for high-end instruments start at 200 gs, but he is never short of customers.

The Market: Located in the center of New City, the Market is Spyre's main shopping center. Stallholders tout for business from dawn until dusk on Marketdaeg and Sangdaeg, and from dawn until midday on Heafoddaeg and Healfdaeg.

In the middle of the square is a shrine. Unusually, it is not dedicated to Var, but to Thunor. It takes the form of a towering stone pillar, to the top of which is tethered a rune-decorated wind sock. As well as being a place of worship, the wind sock also provides notice to citizens planning on crossing Gambler's Bridge as to the wind strength and direction.

The Messengers Guild: For those who need to contact family or friends at ground level but don't fancy climbing down and back up the mountain, there is the Messengers Guild. The guild uses carrier pigeons for most messages, the birds being trained to fly to either the mines and quarries, or to guild offices in Aslov and Halfway. For those who require faster communication, and privacy,

the guild sells *voice on the wind* scrolls up to Veteran Rank (30 words maximum). The user simply inscribes his message on the parchment and then burns it to activate the magic and transmit the message.

The Nest: Spyre has its fair share of taverns and inns selling food and drink. The Nest, which occupies the top floor of a housing block in Old City, is one of the best eateries in the city. Full meals aren't cheap—a cheap meal is effectively a small starter, an average meal costs 4 gs, and expensive meals begin at 25 gs. The food is excellent, though, and the company refined. Adventurers in armor or carrying weapons are turned away at the door.

Given few commoners can afford to eat here (assuming they get passed the door), it is the reserve of the city's elite, making it an ideal place to make important contacts.

The Piper's Call: It is not hard to miss this lower-class tavern—the slightly off-key wail of loud pipes echoes up the neighboring streets. The regular patrons don't mind the noise—it allows them to talk without fear of being overheard even at the next table and it conceals the activities of the thieves' guild, who operate out of a secret room in the cellar.

Spyre's thieves are well organized and cautious—when you live in a city with only two ways out (the bridge, access to which can quickly be closed, or a long climb) you need to be sensible about planning crimes and avoiding detection. The gang, known as the Long Drop (because that's what you get if you cross them), is 35 strong, though they are spread around the city.

Prospecting Office: Spyre does not claim dominion over the Lesser Hills, but it is has long lent military support to the scattered settlements in return for mining rights. Anyone seeking to prospect in the hills must secure a license from the Prospecting Office. A license costs 50 gs and is good for one year. The license requires any prospector striking a workable vein to sell the ore or gems to



Spyre. Alternately, he may sell his stake to the city for a one-off fee, the price varying with the estimated productivity of the mine.

Sewers: The citizens of Spyre enjoy indoor lavatories. Bodily waste, and anything else you can fit down the hole, drops into a labyrinth of sewers running beneath the city. The sewers slope toward the western side of the plateau, emerging into open air at a point known locally as the Yellow Waterfall.

The Sparkling Hall: Carved into the living rock beneath Old City, the Sparkling Hall is the temple to Ertha. Its walls are adorned with thousands of gemstones, while great plates of beaten metal inscribed with prayers in huge letters hang from the ceiling.

In front of the altar, a slab of polished granite, is a metal hatch inscribed with Ertha's holy symbol. Under it is a narrow shaft that drops, so folklore says, into the heart of the world. Worshippers throw gems and metal items into the hole on Feeding Day.

Primarily used by frost dwarves, there is a separate entrance from Dvergdelf. The iron door to the tunnel is barred when not in use and can be opened only from inside the tunnel.

The Spire: Thunor dislikes enclosed spaces, but the local cult has long argued that the Spire, with its many holes, is far from enclosed. As a result, the Spire has become an unofficial focal point of Thunor worship, though it is used only on high holy days and then only by the clergy. Standing in one of the openings allows the clerics to feel the wind that whips across the plateau and, if they are confident in their faith, leap into the void *before* invoking *fly*.

The Storm Dragon: The inn has changed hands many times down the centuries, but it has never changed its key features. A huge tapestry depicting a brave warrior defeating a storm dragon covers the rear wall of the main hall. According to folklore, the victorious warrior visited Spyre, where he gifted the then owner of the tavern several dragon scales. Once they hung proudly on the wall, but today the servants use them as trays.

The inn is popular with visiting adventurers, whom the locals try to coax into telling stories of their heroic deeds. No matter the deed recounted, the response to such stories always runs along the lines of, "Brave indeed, but it wasn't as worthy an act as beating a storm dragon single-handed, was it?"

Warehouse District: Running along the eastern wall of New City are rows of stone warehouses. Spyre's economy is a thief's delight—luxury goods and wine flow in, while metal ingots and gems flow out. The constables maintain a constant vigil here, but even their presence is not enough to deter the thieves' guild.

SPYRE: MINES AND QUARRIES

Spyre's economy is based entirely around mining and quarrying. Despite what one might hear, there are no active mines in the upper reaches of the Pinnacle. Instead, gems, ore, and stone are mined from the base of the Pinnacle and in the Lesser Hills.

Given that returning to one's lofty home each night after toiling hard all day is virtually impossible, the laborers work a shift system. Miners and laborers hack and hew at the stone for three weeks solid each month and then have the fourth week as a rest period. While such generosity is most unusual (most citizens get two days off work a month plus a few holy days), it has helped productivity. Since snow and ice can close the path to Spyre for months on end, the mines and quarries only operate from mid-spring until the first snows fall. During winter, only a small number of guards occupy the gem and metal mines.

Once smelted into ingots, the copper and iron is transported to Spyre for storage and to be worked into finished goods. Caravans usually make the long and dangerous trip only once a month. Gems are carried each week, while worked stone is stacked near the quarry unless required for a building project.

STONESTHROW

Population: 595
Ruler: Baron Danain ap-Pepin
Religion: Eostre Plantmother
Imports: Fish, timber
Exports: Vegetables

Stonesthrow's unusual name comes from its supposed founding. A popular story tells how the founder, one of the baron's distant ancestors, once lived in Spyre. He desired lands of his own, for in Spyre no noble claimed much territory. He picked up a vast boulder, for he was a man of heroic physical strength, and threw it from the mountain, claiming he would build a new home where it landed. In the center of the marketplace does indeed lie a large boulder, evidence, the locals claim, of the tale's veracity.

The village lies close to the border with Angmark and Angarion. It trades fish for vegetables with Angmark and pays tribute to the elves in return for collecting firewood from the edge of the forest. Under the terms of the agreement, no living wood may be cut.

Nearby lay the ruins of a town, its rotting timbers jutting from the boggy heath. Locals avoid the place, for it is said the townsfolk offended the elves and were cursed, their fields turning to bog overnight. Although the town was built of timber, stories of stone tunnels running beneath the streets are commonplace. Skalds say the town was home to a powerful Saxa king in days of yore, and that the tunnels contain burial crypts and treasuries.

SUMORTON

Population: 419
Ruler: Thegn Edwin Coenhelmsunu
Religion: Thunor, Tiw
Imports: Armor, weapons
Exports: None

The Freelands' newest village, Sumorton was founded just 18 months ago. Thegn Edwin once held land in Nordmark under Jarl Erp the Crow. A sworn enemy of the upstart Cyning Geirmund, Edwin fled his lands before they were conquered, taking his huscarls and many peasants with him. Seizing an area of unclaimed land a few miles over the border, he founded a new village. Whereas Nordmark's other nobles have sworn oaths of loyalty to the young king, Edwin has declared war. He refers to the king only as "the Usurper." Anyone using the king's real name in the thegn's presence risks being the target of physical violence.

At present the settlement has only basic defenses in the form of an earth bank and ditch, but work is under way to erect a palisade and gate. Construction should be finished by the start of winter.

Edwin has 20 household huscarls, plus 30 others who forsook their former oaths and joined his cause rather than bow before the new king. Every male of fighting age in the village has been conscripted into the militia, adding a further 100 soldiers. Edwin is considering extending this to women as well.

Edwin's army may be small, but the huscarls are mounted, enabling them to conduct hit-and-run raids. King Geirmund is unwilling to send troops against Edwin, since doing so would constitute an invasion of the Freelands, with whom he has strong trade links. With his country still recovering from two wars, the king has been unable to do little except declare the thegn's men bandits and strengthen patrols along the border.

THE TEMPLE OF ERTHA

Located a day's hard march north of Dalsetter, all that is visible to the naked eye are a small fort and a watchtower. The true temple lies beneath the ground, in a series of natural chambers. The site was chosen by the cult after the discovery of an elemental locus of earth. Unusually, the locus grants boons to clerics of Ertha as well as elementalists, a phenomenon that first drew clerics here long ago.

The temple was abandoned during the Blizzard War and thereafter forgotten. Across the centuries, orcs, bandits, and adventurers have used the surface level as a base of operations, each driving out the current inhabitants in a seemingly never-ending cycle. The last occupant was Gautrek, a paladin of Vali (see adventure *N1 Lair of the Vermin Lord*).

Word of the paladin's destruction and the rediscovery of the locus has spread along the trade roads. The cult of Ertha is keen to reclaim the abandoned temple and reconsecrate it. Unfortunately, orcs have already claimed the vacant site. The cult is prepared to

reward adventurers prepared to clean out the orcs and hold the site until the cult has organize workers and permanent guards with alchemical devices, favors, and gemstones.

THE TEMPLE OF BOUND PLAGUE

Population: 24
Ruler: Peacekeeper Ursanne ap-Foilan
Religion: Eira

The aftermath of the Blizzard War brought many dire problems, not least of which was a virulent plague that spread from community to community like a wildfire.

Legends, as recounted by skalds, say the plague would have consumed the entire land had a priestess of Eira not lured it to her remote temple and sealed it within the holy place. The cleric was given no reward for her miraculous deed, though her name, Anwyn the Pious, lives on in folklore. Aware that the disease might one day escape, Anwyn elected to spend the rest of her days in prayer inside the locked temple. According to popular belief her spirit remains there still.

A short distance away from the temple is a fortified camp populated entirely by Eira's paladins. Although the paladins are routinely rotated to other duties, they are always 24 in number. Their days are spent feeding Anwyn's spirit through prayer, maintaining a constant vigil on the temple to prevent Vali's cultists or foolish adventurers from breaching the ancient seals and unleashing the fell pestilence, and repairing any damage to the thick layer of clay that coats every inch of the building's exterior and renders it both water and airtight.

Peacekeeper Ursanne, a distant descendant of Anwyn, has led the contingent for the last 20 years, having made it her holy duty to watch over the site until Eira calls her to her side. Each year she takes a two month sabbatical. She spends this time visiting other temples to Eira, exhorting the clergy to pray for Anwyn's spirit and beseech Eira to elevate her to champion status. Should the latter occur, she intends to raise a shrine in the camp.

TEMPLE OF THE SUNDERED SWORD

Population: 37
Ruler: Swordmaster Bruyant Cerdicsunu
Religion: Tiw, Rigr, Kenaz
Imports: Ale, food, iron, pottery
Exports: Mercenary services

The Temple of the Sundered Sword is a battle-monastery, a heavily fortified stone temple of vaguely pentagonal shape. It stands in the narrowest gap between the edge of the Jagged Peaks and the Withered Lands.

Living here are a dozen Swords of Tiw and a dozen Shields, two clerics of Rigr, and a cleric of Kenaz. The highest-ranking member is always a Sword, and he takes the title Swordmaster. All must be competent horsemen (Riding equal to Fighting). As well as the clerics there are a herald, a treasurer, two healers-cum-herbalists, two veterinarians, a cook, and three stablehands.

The clerics are an independent mercenary force, small in number, yet more than adequate to defeat an enemy ten times their number. Any settlement can hire them, at the rate of 50 gs per cleric per day for aggressive missions and half that for defensive ones. They also hire out the clerics of Rigr to help oversee the construction and blessing of new fortifications. The cleric of Kenaz works as an armorer and weaponsmith and rarely leaves the temple.

The temple takes its name from its most sacred artifact, a great sword, sundered in twain half way along the blade. The remains of the weapon lie on the altar of Tiw. According to legend, it belonged to a mighty Sword of Tiw. During the Blizzard War he cleaved clean through the neck of an ancient Hellfrost dragon, snapping his blade in the process. Each cleric who serves the temple wears a sliver of the blade on a thong around his neck. Should the cleric die or leave, his token is melted down and offered to Ertha.

A prophecy revealed by a cleric of the Norns says that once the whole blade has been used for this purpose, the Fimbulvintr will begin, for Thrym fears the blade and will not act while it remains.

TRADING POSTS

Population: 10

Although travel towers line the major trade roads, enterprising Freelanders quickly caught onto the idea of erecting trading posts, especially along the myriad of lesser trade roads.

A typical trading post is little more than a stockade housing a basic inn, a store, and a stable block, with a lone watchtower in one corner. The courtyard provides parking for up to a dozen wagons. Caravans can park free of charge overnight, but visitors are bound by the laws of hospitality to aid in the defense of the trading post should it be attacked.

The inn normally charges a flat 2 ss per person. This covers sleeping space in a heated communal hall, a bowl of soup, a hunk of cheese, and a small loaf of bread. Drinks cost extra. Stabling is free, but oats and hay incur an additional charge. Generally, drinks, oats, and other extras cost 50% more than normal for a village.

Most trading posts are run by a single family. Security may be mercenaries, but often family members fill this role. Others are outposts for the cult of Var, usually with a paladin or two for security and a priest running the business side.

UPPER & LOWER FLOXTON

Population: 220 (Upper), 370 (Lower)
Ruler: Mayor Fierbras ap-Gaumadras (Upper), Mayor Aelfric Vengersunu (Lower)
Religion: Eostre, Var
Imports: Pottery, luxury goods
Exports: Sheep, vegetables

While Floxton is spoken of as two distinct communities, it is actually a single village, at least geographically. Four generations ago the villagers divided. No one recalls what started the feud, but Upper and Lower Floxton became bitter rivals. While there is some racial division, Upper Floxton being mainly Anari and Lower Floxton predominantly Saxa, members of both cultures live in both parts of the village and suffer no discrimination from their neighbors.

Upper Floxton, which stands on a hill (hence the name), is home to the wealthier inhabitants, the master craftsmen, merchants, and landowners. It boasts a fine inn (The Merchants' Wagon) and a small temple to Var, which doubles as a covered market. The villagers have erected a palisade around the base of the hill, and maintain their own militia.

Lower Floxton, which surrounds the hill, is home to the craftsmen, laborers, herders, and farm workers. It has a small marketplace, a rough-and-tumble inn (The Hayloft) and a shrine to Eostre's dual aspects. It is surrounded by a ditch and bank, and has a separate militia.

Although rivals, the villagers do mix, albeit begrudgingly. Most of the Lower Floxtonians work for the inhabitants of the Upper Floxton, they worship at both temples, and with the markets selling different goods the inhabitants are forced to shop in both parts of the village. Snide comments and jibes are commonplace. These lead to frequent brawls among the younger members of the communities. Romance between the rival communities is heavily frowned upon and has only fuelled the feud.

Both mayors are elected, but only by the population of their village. Upper Floxton's mayor governs for four years, while his counterpart serves for three years. The mayors meet once a year to discuss matters concerning both settlements. These meetings usually end in shouting matches rather than any consensus.

WUDUSMOCA

Population: 682
Ruler: Hearthkeeper Halfdan Haraldsunu
Religion: Kenaz, Eostre Plantmother
Imports: Ale, grain, meat, pottery, vegetables
Exports: Charcoal

Charcoal production is exhausting, dirty, and not without its dangers and setbacks, but Wudusmoca, a town whose name literally means "wood smoke," has turned it into a thriving business. Day

and night, in all seasons, plumes of smoke rise from the colossal piles of dirt-covered burning wood on the outskirts of town.

Despite its population, Wudusmoca boasts scant fields, the citizens maintaining small allotments for vegetables, and keeps little livestock. As such, it is dependent on outside trade for much of its food supplies. Fortunately, charcoal is a required commodity and trade is brisk despite its remote location.

The town has been ruled by the cult of Kenaz since its inception after the Blizzard War, with lordship passing to the high priest automatically on his appointment. Each high priest appoints his own successor, and more than once this has been one of the priest's children or close family members.

Life here is dirty and hard, and conditions get much worse in winter, when famine is a constant threat. Halfdan understands his worker's plight, for he himself routinely helps with the charcoal burning. The citizens are well paid for what is typically considered a menial profession, and Halfdan ensures feasts are laid on every high holy day of his deity at the cult's expense.

Located on the southern edge of the Stone Forest, the locals cut their own timber, reducing their overheads but increasing their workload. Relations are tense with the native hearth elves, who claim the inhabitants are overstepping the mark in harvesting so much wood. No threats have been made, but many charcoal burners have reported feelings of being watched.

Security in the town is provided by a constable and a full-time watch of 20 guards, paid for by the charcoal profits, plus three paladins of Kenaz.

In addition to a small temple to Kenaz, the town maintains a modest shrine to Eostre Plantmother. Halfdan lives in a fortified wooden manor built by one of his predecessors. There are two inns, but few people from outside the community bother to visit unless they are here to trade.



PERSONS OF NOTE

THE BLACK HEALER

Eira is a merciful goddess, but she is not above punishing wayward clerics. One cleric who has suffered her wrath is Hansine ap-Jehan, a woman now known only as the Black Healer for the robes she wears.

In her youth she refused to treat a nobleman she believed was suffering a case of the sniffles. But the ailment was something worse, and the noble developed black lung. He returned and demanded a cure, screaming and shouting at the healer and making vile threats against her, but again Hansine refused. Soon after he, his wife, and his children succumbed to the plague. Eira swiftly punished her servant, for in her eyes she had helped spread the disease by her inaction and was therefore also directly responsible for the death of innocents.

Hansine refused to accept her guilt and perform penance. In her eyes she had done nothing wrong, for the nobleman was known to be corrupt and wicked. The loss of his wife and children were to be mourned, but he had brought down their fate, not she.

Fifty years have passed, and Hansine is now a wizened crone. She has remained a healer, albeit one still stripped of her miracles. Eira has never sent her furies after the cleric, for while Hansine has performed no major act of penance her continuing good work has been a slow road to salvation. Whether she will reach Eira's Afterlife is yet to be decided, for she still refuses to accept any blame for her earlier misdeeds.

Eira, though, is keen for her servant to repent, an act which would ensure her spiritual salvation. She plans to guide mortal agents to Hansine in a bid to try and save her soul from the Abyss, for Eira has no sway over Scaetha, and a thousand minor rights cannot cleanse one truly dark stain from a soul without conscious action.

HONEST ENNO

Enno, an engro, and his family are nomads. Their gaudily decorated wagon roams the Freelands, visiting communities along the way to trade and swap news. Enno is a tinker by trade, buying and selling small items, and repairing shoes and metalwork. Although he mainly trades in mainstream items, his wagon contains many oddities, such as limbs from a golem, crystal skulls, various animal parts, and so on. In a locked chest he keeps a store of keys he has acquired over the years.

Enno buys items at 50% their standard cost automatically, giving 75% on a raise. He asks no questions of his buyers as to their right to sell the item, nor does he give away much detail of items he sells, merely stating only that he "picked them up somewhere back along" or came by then from "a man much like yourself."

Enno claims to be a humble merchant and follower of Var, though he is actually a cleric of Maera and a Reliqus. Much of his youth was spent investigating ruins, which accounts for the bulk of his strange collection. Today he operates as a semi-independent field agent, roaming the Freelands while keeping an eye and ear open for rumors of relics or unusual objects.

Enno rarely visits the Citadel. To do so would threaten his cover, for it is widely known the Reliquary do not trade or deal with outsiders. All communication is handled through *voice on the wind* spells, and Enno keeps a large stock in his caravan.

JESRIC GREENTONGUE

As a newly ordained priest of Eostre Plantmother, Jesric saved the life of a minor fey courtier being attacked by a bear. As it turned out, the fey was a favorite of a powerful Seelie noble, Lady Green Needles. Grateful and generous, she offered the young priest a reward of his choice. He asked for the ability to speak with plants, a boon the noble was happy to grant without hesitation. Suddenly fluent in Arboreal as well as the secret language of mundane plants unknown to all save the fey and a handful of elderly elves, Jesric found his gift came with an immediate side-effect—his tongue turned bright green.

As often happens, though, a fey gift is as much a bane as a boon if the request is not carefully worded. Beside his strange tongue, Jesric can hear the cry of cereals as the scythe slices through their stalks, the moan of grass as it is crushed underfoot by travelers, the gasp of plants as their ripe fruit is plucked, and the howls of pain of trees attacked with axes.

Ironically for a man who wanted to devote his life to tend the wild, Jesric now spends much of his time in towns and cities, where living plants are few and far between. To spend too much time amid the greenery he so loves is to court madness.

WHY COME HERE?

Most adventuring groups will need little encouragement to pass through the Freelands. Those who wish to travel from the Hearthlands to the Winterlands are best served passing through Hellfrost Pass, and that means walking the Freelands.

Aside from the prospect of earning much glory and treasure, the Freelands having its share of monsters' lairs and ageless ruins, heroes may be drawn here by the lack of central authority. So long as they do not try to claim land owned by another authority, they can settle here and raise a fortification, temple, school, or settlement without fear of retribution or demands for taxation. Gamemasters who wish to allow this will get much mileage from the Resource Management rules in the *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A small but prosperous town is suffering a sinister ill. In recent months five heavily-guarded trade caravans have left the town for distant markets, only to return a few days later. The cargos were intact, the mounts unharmed, but every member of the caravan was dead, nailed to the sides of the wagons.

Word is spreading, and merchants are fearful of visiting the town lest the same fate befall them. The local noble offers anyone who can stop the attackers governance of a small hamlet on his lands, which they would rule as his feudal inferior. The hamlet has been seriously neglected over the years, but with work it could become profitable.

* Tribes of orcs are gathering in the foothills of the Icebarrier Mountains. This is nothing new, for orcs raid the Freelands with impunity when the urge strikes them. These tribes, however, are normally bitter enemies. Someone, or something, has managed to get them to set aside their ancient differences and violent blood feuds and work together.

* Since the construction of the Scieldvollr across northern Angmark, orc raiders searching for spoils have been pushed eastward into the Freelands. Many villages and steads have suffered intensified raids as a result. One plan being proposed involves building a Freelands' Scieldvollr, but far stronger than the one in Angmark. The king of Angmark has learned of these plans and has threatened a military response, for if the Freelands' wall proves too much of an obstacle, the orcs will simply turn their attention back to Angmark's barrier.

Heroes might be involved in guarding work parties or supply caravans against orc raiders, driving back an Angmark incursion, or negotiating a settlement that benefits both parties.

* Rogue druids have begun attacking small communities, intent on razing them to the ground. They believe the Freelands should be abandoned by humans and returned to Eostre. A few druids wouldn't normally be much of a threat, even with magic at their disposal, but they have the aid of many fey, tree men, wood elementals, and even the wild animals.

* A spate of suicides has struck Spyre—citizens are throwing themselves off the Windbreak for no good reason. Panic is spreading, the high priest of Thunor is predicting doom for the city, and no one has been able to find the cause. The Count has sent out messengers to find suitable adventurers to investigate the matter before the winter snows isolate the lofty city.

FREETOWN

Only those looking for trouble or illegal goods bother to visit the wretched den of thieves, murderers, smugglers, and beggars that is Freetown. Ruled by the mysterious Lord Blackhand, the city-port is a cesspit of civilization, yet it continues to grow and prosper.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Freetown.

* **Center of Trade:** Virtually anything short of relics can be purchased in Freetown. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost double. Items with a City availability cost just 25% of normal. Heroes selling goods in Freetown have +2 to their Streetwise rolls to find a buyer.

* **Den of Thieves:** All citizens have Stealth d4. This represents not only their ability to avoid danger, but also their habit of picking pockets (almost a subconscious act).

* **Vile Inhabitants:** Assume the average unsavory inhabitant of Freetown has –2 Charisma.

WHO IS LORD BLACKHAND?

The man known only as Lord Blackhand has ruled over Freetown for nearly 30 years, yet he remains a mystery not only to the folk of Rassilon as a whole, but to even his closest advisors. He rarely makes public appearances or gives audiences, and when he does he is always masked behind an ornate silver mask or wrapped in a black, voluminous cloak. Next to nothing is known of his past, yet small clues have allowed gossips and rumormongers to devise a wealth of stories.

Blackhand is not his given name—that much is hard fact. The name is a nickname based on his physical appearance, for it is said his hands are withered and black, as if subjected to some great fire. Some claim his entire body is scarred in the same manner, hence the lord's preference for remaining concealed. Yet whether or not his hands are truly burnt remains open to conjecture.

While the denizens of the desert realm of Al-Shirkuh, who sometimes call here to sell drugs, are brown skinned, they occasionally bring slaves whose skin is as black as midnight. Some insist Blackhand is merely a slave from unknown southern lands who somehow made his way to Rassilon and prospered. One tale, quickly quashed when the rumormonger was found strangled in his bed, his neck crushed by some immense force, records how a merchant from Al-Shirkuh had the honor of meeting Blackhand and came away as pale as snow, mumbling only two words "Hekata" and "mummia." Desert merchants have proven very reluctant to discuss either term, quickly changing the conversation to something more appealing.

Stories that Blackhand is a wizard are rife yet groundless. It is certainly true he has a great fascination of relics, but given that any ruler worth his salt has a similar desire to possess powerful artifacts that is hardly conclusive. He has never invoked a spell in front of witnesses. Some argue that he might (others insist "must") be a cleric of Nauthiz since he rules over a town full of thieves. Others hint at him serving Hothar (he runs the city with an iron grip) or Vali. Again, talk is cheap and evidence is lacking.

Although everyone calls Blackhand "his" lordship, there is no direct evidence he is a man. He is of thin frame and wears baggy clothing, which were he a woman might conceal small breasts. Blackhand smells, so it is said, of exotic spices and incense—wearing perfume or scent is not considered a male trait anywhere in Rassilon. His voice is strong and deep, almost hollow, yet it has a singsong quality. While he is conversant in many languages, rarely requiring a translator even when dealing with foreign emissaries, his lordship has an indefinable accent, as if none of the languages he speaks are actually his native tongue.

THE BLIZZARD WAR

Read any official account of the Blizzard War and two things will become apparent. First, the frontline never moved much further south than northern Midmark, and second, the original settlement on whose crumbling bones Freetown now stands was destroyed during that conflict. While the land forces of the Hellfrost horde was indeed stopped at Midmark, a flight of Hellfrost dragons deliberately broke away to attack what was then a relatively obscure Anari trading post. Quite why the dragons went to the effort of eradicating the settlement has perplexed scholars and storytellers to the modern age.

ATMOSPHERE

Although Freetown's population is similar in size to that of not-too-distant Aith, the town feels far more claustrophobic. Hemmed in between the cliffs that mark the end of the Lesser Crystalflow, the city is a maze of narrow, dirty alleys, drab two-story buildings (ground space is limited), and crowded streets.

Like most ports one feels both welcome and alien because of the number of foreign visitors present, but here there is an air of constant menace. Eyes peer furtively from behind drapes; strangers in the street flick their eyes to money purses and weapons, sizing up possible rewards in relation to the danger of robbing an armed man; rich citizens go nowhere without gruff bodyguards; polite smiles and hellos from shopkeepers and fellow pedestrians are replaced by mumbled threats and curses, or hard stares; and corpses hang at every street corner as a reminder that the laws are absolute.

The crowds press relentlessly as they bustle about their business. The streets are covered in filth while rats scurry unmolested through open sewers and across the lice-ridden, disease-ravaged, and crippled beggars that line the walkways in throngs. The dogs are mangy, the cats feral, and the children prone to picking pockets.

Inns and taverns are frequently the scene of ugly brawls. Strangers are greeted with silence while the patrons decide whether to rob or murder them or just let them have a drink and something to eat. Most establishments serve only poor quality food and drink, and anyone sleeping in an inn will share his bed with more lice and fleas than he is accustomed to.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Thirty years ago a cabal of crime lords known as the Nine Captains controlled Freetown. Each represented a powerful faction or family. Promotion came through assassination or political maneuvering rather than waiting for a vacancy.

Then Lord Blackhand came to Freetown. In the course of a week he had assumed total command of the port, murdering the Nine Captains by his own hand (or so the story goes) and installing the Black Watch as his enforcers. The families and factions of the deceased rulers were given a stark choice—swear unconditional loyalty to Blackhand or meet a similar fate. Given the state of the bodies, which were said to have been horribly mangled to such a

THIEVES' GUILDS

There is no such thing as a standard thieves' guild. Some are informal bands; others operate around a rigid hierarchy. Some have a handful of members; others have memberships in the dozens or hundreds. There are, however, certain titles commonly used by thieves' guilds across Rassilon.

Apprentice: You can't just walk off the streets into a thieves' guild and expect to be welcomed with open arms, at least not unless you're already a talented thief. Any idiot can commit a robbery—the art is not getting caught.

Apprentices practice climbing, picking locks and pockets, cutting purses, disarming traps, and avoiding detection. Apprentices lack the Thief Edge and typically have the core thief skills at d6.

Thief: A trained thief forming the bulk of any guild. They have the Thief Edge.

Guild Thief: Not every thief is a member of a guild, and not every guild member has this title. This title is awarded to thieves who have proven their loyalty and who have built up a good network of contacts in his home city. In game terms, they have the Guild Thief Edge.

Master Thief: Any guild thief renowned for his larcenous abilities is called a master thief. In game terms, he must have the Guild Thief and Thief Edges, Climbing d8, Lockpicking d10, and Stealth d10. Such individuals are usually Wild Cards, as having a Wild Die for all their traits makes them a cut above the rest.

Thief Lord: The next step up from master thief, a thief lord has a minimum of d10 in the three core thief skills and his Agility, plus the Guild Thief and Thief Edges. They serve as the guildmaster's lieutenants.

Guildmaster: The guildmaster runs a thieves' guild, but his position is one of leadership and organization, not necessarily criminal abilities. Some guilds elect a leader, while others allow assassination as a means of promotion. In theory, any thief with the Thief Edge can carry this title.

degree that identification was possible only through tattoos, scars, and their gold rings of office, they chose wisely. Lord Blackhand now rules as an absolute autocrat, neither taking nor asking for counsel.

Although seriously weakened, the families and factions of the Nine Captains remain powerful players in Freetown's politics, though they are careful not to involve their lord in their power plays. They still control much of the trade and crime, and while they can hardly be said to be upper class, they are the nearest the city-port has to offer. Regardless of their actual financial status, they consider themselves the "old families," and expect to be treated with due respect.

Craftsmen, merchants, clerics, wizards, and anyone else with a decent level of income are next down the social ladder. Then come those who work for other people, such as soldiery, laborers, and apprentices. Finally there are the beggars, those whose income relies on the charity of others. With charity in short supply in Freetown, only citizens unable to find other forms of work take to the streets and beg.

RELIGION

So long as temples, shrines, and congregations pay their dues and do not preach against his laws or rule, Lord Blackhand allows the open worship of any deity (including the demon princes) in Freetown. The most popular by number of worshippers, are Nauthiz, Neorthe, Freo, Thunor, and Tiw.

Nauthiz is openly honored here, for thievery is not illegal and gambling is a popular pastime. Such is his acceptance that the city boasts a temple, one of a small few not concealed from public scrutiny. Whereas in many realms clerics of the thief god find it hard to avoid sins or the long arm of the law, in a den of thieves they ply their trade and appease their god with great ease. Traditionally, the high priest, who takes the title Lord Thief, was one of the Nine Captains. While the temple has no real say in the running of the town any more, it remains a powerful faction.

Much of Freetown's illegal trade comes in via ship, and more than a few of its citizens are pirates. Hence, Neorthe, god of the sea, is worshipped. Since Thunor commands the weather, even on the open ocean, he too receives plentiful worship. Unlike among the Saxa, his minor aspect of opposing tyranny receives little worship, and what few adherents that part of the cult has lurk out of sight for fear of stirring Blackhand's ire. Freo is similarly placated. While the god of travel has little jurisdiction over the weather, it never hurts to offer him prayers for a safe and speedy voyage.

With only 300 soldiers present, Tiw may seem an odd choice as a major god at first. Since the port boasts many pirates and is surrounded by Midmark, a hostile nation as far as Blackhand is concerned, Tiw has many adherents.

Slavery is openly practiced in Freetown. A small band of Haptsönir cultists operates here. Since they are opposed to Blackhand's laws, they must worship and act in secrecy. Rooting them out has proven extremely difficult, even in a port where information is easy to gather.

What strikes many outsiders as odd is that Vali does not seem to receive public support. While the cult is not forbidden from opening a public temple, the cult has never liked attention. Cultists work behind the scenes as elsewhere, though in truth there is little need for them to work that hard—the citizens of Freetown are quite open to corruption without their sly nudging. While the famine-cultists prefer richer targets, the cult of Haratt, god of rats, has adherents—Freetown, a port and a filthy city, is beset with vermin.

The cults of Hothar and Sigel also have worshippers, though they are very few in number. Both are opposed to the open corruption and rampant thievery, but to open a temple and preach against the moral decay would invite not only scorn but also violent attacks, and likely raise the ire of Blackhand. Thus, they must work in the shadows to appease their god. Var has no official presence here, despite Freetown relying on trade (albeit illegal). Any temple to the god of trade would quickly become a target for thieves or embroiled in black market activities. While the cult is not opposed to criminal ventures, it has no wish to be stained with a poor reputation for actively seeking such markets.

MILITARY

Before Lord Blackhand seized power, Freetown had no standing army. Every thief lord, slaver, merchant, and whoever else could afford it, kept a personal bodyguard to watch over their person and property. Turf wars wracked the city as the crime lords pitted their forces against each other for dominance.

After removing the most power hungry criminals, Lord Blackhand created the Black Watch, a force of 300 heavily armed soldiers loyal only to him. After a series of very short and very brutal actions, the private militias were disbanded. While citizens may retain bodyguards and watchmen, no family may keep more than 10 armed servants. To do otherwise is to be summoned before Lord Blackhand, a fate few desire more than once.

The Watch is divided into three distinct groups. At the top is the Elite Guard, a force of 10 men who form his lordship's personal guard. The faceplates of their full helms resemble grinning skulls, and black ermine fur cloaks, a mark of their office, hang from their shoulders.

Beneath them are the Palace Guards. Sixty strong, they are responsible for guarding the jail and the palace proper. They are divided into three companies of 20 men. One company is on watch at all times, the second on standby, and the third sleeping or resting.

Finally, there are the 230 Black Watch proper, the thugs who patrol the streets and brutally enforce the law. The Watch is divided into ten companies of 23 men (ten soldiers, two sergeants, and one captain). During the day and evening three companies are on street patrol. At night, four companies hit the streets looking for troublemakers to quell.

The Watch is well equipped, but they receive low wages. They are allowed to make money through bribes, but within certain limits. The Black Watch have the right to accuse anyone of a crime, for instance. Often the accused has done nothing wrong, and a small

bribe may suffice to rectify the "mistaken identity." The Watch is careful not to abuse this privilege too much, for Blackhand executes guardsmen who routinely accept bribes, considering them too untrustworthy. They are also wary about mistreating members of the old families. This isn't out of any respect, but because Blackhand doesn't want to give them an excuse to revolt against his authority (similarly, he can't just eradicate the families because it may stir the people against him).

Freetown has no walls to protect it. The cliffs prevent armies from attacking by land, and the Lesser Crystalflow, which divides the town in half, is seeded with sharp stakes to prevent invaders reaching the third bridge. The only open approach is the harbor, and that is protected by small towers outfitted with ballistas and catapults.

LAW AND ORDER

Freetown may be full of criminals, but it is not lawless. Far from it, in fact, for Lord Blackhand rules with a rod of iron. While citizens are free to rob and murder each other, this is not an open invitation for anarchy. First, visiting merchants are largely off-limits—Blackhand wishes to encourage trade, not scare away customers. Second, being caught in the act is still a punishable crime.

Since many citizens are in some way connected to the Nine Captains, theft and murder can lead to reprisals. No one wants a gang war, especially since that may encourage Blackhand to crack down harder. Thus, despite Freetown's unsavory reputation, theft and murder are not as prevalent as skalds may claim.

Anyone accused of a crime by a member of the Black Watch or a reliable witness is thrown into jail, whereupon they are promptly forgotten. Unless the "criminal" was caught in the act of committing a crime, his friends and relatives may pay a fine to secure his release. Those who are not freed perish from disease, malnutrition, disease, old age, or murder.

The guards don't keep any records—every prisoner is identified only by his cell number. This means anyone who wants to free a friend by paying a bribe has to pay a bribe to learn what cell they are in first. Each month on Raestdaeg, Blackhand draws a single token from a cask. Whoever happens to be in that cell at the time is dragged onto the streets and publicly executed as a warning to others. The corpse is then placed in a gibbet on one of the street corners and left to rot.

THIEVES' GUILD

Freetown's independent thieves' guild (the Restless Hand) operates quite openly, claiming the temple of Nauthiz as its headquarters. Wary of Blackhand, what the guild says and what it does are two totally different things. The true headquarters is in the basement of a run-down tavern, the Luckless Beggar.

As well as committing acts of theft, the guild operates gambling houses in Freetown as legitimate businesses. Most games are actually honest, the odds being stacked in their favor by the laws of probabilities. The guild is accustomed to harassment from the Black Watch, and maintains a slush fund for bribing officials. Of the many prisoners in the jail, the only guild members are those who offended the guildmaster in some way.

Officially the Lord Thief is Liaze Shadow-Thief. She took her nickname after convincing gullible citizens she was such a good thief she could steal a person's shadow (it was a moneymaking scam done using magic). Like much in Freetown, her position is an illusion. The true guildmaster is Maugis the Thin, a corpulent gentleman who passes himself off as an honest merchant. He remains hidden partly to avoid Lord Blackhand, and partly because promotion in the guild comes at the point of a dagger more often than not.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Freetown legally imports very little—most goods in the market are the result of piracy. The port's true mercantile value is as a center of smuggling operations. With only a few safe harbors on this stretch of coast and only two capable of handling large cargos, merchants who want to avoid paying the import and export duties at Drakeport or Aith see berthing at Freetown as a necessary evil. Freetown also acts as a trade center for illegal goods, offering a place where merchants can buy and sell cargos prohibited elsewhere.

Freetown faces two immediate issues based on its geographic location. First, with the merchants of the Free Emirate States lacking a readily accessible trading port in eastern Rassilon, the city might yet become a legitimate center of trade. In order for this to work, Freetown would have to build better ties with Midmark, construct a trade road network, and curb the thievery, violence, and smuggling that makes it a pariah state. Lord Blackhand might be prepared to take this step, but his people might need persuading the move is in their best interests.

Second, Midmark is heavily reliant on the Crystalflow Confederacy for trade. The kingdom may decide to alter the balance and power by transforming itself into a major mercantile realm. All it would need to do is seize Freetown and its deep water harbor. This would not be a simple matter, but with its new navy at Aith it could effectively besiege Freetown on land and water.

Living in Freetown isn't free—Lord Blackhand demands taxes from the citizens. Since people either don't bother to declare their income or would lie, there is no income tax based on annual earnings.

Entrance Tax: Any person entering Freetown must produce a travel pass. These can be purchased from any watch station or the harbor master's office. Prices vary by the length of duration the permit is valid. A day pass costs 1 gs. A week-long permit costs 6 gs, a monthly permit costs 20 gs, and a year's entry runs at 240 gs. The Black Watch frequently charges more, pocketing any extra payment. The harbormaster is actually honest.

Any person may be asked to produce his travel permit or proof of citizenship (see below) by the Watch. Failure to produce the necessary paperwork results in imprisonment (unless a swift bribe is paid), while stubborn refusal to comply results in a severe beating before a trip to the jail.

Citizenship Tax: All citizens with a permanent residence in the city must pay 10 gs per year. In return they are awarded a token declaring them to be citizens of Freetown. This exempts them from the entrance tax. Citizenship tokens can be purchased illegally for 50 gs. Being caught with a forgery results in a trip to the jail.

Property Tax: Citizens pay 10% of the value of their home, including all furnishings, each year. Business premises pay 5%. As a result of this policy, most citizens have just a single well-furnished room, leaving the remainder of their home looking very bare.

Trade Tax: All imports, exports, and goods passing through the city are taxed at 0.5% of their value. Given the low tax rate, few merchants bother to try and conceal their cargos' true value.

Temple Tax: All temples are required to pay a flat fee of 500 gs per annum, while shrines are charged 200 gs. In order to pay the tax, most temples and shrines charge attendees 1 ss per visit. The temple of Nauthiz has a special agreement with Lord Blackhand. Each year, in a public ceremony, the Lord Thief and one of his lordship's chosen servants play dice on the temple steps. If the Lord Thief wins, the temple tax is waived (and the servant thrown in jail). If the servant wins, the fee is doubled.

ARCHITECTURE

Freetown was rebuilt from the rubble of the original Anari city. The modern city displays a total lack of civic planning, having evolved slowly from the debris as the population grew and expanded outward.

When ground space became short the citizens built upward, adding second stories to their homes and shops. Lack of masonry skill meant the early settlers used any blocks they had at hand, resulting in ramshackle abodes with uneven, sloping walls. In the case of two-story dwellings, the top half is rarely mortared to the ground floor—only the weight of stones prevents the top part falling off into the street.


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FREETOWN

1. The Black Swan
2. The Black Palace
3. The Broken Nose
4. The Cabin
5. The Cattle Market
6. The Corsairs' Return
7. The Crone's lair
8. The Dragon
9. The Floating Temple
10. The Gibbet
11. The Hall of Plenty
12. The last Repose
13. The living Shield
14. The Messengers' Guild
15. The Pasha's Palace
16. Pinpricks
17. The Poisoned Chalice
18. Raedvig's
19. Rat's Nest
20. The Raven's Nest
21. The Scroll in the Wall
22. Security First
23. Shipyard
24. Snips and Snacks
25. Soup Kitchen
26. Wilbur's Weed
27. The Word

population: 7,600 ruler: lord blackhand

THE PRICE OF SLAVERY

True slavery, as opposed to indentured servitude, is illegal in much of Rassilon. Indeed, most citizens find the thought of slavery abhorrent. Still, there are still realms where the trade is alive and well, such as Blackstone Barony and Freetown.

While it is unlikely many player characters will desire to own a slave, typical prices for basic slaves are included for completeness. All prices are in gold scields.

Naturally, any slave with an Edge from the *Land of Fire* setting must hail from Al-Shirkuh, which makes them exotic and thus more expensive. Ignore the Edge if you don't own the relevant book.

* **Courtesan/Bed Wife:** *Base:* 500; *Edges:* Houri* (+300; see *Land of Fire*); *Other:* +150 per point of positive Charisma.
* **Domestic Servant:** *Base:* 200; *Skills:* If the slave has a relevant Knowledge (Craft) skill, such as cooking, add +25 per die.
* **Educated:** *Base:* 1000; *Skills:* +100 per die in Knowledge skills except Craft; *Edges:* Investigator (+75), Lorekeeper or Sage (+100; see *Land of Fire*), Scholar (+200).
* **Entertainer:** *Base:* 500; *Edges:* Acrobat (+150), Contortionist (+150; see *Realm Guide #22: The Kingdoms of the Sphinxes*), Master Storyteller (+50), Legendary Storyteller (+50), Storyteller* (+200).
* **Laborer:** *Base:* 200; *Edges:* Brawny (+200); *Other:* +100 per die of Strength over d6, +50 per die of Vigor over d6.
* **Scribe:** *Base:* 75; *Languages:* +100 per language after the first; *Special:* Scribes cannot be Illiterate.

Whereas the Old Town, the part on the banks of the river, has changed little since it was erected, New Town, the part further up the cliffs, is continually evolving. Much of its evolution is unseen, though.

Peering up the cliff, one sees narrow houses seemingly perched on thin outcrops. Without further investigation, it appears as if the inhabitants have even less living space than the scum who inhabit the Old Town. Like the power and influence the old families claim to possess, New Town is largely a facade. The front of the dwellings appears like a well-crafted house, but much of the living space extends deep into the cliff. When the rich wish to expand their homes, they simply hire miners and masons and dig deeper.

Rough cut steps, which become slick when it rains and downright deadly when icy, ascend the cliff in a crisscross pattern. Most citizens of New Town prefer to remain at home except when absolutely necessary, sending servants to make the treacherous climb to buy provisions and other goods.

MAJOR LOCALES

Freetown is an isolated city-port. It makes no claim to any territory beyond its city limits. This entry expands locales with the settlement.

The Black Palace: Home to Lord Blackhand and the city jail, the Black Palace (named after the color of its stone) stands on a small island reachable only by boat. While the imposing exterior looks drab, the interior is lavishly decorated—Blackhand does not scrimp on indulging himself. Statues, tapestries, and carvings from many cultures and ages adorn the walls or stand on marble plinths. While no one has ever seen a library, most citizens who have met Blackhand agree he must have one—he speaks of past matters as if he had witnessed them first hand, and is versed in many lores.

Freetown has a total population of 7,987, yet only 7,600 are registered as citizens according to its last census (taken each year when new citizenship tokens are purchased). The missing citizens are prisoners, slowly rotting in body and mind in the dank jail.

The Broken Nose: Quiet during the day, the Broken Nose tavern is packed once the sun sets. Much of the main barroom is marked off by a low wooden fence, an arena for the nightly bare knuckle prize fights. Any patron prepared to stump up 5 gs can challenge one of the inn's fighters at odds calculated by the innkeeper. Every fight is the subject of heavy wagering. Anyone prepared to try for big money can challenge Pounder, an ogre bought as a slave several years ago. Pounder is has Fighting d10 and the Bruiser Edge.

The Cabin: Located near the north dock, this large inn was once the meeting place of the Nine Captains. Back then it was known as the Captains' Cabin. The owner, Milon ap-Haylon, wisely removed the prefix so as to avoid upsetting Lord Blackhand. Offering relatively clean sleeping furs and adequate food, the cabin mainly caters to wealthier clients. Many of the clientele are the sorts of people Blackhand wants to do business with, so thievery is less common than in other inns.

Two of the patrons, a dour couple claiming to be merchants looking to avoid Midmark's taxation policies, are actually clerics of Scaetha. Eulogist Ernaut ap-Begon and Divine Slayer Cuthhelm Edmundsunu have a suspicion Lord Blackhand might be the missing liche, Angtharinax. His withered hands, reluctance to reveal his features, and interest in relics, not to mention his sudden arrival 30 years ago and unknown background, are all too coincidental to be ignored. They are currently seeking evidence to prove their claims.

The Cattle Market: Slavery is legal in Freetown, but citizens have long referred to the slave market but a more conventional name (albeit one that reveals the value they put on slaves a people). While awaiting sale, slaves are kept in cages, allowing potential buyers to examine them before deciding on whether to hand over hard coin.

Anyone can sell a slave, but all transactions must take place at the Cattle Market. The captives on offer are primarily from Rassilon, but there is a healthy number of residents of Al-Shirkuh. On rare occasions, black-skinned slaves from more distant lands and oriental subjects of the Jade Empire are found shackled. Slaves are sold as auction lots. The prices in the sidebar above are typical values. The actual sale price may be anywhere from 20% lower to 100% higher, depending on demand and the condition of the slave.

The cult of Thunor turns a blind eye to activities in the Cattle Market—the god of winds proscribes clerics from owning slaves, but allowing the trade is not a sin. The cult of Haptsönir has freed numerous slaves over the years, but has never managed to stop the trade completely.

The Corsairs' Return: The corsair fleets that once plagued the coast of the Free Emirate States may have been disbanded, but piracy remains a way of life for some. With no safe harbor in western Al-Shirkuh, a new breed of corsairs has settled in Freetown. The Corsairs' Return is a tavern frequented by the villainous sea dogs. The pale faces of Freetown's native population are a rarity here, partly because they stand out from the crowd and partly because very few of them speak Sandspeech, the *lingua franca* of the tavern's regular patrons. Aside from the unusual language and clothing of its patrons, there is little to mark this as a haunt for foreigners—the food, drink, and decor is all thoroughly northern.

The Crone's Lair: A small tavern in a side alley near the docks, the Crone's Lair is home to a "priestess of the Norns" reputed to have amazing powers to divine the future. Such is her reputed power that she rarely sees customers, and favors only those with important roles in life. In return for unraveling a client's thread of life and seeing what lays ahead, she demands only that the client tell her a secret hidden even from the Norns.

The priestess is a fake, though she is highly skilled at cold reading psychology. She "divines" likely futures based on her client's occupation and ambitions, all of which she slowly wheedles out of him during her divination. She is actually an agent of Lord Blackhand.

The Dragon: A 50' high wooden pole, carved to resemble a headless storm dragon with folded wings, rises up out of the ground near the wharves. A shrine to Thunor, it marks the extent of the god's physical presence in Freetown. Atop the pole flutters a colossal windsock shaped like the storm dragon's head.

Engraved into the stone around the pole's base is Freo's holy symbol, which serves as the god of travel's sole shrine. The four points of the sigil are aligned to the cardinal points. Combined with the windsock, it provides mariners with a clear indication of the wind strength and direction.

Clerics of the two deities run a nearby market stall, from where they sell blessings and cults-made alchemical devices. The stall is open only for an hour either side of the high tides.

The Floating Temple: One of the few all-wooden structures in Freetown, the current temple of Neorthe is actually a dozen ships lashed together in the harbor.

A long wooden building similar in appearance to a Saxa longhouse dominates center of the floating temple. It contains a large worship hall, quarters for the clerics, a kitchen and mess hall, the treasury, and an armory. Images of Freo, Thunor, and Tiw carved from whale teeth stand outside the temple.

The floating temple is only part of a larger temple complex, though that is based on shore. The temple owns two wharves and a number of buildings. The latter serve as flophouses for down on their luck mariners, captains seeking somewhere safe to sleep while in town, hiring halls for crews after employment, and the like. A strong wooden fence separates the temple complex from the rest of the docks.

When services are due the vast temple is sailed in between the two wharves. Citizens board the ship via one wharf, pay their respects to the statue of Neorthe and their 1 ss temple tax, and exit onto the other wharf. Once the queue has filtered through, a cleric gives a sermon to the throng massed on the temple wharf. Those who don't fancy standing outside with the unwashed masses or in the cold or rain may pay 2 gs to worship in the main worship hall.

The current high priest is Master Navigator Gui Roughskin. He is named after the sharkskin cloak and hat he wears in all weathers. Local folklore is he physically wrestled with the shark, killing it by ripping outs its eyes.

The Gibbet: In the same way that committing murder is only a crime if you are caught in the act, so paying for someone to be murdered is only punishable if you are overheard arranging the death. The law specifically states "overheard," a term that has led to a loophole, the exploitation of which Lord Blackhand has done nothing to close. Patrons looking to arrange a murder simply take a seat, write a note briefly describing the target, and leave it on the table in front of them. Interested assassins then make their interest known by buying the patron a drink and taking a seat at his table. All communication is done in writing.

Most of the tavern's regular patrons are murderers-for-hire. Few are actual trained killers—they are just violent thugs prepared to take the risk of getting caught in return for a suitable fee. If one is lucky, a cleric of Niht will take an interest, for the Gibbet serves as one of their headquarters in Freetown. (Like the other dark cults, they have no wish to broadcast their presence too loudly, for not everyone in Freetown is prepared to turn a blind eye to their activities.)

Fees start at 25 gs (life is cheap in Freetown), but rise rapidly depending on the nature of the target and his likely protection. No assassin is prepared to take on Lord Blackhand, no matter how much money is handed over—not even the cult of Niht is that stupid.

The Hall of Plenty: Nauthiz's temple stands on the south bank of the Lesser Crystalflow. Aside from its size, the outside is nondescript, boasting no wealth or religious iconography. Even here, where thieving is a part of daily life, the cult prefers to keep a modest profile. Within are the main worship hall, whose statue depicts Nauthiz in his traditional guise, living quarters and facilities for the clerics, a licensed gambling hall, a small portion of the cult treasury, barracks for apprentice thieves, and a thief training facility known as the "Death Room."

Rumors are that the truly destitute and needy can play the ultimate gambling game. In a secret room is a free-spinning wheel carved with cash sums and methods of death. If the wheel stops with a cash sum indicated, the guild pays up immediately. But if it lands on death, the gambler has run out of luck, for Nauthiz will not be cheated. No fee is charged to play the game, but a citizen can only ever spin the wheel once in his life.

The Last Repose: Death is common in Freetown, though rarely does its shadow fall on great numbers of citizens at any one time. Most corpses are disposed of in the sea. The Last Repose, located on the docks, is considered part of the temple of Neorthe, though there is a small shrine to Scaetha in the grounds. Whereas robbing a living person is part of daily life, stealing from a corpse is risky business. By law, any personal possessions on a corpse found within the city limits belong to Lord Blackhand. These are auctioned off in the Last Repose and the proceeds sent to the treasury.

The Living Shield: The casual violence of Freetown has spawned a lucrative and growing industry—providing bodyguards. The Living Shield is not the only hiring hall catering to those who feel they need protection, but it is regarded as providing the best guards. For 5 gs a day, one can hire a seasoned bodyguard with the Shieldwall Edge. For 10 gs a day, the hired help also has the Bodyguard Edge (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*). For 20 gs a day, one can gain the services of a cleric of Kvara, the minor deity of bodyguards. Patrons are responsible for paying their bodyguards food and lodgings while he is in their employ.

The proprietor, Xavier Three-Eyes, is always after new bodyguards for short-term contracts. Visiting heroes can earn half the rates above by hiring on to protect one of Freetown's citizens.

The Messengers' Guild: The local messengers' guild keeps only a handful of *voice on the wind* devices in store due to the risk of theft. Instead, it makes extensive use of carrier pigeons. Messages are written in special code and sent to Aith, where the guild maintains a small office. These are then sent on via alchemical devices to distant recipients. The guild also offers more traditional couriers, both overland and maritime.

The Pasha's Palace: Spices often flow into Freetown, but the precious cargo is quickly sold on. As a result, even the palatable food in Freetown is notoriously bland, save that is at the Pasha's Palace. Owned by Faisal ibn-Mahmoud, this restaurant serves the native spice-laden cuisine of Al-Shirkuh. Meals aren't cheap (double normal prices), but they are certainly flavorsome. Those who can't afford to eat here are fond of saying the spices cover the flavor of the meat, which comes from a source best left to the imagination.

Faisal never talks to patrons. This is not rudeness—it is simply that he has no tongue. According to word on the streets, he cut out his own tongue soon after arriving as a sign to Lord Blackhand. No one is 100% sure what sign he was showing, but there are knowing nods when ever someone mentions the tale of the merchant from Al-Shirkuh and the strangled gossip.

The dusky-skinned proprietor is not all he claims to be. Faisal is a member of the Brotherhood of Assassins, an elite band of murderers-for-hire who worship a scorpion god. Oddly, he does not ply his trade in Freetown. Assassins who visit Freetown are always pointed toward the Pasha's Palace, where Faisal always has a spare room ready for use. He introduces his guests as cousins from his homeland, the Free Emirate States.

Pinpricks: It is said that only fools and dead men go unarmed in Freetown. Whether one is enjoying the company of a lady of pleasure or dining with an old friend, one always carries a dagger on one's person and keeps it ready to use in an instant.

Pinpricks sells daggers and throwing knives, all made on the premises. As well as standard weapons, the shop sells better quality blades for murderers with discerning tastes or specific needs. Prices below are in addition to the basic cost of a dagger or throwing knife. These options can be combined where applicable.

Balanced: +1 to Throwing (throwing knives only; +100 gs); *Poison Well:* the hilt has a space for a single dose of poison, When used to attack, a hidden switch can be depressed as a free action, forcing the poison along the blade's channel and into the wound (daggers only; +25 gs); *Razor Sharp:* weapon inflicts Str+d4+1 damage (+75 gs); *Thin but Strong:* AP 1; +100 gs); *Weighted:* Range 4/8/16 (throwing knives only; +50 gs).

The Poisoned Chalice: Several organizations secretly operate in Freetown. This herbalist shop is a front for the Reliquary. With Lord Blackhand known to be interested in obtaining relics and the port accessible to merchants from the largely unknown realm of Al-Shirkuh, the Reliquary prudently decided to open a permanent office. The operation is run by Geriant ap-Thibaud, an Arcanologist. Assisting him are three Reliquae, all of whom are also trained herbalists. Two of the Reliquae have managed to infiltrate the thieves' guild. This has greatly enhanced the organization's information gathering capabilities.

Raedvig's: A Saxa skald, Raedvig doesn't advertise his abode or services. Publicly he is an entertainer, traveling the taverns and inns to make a living. In truth he is a very wealthy man, for his true patrons are the old families. While murder is a valuable tool in Freetown, too much of it upsets the lord and risks retaliation. But there are other ways to effectively kill a man.

Such is Raedvig's gift for satire and his widespread popularity with the masses that he can tarnish a reputation beyond repair or

make a man a laughing stock. Such methods are rarely permanent, but they serve their purpose in Freetown's intrigues. Raedvig charges 500 gs a time, but his methods are effective—anyone ridiculed by him suffers –4 Charisma. Each month the penalty is reduced one point. When it reaches zero, the satire has worn off and the reputation restored. Raedvig's satire does not work against a person still under the effects of a previous ridiculing.

The Rats' Nest: Located in a large, low-ceilinged chamber within the "sewers" reachable only means of a narrow flight of steps from street level, the Rats' Nest is a low-end tavern. The proprietor, Gurth Six-Fingers, breeds giant rats in a nearby section of tunnel. Each Marketdaeg, rowdy patrons crowd around a pit in the center of the drinking room to gamble on the outcome of deadly fights in which ferocious dogs are 'matched against the equally ferocious rats. A patron prepared to take on a giant rat using only his bare hands (no magic) can win big, assuming he survives.

The Raven's Nest: Proudly proclaimed as the highest tavern in Freetown, the Raven's Nest is located on the slopes of the southern cliffs. Its prices are as high as its location, something that serves to keep out the poor. Here wealthier citizens can sit and enjoy moderately good beer and wine, acceptable food, and passable entertainment without being troubled by beggars.

The Scroll in the Wall: The interior walls of this tavern are dotted with hundreds of niches. In each one is a scroll. When and why the tavern became a depository of forgotten lore has long been forgotten, but every owner has retained the unusual feature.

The current owner, Elias the Learned, a burly ex-sailor with a gift for languages and a thirst for knowledge, allows patrons to browse the scrolls, but only if they purchase drinks every hour. A small mug of beer costs 5 gs. A patron who gifts Elias a scroll of lore is entitled 20 hours free browsing.

Investigation rolls here have a –2 penalty. This is due to two key factors. First, there is no order to the scrolls—each sits wherever the last browser placed it. This disorderly filing system makes it very hard to track down information with any haste. Second, the scrolls cover dozens of topics, come from different cultures, and were penned untold centuries ago—the odds of finding a single scroll with all the information one seeks are slim.

Security First: Few citizens in Freetown have much wealth, but those who do have no desire for it to fall into the hands of thieves. While the city has several locksmiths of varying skill and honesty, the rich hire the cult of Lasemed, minor deity of locks and traps, which runs this business. In recent years the cult has branched out. As well as providing excellent locks and protective *glyphs* and testing existing security systems, it also hires out the five paladins of Forseti, minor deity of catching thieves, in its employ.

The thieves' guild isn't best pleased with the Thieftakers' presence, but the guildmaster has decreed that no member shall attempt to murder them directly or through hired agents—the guild has no wish to see the paladins turn from a passive obstacle into active thief hunters.

Shipyard: Freetown's shipwrights have always done a good trade in boat repairs—not surprising once you realize most of the damage is caused by them! Ships are sabotaged while in harbor, forcing the owners to make costly repairs before they can leave. More legitimately, they can build ships surprisingly fast—assume one week per point of base Toughness (not including armor).

Snips & Snacks: This combination barbers and pie shop is run by a husband and wife team. Customers invariably order a meat pie from Isabelle (a plump Anari) before getting their hair and beard trimmed or wounds stitched by her husband, Fikri, skilled barber-surgeon who hails from Sirhan, City of Stars, in the Free Emirate States of Al-Shirkuh. By the time her husband has finished his work a hot pie is ready to take away.

Cleanliness isn't a common trait in Freetown, at least not among the lower classes. The clientele for haircuts consists of wealthier citizens and visitors from Al-Shirkuh. Poorer denizens come here to have their wounds tended and for the pies, which are cheap and very tasty.

Soup Kitchen: Run by three clerics of Eira, the soup kitchen hands out soup and bread to the city's beggars each day. The clerics treat beggars' recent injuries (rat and dog bites are common) for free, but charge other citizens. They keep no alchemical devices in stock, but can manufacture a variety of herbal brews from their supply of dried herbs.

Wilbur's Weed: Wilbur, a portly engro of good cheer and yellow-stained teeth, sells pipes and pipeleaf. Much of his leaf supply is stolen, enabling him to sell pouches for a mere 10 gs. For those short of funds but in need of a fix, he even sells single pipe measures for 2 gs. Wilbur is also Freetown's leading source of hashish, a narcotic smuggled in from Al-Shirkuh by his contacts. Hashish is sold in single doses costing 5 gs. Wilbur's stock is very valuable. Rather than pay for expensive locks and traps and hire guards, he pays a monthly stipend, a mixture of money and drugs, to the thieves' guild for them to leave him alone. In return, they protect him from freelance thieves and opportunists.

The Word: The interior of this small establishment contains only a table and a number of comfortable chairs. The proprietor, a man known only as the Mouth, buys nothing and sells only one thing—information—and it does not come cheap. The Mouth has eyes and ears everywhere—little that transpires in Freetown escapes his attention. While those with secret plans might wish the Mouth dead, no one has ever raised a hand or uttered a threat against him—to silence him would rob them of information concerning their rivals' schemes.

WHY COME HERE?

In the wilds one expects to be beset by bandits or orcs, yet within a town or city there should be a degree of comfort and safety. Not so in Freetown, where visitors risk being robbed or murdered. So what can lure the heroes to a den of thieves and cutthroats?

* Orders. While organizations provide members with support, there are times when they call in favors or issue direct orders. Honor-bound to obey, the adventurers may find themselves sent here on an errand. Clerics of Hothar or Var may find themselves tracking a criminal to its shadowy alleys, as may heroes oath-bound to a nobleman.

* Duty. Even if an organization doesn't see fit to dispatch an agent to Freetown, members may feel compelled to pay the city a visit. A cleric of Hothar may desire to wage war on the thievish inhabitants. A follower of Var may come here to engage in trade (see below). Worshippers of Nauthiz ay simply wish to stroll his temple, safe in the knowledge they will not be arrested.

* Trading. While the characters are unlikely to engage in large-scale mercantile enterprises, Freetown can be a source of hard to find items or ones that are too expensive elsewhere. It is also a convenient place to sell large quantities of treasure, as no one asks questions and there are plenty of willing buyers.

* Hiding Out. Adventurers who go on killing sprees in civilized lands will quickly find the authorities on their tail, as will those who betray powerful individuals or organizations. Those looking for a place to hide out for a while will always find refuge in Freetown—Blackhand cares little for who dwells in his domain, so long as the appropriate taxes are paid on time and in full.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Many of the bodies buried at sea are never claimed by Neorthe. The cult of Hela is dragging the bodies from the water and storing them in the "sewers." Slowly but surely they are amassing a sizeable army. When the Liche-Priest rises again, they hope to have enough undead to capture Freetown, giving them a stronghold on the edge of the southern Marklands.

* A friend of someone important from another land has been arrested in Freetown and thrown into jail. All attempts to bribe the guards have failed, and there is a rumor the prisoner will be executed on the coming Raestdaeg. The adventurers are hired to break the prisoner our of jail and return him to safety.

* An outbreak of poisoning is sweeping Freetown! Unusually, the murderer is a cleric of Hothar. Driven half-mad by the unpunished sin, he intends to wipe Freetown off the map by killing all the inhabitants.

FROZEN FOREST

Nestled beneath the Icewall and wrapped around the Scythe Mountains, the vast expanse of the Frozen Forest is a lifeless realm locked in endless winter. Once a major realm for the taiga elves, it is now a frozen hell, wracked by deadly blizzards and the maddening Hellfrost Wind. Few venture deep into its depths, and even fewer return to speak of the terrors and secrets they have witnessed.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Frozen Forest

* **Gloomy:** It is a realm where even the strongest sunlight filters through as only a dim glow, and at night it is darker than pitch. The ambient lighting is Dim during bright days and Dark when it is cloudy. At night, it is always Pitch Dark.

* **No Firewood:** The only wood in the Frozen Forest is icewood.

* **Perpetual Winter:** The temperature within the Frozen Forest remains a steady –40 degrees, making it the same as the Outer Hellfrost. The temperature is not subject to nocturnal fluctuation, though cold snaps do occur.

* **Shapes in the Gloom:** Knowledge of what dwells combined with the sight of frozen corpses, any of which might be a frost wight or ice mummy waiting to pounce, give a –1 penalty to Spirit rolls to resist Fear. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others.

* **Starvation:** The only game and berries have been encased in ice for centuries and are largely inedible. Survival rolls to find edible food suffer a –4 penalty.

* **Weather:** The Frozen Forest uses a different weather table than the rest of Rassilon thanks to its unnatural origins.

d20	Weather
1–3	Clear skies
4–5	2% chance of precipitation, else overcast
6–8	5% chance of precipitation, else overcast
9–10	10% chance of precipitation, else overcast
11–15	Blizzard
16	Heavy Snow
17	Freezing Rain
18	Icicle Rain
19	Hellfrost Wind (treat as Outer Hellfrost)
20	Cold Snap

ATMOSPHERE

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents a brief overview of the major geographic features, but it says little of the atmosphere within this frozen, lifeless realm.

To those who do not know the history of the Frozen Forest it seems a place of wonderment. From a distance it looks serene and picturesque, the sun glinting off the frozen trees and rock-hard ground, snow flurries whipped up by the wind dancing between the towering, living icewood trees like glittering sprites. No footprints mar the snow-covered ground, giving one the impression of entering virgin territory.

But quickly the tranquility begins to grate on the senses. There are no bird calls or animal noises, and when the wind drops, the only sound is one's labored breathing or the crunch of one's feet in the snow and ice. In the near-total absence of external sounds, the mind begins to create its own stimuli. The lack of animal tracks, cart tracks, and footprints brings not feelings of peaceful privacy, but of total isolation. The endless expanse of trees grows monotonous, leading to malaise—a fatal condition in a land where a single mistake might be your last.

While the emptiness assails the mind and soul, the weather destroys the body. Terrible blizzards can spring up in minutes, blanketing the landscape with buffeting wind and stinging snow, eliminating any hope of detecting approaching foes unaffected by such weather. Rains falls as razor-sharp icicles that pierce armor as easily as flesh, or freezes on contact, encasing everything in thick ice. The freezing temperature, which changes neither by season nor time of day, saps strength and erodes morale, and without a source of firewood, hot food and warm nights rapidly become a distant memory. Even heat-magic, one's only salvation against the gnawing cold, is difficult to work, adding to the misery of those accustomed to warm hearths.

The snow is rarely deep, but it is thick enough to conceal small objects. Travelers stumble and trip over hidden obstacles, kicking away at what they think is a stone only to reveal the milky, sightless eyes of an animal frozen five centuries before.

Once night falls the very air seems alive with evil, the wind rising and falling like the frosty breath of some colossal beast that seeks to snuff out any sources of warmth daring to trespass in its forbidding lair. According to the taiga elves, the fell wind which froze their kin in the blink of an eye froze their souls to the mortal realm. Trapped for centuries, they have descended into insanity, eternally screaming out in anguish, increasing the potency of the Hellfrost wind which howls relentlessly through the land. No, this is no place of wonderment, but a haunted realm of endless winter, where death is ever present.

MAJOR LOCALES

Only the Lance Knights have much cause to venture into the interior of the Frozen Forest, and they rarely tarry to explore, for their journey takes them to the Hellfrost. Below are just some of the unusual sites found in and on the borders of the Frozen Forest. In addition to these sites, there are ruined castles, villages, and temples from the age of the Heligi, taiga elf settlements, and possibly locations which predate the arrival of even the taiga elves.

CASTLE OF THE FROST GIANTS

Before the Blizzard War, the elves of Morenelion and dwarves of Karad Khan kept the giants and orcs of the Scythe Mountains in check. For 500 years they have had little to fear except the frost wights, and the undead rarely climb the high peaks. Their numbers have grown steadily, kept in check only by their natural hostility toward rival tribes.

But a new threat has risen. A powerful frost giant jarl has finally defeated his rivals and is now beginning to impose his will over the orc tribes. While he is not an immediate threat, his continued existence poses a danger to Nerenel and the Shattered Moor. Should these realms fall, his armies could sweep south through Seithrby and Heligioland. If they were brave enough, they could in theory bypass any resistance and march through the Liche Lands, linking up with orc forces in the White Drake Mountains and Heldalund, and possibly the frostborn of Cul. So vast an army at the very gates of the Hearthlands would spell disaster for the civilized races.

The jarl resides in a castle atop one of the central peaks, on the opposite side of the range to Karad Khan. Protecting him are

a number of frost giant warriors and a host of vicious orcs. The Hearth Knights have heard stories, but know very little about the jarl. No army could march into the forest without incurring heavy losses, but where many might fail, a small band might succeed.

DVERGTON

Population: 100
Ruler: Noble council

Dvergton, Auld Saxa for "enclosure of the dwarves," actually lies in the Unclaimed Lands a few miles west of the Frozen Forest in the Scythe Mountain foothills. In days of old it served as an outpost of Karad Khan, but today it is the permanent home of just 100 dwarves

Dvergton's sole purpose in the current age is to provide a refuge for the icewood harvesters and their wagons. Originally it possessed two defensive walls, one inside the other. The outer wall has been torn down and used to heighten and strengthen the inner wall. The area between the foundations of the old wall and the new perimeter is seeded with alchemical *blast, entangle*, and *voice on the wind* devices designed to activate if pressure is applied to them. The route through the traps and alarms is changed every year, requiring visiting caravans to wait for a guide to show them through.

The thick stone wall surrounding the encampment, for it cannot truly be called a village, was built without mortar. Yet such is the skill of the frost dwarves that no blade can slide between the huge stones. The walls slope outward as they rise, hampering attempts to scale them.

Butted up against the inside of the perimeter wall are stable blocks and storerooms. Dominating the center is the great hall, from which a watchtower rises. This imposing stone edifice contains the nobles' private quarters, a feasting hall, barracks for the resident huscarls, an armor and smithy, a temple to Ertha (beneath the fort), guest quarters, and a law court for settling disputes, as well as pantries, storerooms, and other mundane areas.

A great beacon burns on the top of the flat-topped watchtower day and night. Visiting dwarves know that if the beacon is ever extinguished, the outpost has fallen and should be avoided. Two huge signal horns, carved from the tusks of mammoths, are positioned here, one facing south, the other facing the forest canopy. Should danger be detected, the horns are blown, alerting dwarves harvesting the icewood to flee to the refuge. One of the horns is a relic, imbued with a permanent, and rather unique, *voice on the wind* spell. When the rune is activated and the horn blown, its warning boom can be heard as far away as Nerenel's southern border.

Although it is widely considered a fact that dwarves and elves do not get along, the two races have never warred. Both are insular races, and contact is sporadic and often over with quickly. However, the master of Nerenel and the dwarves have long had an agreement. In return for the dwarves alerting the elves to any dangers approaching from the north and selling them icewood at a discount, the taiga elves supply the outpost with fresh meat and furs, and agree to help defend the fort should it ever be attacked.

Four nobles govern Dvergton. Hailing from Karads Azgul, Iarn, Marn, and Zor, each holds the title of hauld and has an equal say in the running of the outpost, for Dvergton belongs to no one lord or realm. The four are Angrik Ironteeth (Azgul), Gungnir Twice-Dead (Iarn), Thurik Orcbane (Marn), and Vortigern the Beardless (Zor). Each hauld directly commands a force of 22 veteran huscarls and two experienced rune mages sent here by his home city.

Aside from Lance and Sword Knights, who stop here before entering and upon leaving the Frozen Forest to learn and deliver news, the dwarves allow only taiga elves from Nerenel and those recognized as dwarf friends to enter. No charity can be found here for those wishing to shelter from storms or the denizens of the Frozen Forest.

THE FROST DWARF'S PRISON

While the formation of the Frozen Forest was a short-lived boom to the economy of Karad Khan, many frost dwarves believe it also sounded the death knell, for all communication ended less than a decade later. The loss of the great city still haunts dwarves five centuries later.

The first mention of the frost dwarf's prison occurs less than a century ago. A forester from Karad Zor, separated from his comrades during a blizzard, accidentally stumbled into the Frozen Forest. For a week he wandered, lost in the frigid realm of frozen trees and icy death. Starving, frostbitten, and half-mad from the stress of avoiding the fell denizens, he eventually found his way back to his logging camp.

Once recovered, he reported finding a semi-ruined stone building deep in the forest, at the base of a craggy mountain. By its architecture and broken statues he at once deduced it of dwarven construction, perhaps an outpost of Karad Khan or a mine head. Within its dark interior he sought shelter from the biting cold that gnawed at his bones.

His sanctuary was short, for he was driven out by frost wights emerging from a dark doorway. But before his flight he caught sight of a side chamber which he had previously missed. Within, lying atop a funeral bier, was what he at first thought was a cunningly worked statue of a frost dwarf clad in great finery. Only as he fled into the forest did he realize the figure was no work of art, but a real dwarf, its prostrate form coated in a thin veil of glittering, crystal-clear ice. Although panicked, he swore he saw the figure's chest rise and fall, as if it breathed ponderously, in his peripheral vision.

From his description his comrades surmised the figure could be no less than Karad Khan's lost king. Incensed that the king had been taken prisoner, yet gleeful the great monarch might yet still live and thus know of the doom that came to Karad Khan, the loggers and huscarls set off into the forest. Many ruins of dwarven origin were found, but none matched the logger's description or contained much of interest. With their rations shrinking and casualties mounting, the search was eventually abandoned.

The story, retold among dwarves as the Sorrow of the Frost Dwarf and the Seven Wights, for such were their number according to the sole eyewitness, has become part of dwarf folklore. Every year, parties of dwarves brave the Frozen Forest in search of the prison, but none have sighted the king's tomb.

GRAVEYARD OF THE LIVING

On the southern edge of the forest, where the old trade road to Karad Khan enters the realm, stand rows of menhirs. Carved into the weather-beaten stones are the names of taiga elves who have entered the Frozen Forest. Symbolically dead to their people from this point forward (see The White Druid below), this is their last "living" act. Clerics from Nerenel come here every month to record names added since their last visit. Offerings of food are then made to Eostre, recompense for not providing her a corpse, and prayers are sung for the dead.

THE KING'S ROAD

While the White King ruled in Morenelion, the frost dwarf king ruled from Karad Khan. As a gesture of friendship, the dwarves excavated a tunnel through the mountains, a passage through which the elves could reach the outer world without having to pass through the dwarven city or undertake a lengthy detour. This was no dank tunnel, but a majestic highway, wide enough for ten to walk abreast, paved with flagstones, lined with statues of the White King, and brilliantly lit by magical means.

The tunnel still exists, though few know of its existence today. The statues are shattered by cold or defaced by clawed hands; the route is lined with frozen corpses, the earthly remains of those who tried to flee the terrible wind; and the magic has failed, plunging the long tunnel into utter darkness.

THE LAST HEARTH

Nestled away in a crack in the Icewall, just a few miles from the start of the White Stair, is the last hearth before the Hellfrost. The cave is a secret known only to Lance Knights, and its location is

never spoken of around others, not even Sword Knights attempting to elevate their position and the great masters of the order yet to achieve Lance Knight status.

Stashed within the cave, whose entrance is concealed by a large boulder on which are scratched innocuous marks, is a large store of firewood, strips of frozen meat, weapons wrapped in oiled sealskin, furs, tinderboxes, alchemical potions (mainly *environmental protection* and *healing*), and pouches of dried herbs.

Every Lance Knight who passes this way is honor-bound to replenish any supplies he uses, for they are a vital lifeline in the war against the Hellfrost.

THE LOST CITY OF ANASTELILLIOS

While the taiga elves are today a nomadic people, they once lived more settled lives. They built in wood rather than stone, feeling that stone was too permanent and that, like life, buildings should die to make way for new growth. So it was that the great capital of Morenelion, Anastelillios, was built of wood.

While some hearth elves do dwell in houses high in the trees, taiga elves have always favored pine forests, ill-suited for arboreal dwellings and surface-level abodes. Unlike a human city, the dwellings of Anastelillios did not huddle together. Instead, the elves cleared small glades and linked them with cunningly hidden paths, creating secluded pockets over many square miles.

Here stood small cottages, similar in many ways to Saxa steads, yet less imposing and ugly, and lighter and more spacious inside. Hearths were not needed for heat, and so were small, brick ovens, leaving the center of the room free for the occupants. Warehouses and granaries buildings were few, for the elves hunted and gathered only what they had immediate need of. Industrial buildings, such as forges and workshops, were hidden away from the main thoroughfares. Towering temples blended in with nature, seeming to grow from the soil, as if gifts from the gods that allowed worship without imposing dominance over the forest.

No walls protect the city or mark its boundaries, for soldiers, the animals, and the very forest itself protected the citizens. When possible the elves hid their city by magic conjured from powerful relics and enchantments passed down only from king to king. When magic failed, the ferocity of the elven guard ended threats before they came close to threatening the capital.

Laughter and music filled the air, for while the elves had many enemies they were a carefree race, even after their exile from the far north, a topic of which they do not speak openly. But that was long ago.

Today the city is deserted, its streets covered in snow, great icicles hanging from awnings and beams. Doors hang open, their hinges frozen in place. Many buildings have no roofs, the weight of accumulated snow and ice causing them to collapse over the centuries. Wooden walls, transformed into icewood by the terrible curse, are cracked and buckled. Inside, though, many buildings are locked in time, a glimpse of life in the final seconds when Morenelion was obliterated in one fell swoop.

At first glance it looks for all the world as if the occupants have just stepped out and could return at any moment. Pet dogs sit at attention awaiting scraps that will never come, or drink from bowls filled with solid ice. Mice are caught in the jaws of frozen cats, forever trapped in the moment between life and death. Tables are laid for dinner, half-eaten meals perfectly preserved on wood plates. Spilled wine covers tables like a sheet of colored glass. Clothes as solid as steel sheets hang in cupboards or draped over chairs.

Great Library: While the taiga elves were perhaps not as studious as their hearth elf cousins, they possessed knowledge and wisdom in excess of men. Within the great library, which served as a temple to Hoenir, were housed many thousands of scrolls and tomes. The most valuable were taken when the king moved his court, but hundreds remained behind. Care must be taken, though, for the pages are crisp and brittle, prone to breaking if roughly handled. Among the collection are likely to be many alchemical scrolls, tomes of lore, tomes of learning, and perhaps records that reveal something of the older history of Rassilon.

Hall of the Eternal Flame: Serving as Kenaz's temple, the Hall contained many forges and hearths. At its center burned the sacred flame, the fire after which the temple was named. While lesser fires across the city were extinguished, some magic befell this holy flame, for the flames are frozen solid. No heat radiates from them, though they cast an orange-yellow glow. Hearth Knights who have visited the temple to pay their respects claim shards can be snapped off the flame. When the temperature returns to normal, the shards "melt," becoming fire once more.

Royal Treasury: While treasure hunters talk of a royal treasury brimming with coin, their tales reveal ignorance of taiga elf customs at the time. While noble men may hoard coins and gems in locked boxes, the taiga elves kept their treasures on display, seeing no value in hiding beauty where others could not admire its splendor.

Exquisitely carved whale bone panels and vessels, dresses laced with gold and silver thread worked into beautiful designs, colored glassware as thin as paper and delicate as lace—these were the treasures of the elves. It is true there is still coin enough to make a man rich for at least one lifetime scattered throughout the city (orcs have taken much of it), but these are not the true treasures.

There is actually a royal treasury, though no one has yet discovered its location. It is quite possible it was emptied before the exodus, for inside were kept many relics. Heedless of the risks, the Reliquary has launched many expeditions to the city, both to recover any remaining relics and to hunt for arcane knowledge. Most never return, and those who do come back empty handed.

While skalds still sing of the treasury and its wonders, their talk of deadly arcane traps are largely fanciful creations designed to appease their audience. With little risk of an enemy ever reaching the city and theft rare, the elves saw little point in constructing elaborate traps.

DENIZENS OF THE REALM

Most scholars and explores agree that ice mummies and frost wights are the only creatures that dwell here. The truth as always is far more varied, for many creatures have made this land their home since it became a frozen wilderness.

Living creatures such as Hellfrost boars, frost wolves, snow leopards, and all types of mammoth wander through the outer regions, while arctic tick swarms infest the bodies of such creatures that have fallen foul of the vile denizens that lurk deeper within.

Coldfire salamanders, coldfire sprites, and various icy elementals gather in the deepest depths. Chills, frost mote swarms, hvitrwyfs, and Hellfrost vampires lurk in the dark recesses, awaiting the warmth of the living to feed upon. Coldfire beetles scurry through the undergrowth. Winter hags serve Thrym in secret glades, while shiversprites dance merrily before unleashing their frigid powers on neighboring lands.

Frost giant, ice goblins, and well-wrapped orcs reside in the Scythe Mountains, occasionally raiding the forest below in search of treasure. Dark-souled hrimwisards and clerics of Thrym venture here in search of contact with intelligent beasts that might impart them wisdom and understanding of the Hellfrost.

THE SUMMER GLADE

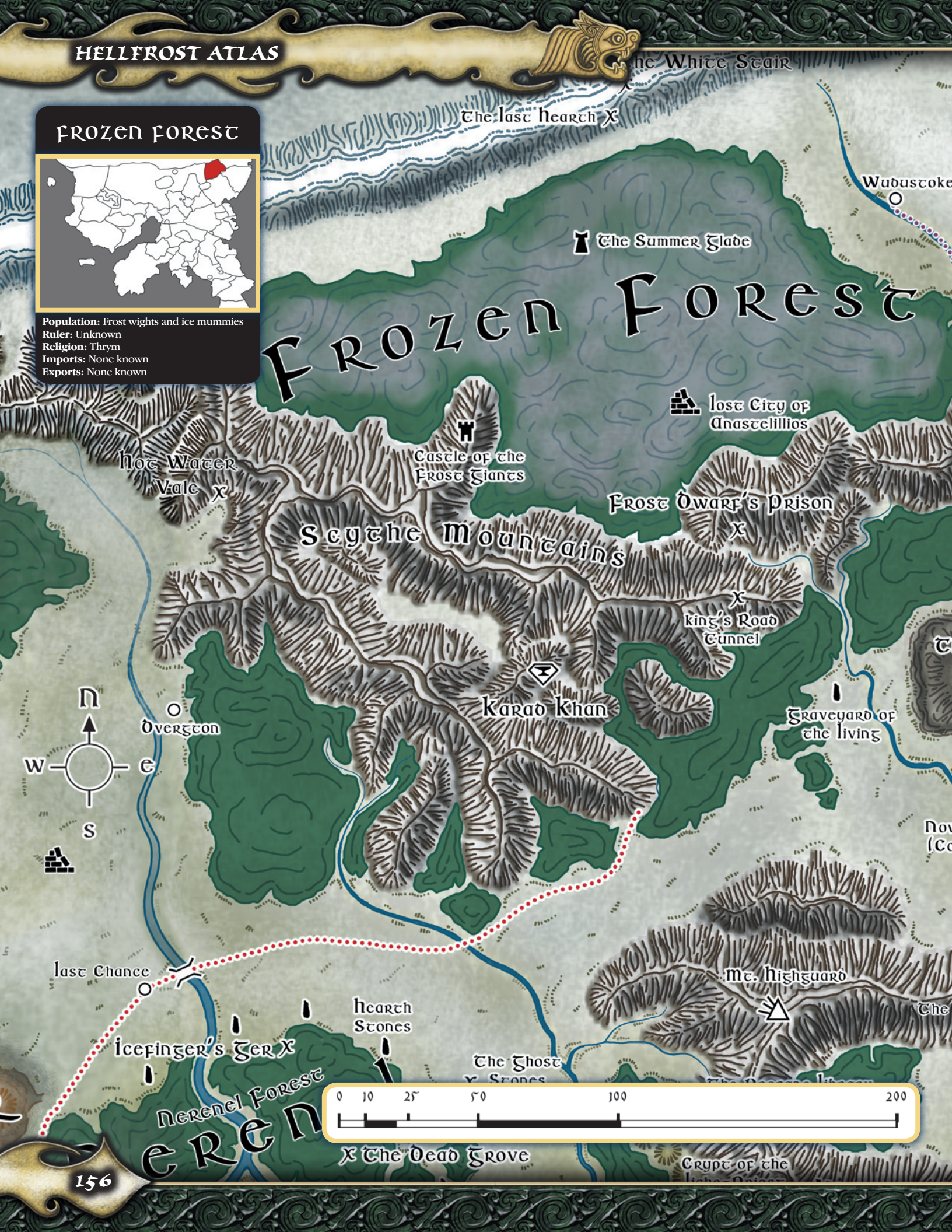
While taiga elves enjoy cold temperatures, they still recognize the need for the seasons, for summer and winter are both part of the cycle of life. They worshipped Kenaz as the god of summer, not Sigel. Their myths tell that in summer Kenaz would work at his forge, the heat from which warmed the world. In winter, he rested from his labors, throwing on only a few lumps of charcoal to keep the world from freezing.

As a result, Kenaz had two distinct aspects in Morenelion. One was the god of hearths and forges, who was worshipped inside temples, while Kenaz the god of summer was honored outdoors. The Summer Glade is an outdoor temple to Kenaz.

It comprises a circle of eight menhirs of red sandstone, each emblazoned with elvish script telling of Kenaz's might. In the center of

FROZEN FOREST

Population: Frost wights and ice mummies
Ruler: Unknown
Religion: Thrym
Imports: None known
Exports: None known





a circle is a large hearth ringed by small stones. Rising from the core of the hearth is a tall, slender stone with polished sides and Maerathril lettering worked into its smooth surface. Despite the cold winter, the temple remains a sacred site to the god of warmth.

Spirit Name: Summer Son.

Ambience: Within the outer circle the temperature is slightly warmer, though it is still as cold as the High Winterlands in winter regardless of season. The malevolent threat that pervades the rest of the wood is lessened.

Deity: Kenaz.

Senses: When the spirit is dormant it has d4 Notice extending only as far as the outer stones. Once active, this increases to d10 within the temple.

Communication: Summer Son talks in a crackling voice, but unless a sacrifice has been made he is comatose. Once awakened, he speaks to those who made the sacrifice. Summer Son can only recall events that occurred while there were sacrifices in the hearth. After this, all he does is sleep a dreamless sleep. Given the rarity of visitors, there may be decades or even a century or two between awakenings.

Sacrifice: Firewood (**not** icewood) or charcoal.

Powers: Regardless of the temperature or when a sacrifice was last made, the hearth radiates just enough heat to keep the temperature above the forest ambient. For each pound of suitable sacrifice thrown onto the hearth, Summer Son can produce one of the following effects.

* Raise the temperature within the temple confines to that of the Hearthlands in summer for 24 hours. The temperature rises within an hour of the sacrifice being made and drops just as quickly when the period ends.

When this occurs, a miraculous transformation occurs. The snow and ice melt away, flowers erupt from the defrosted earth and bloom, and icewood trees transform into their natural counterparts. Frozen animals carcasses brought into the warmth defrost, though the spirit cannot return them to life—such acts are beyond even Eira.

* Grant one person within the temple the benefits of *environmental protection (cold)* for 24 hours. The spell activates when the hero next enters a region where the temperature is below freezing. Only spellcasters with an ice, cold, or coldfire trapping can *dispel* or *negate* this effect. Summer Son has Spellcasting d12 for this purpose.

* Gain a +2 bonus to cast a spell with a heat or fire trapping while within the temple area.

The effects need not be chosen immediately, though unless the heroes take the second or third option as the sacrifice is made the temperature automatically rises and one pound of sacrifice is consumed.

Example: *Four adventurers sacrifice a total of nine pounds of firewood to Summer Son. The temperature immediately rises and one pound of sacrifice is used up. The same day, a frost giant and a band of orcs stumble across the site and attack. During the fight one of the heroes calls on the +2 fire magic bonus three times, consuming three pounds of sacrifice. There are now five pounds of sacrifice left in the hearth. Since one of their number is a brimwisard they decide to use three of the remaining offerings to gain* environmental protection *spells for when they leave. The last two pounds are used to keep the glade warm for another 48 hours. With no sacrifice left, the temperature drops when the last 24-hour period ends.*

KEY PLAYERS

Travelers and sages alike claim the land is uninhabited by any intelligent being, but their tales are wrong. Among the many horrors lurking in the frozen wood are a few possessed of great intelligence and great power. Fortunately, not all are of evil nature.

ANKHSETREHOTEP

One of the most enigmatic denizens of the Frozen Forest, Ankhsetrehotep is a cryosphinx riddle master. He claims to have served the previous White King as an advisor, abandoning the realm when

the king heeded his visions and left before the disaster. If that is true, then he is over 500 years old, a great age for any mortal being. With most of the taiga elf royal archives left behind in Morenelion and no one alive from that period, no one can disprove his claims.

Ankhsetrehotep returned to the Frozen Forest at the end of the Blizzard War, but found only death and ice. It was he, so he says, who told the king of his nation's ghastly fate. The cryosphinx claims he remains here because he believes there lies within the forest a way to remove the curse, though he admits many centuries of searching have revealed nothing. He knows many secrets of the Frozen Forest, but is only willing to exchange them for fresh flesh. Though he preferred sentient flesh in his youth, he is now content with animal flesh.

THE BLIZZARD KING

A fey noble of the Unseelie (or Winter) Court, the Blizzard King is the dominant fey ruler within the Frozen Forest. For countless centuries he ruled alongside his counterpart in the Seelie, or Summer Court, sharing the year equally as the seasons ebbed and flowed.

Spiteful and cruel, the Blizzard King delighted in inflicting harsh winters on the mortal realm, for his power increased as the temperature dropped. Now the mortal shadow of his fey domain is permanently frozen in temperatures that rival the outer Hellfrost, his power is the greatest it has ever been.

Taiga elves describe him as a tall man of bone white skin and hair, and glacial blue eyes, teeth and nails. He wears a crown of ice and wraps himself in a cloak of snow which warps and flows like a miniature snow storm. In his left hand he grips a scepter of black ice. Depending on his mood, his voice is the slow, rumbling grate of a glacier or the howling of the north wind. Wherever he walks, winter follows in his wake, leaving the ground clad in frost.

His powers are many. He can summon blizzards and elementals with a thought, freeze flesh with a touch or sheathe a foe in unbreakable ice, command any cold-dwelling creature to obey his will, and speak the language of all arctic animals.

One taiga elf tale dating back to the time of the destruction of Morenelion claims the winter has remained because the Blizzard King captured the local Summer Court and bound them in chains of ice. Without their influence, the land could not be freed from its icy grip. No taiga elf blames the king for causing the devastating wind, only of taking advantage of it to suit his ends.

Humans, who learned a garbled account of the story from merchants and explorers, have drawn different meaning—their stories claim the Blizzard King is an agent of Thrym, perhaps even a demigod, who has Kenaz and Sigel imprisoned somewhere in the Frozen Forest. While such a story may seem like hokum, in these dark days men will clutch to the most fragile straw, and such is the widespread success of the story that many clerics of the two missing deities believe it holds some truth.

It is likely the taiga elf stories hold some truth, for the Seelie fey vanished from the Frozen Forest at its creation. While the fey are not directly responsible for the seasons, at a local level they exert great authority over them. That there are no seasons in the Frozen Forest is telling.

THE WHITE DRUID

Five hundred years, scarcely three generations in taiga elf terms, have passed since the transformation of Morenelion, yet in that time new beliefs have arisen.

One such belief says that any taiga elf who plans to enter the Frozen Forest is to have burial prayers spoken in his presence before he goes. Taiga elves believe the soul of any living member of their species is devoured by the undead and the body used as a vessel by one of the insane souls trapped in the frozen wilderness. The taiga elf will never again be welcomed back into his clan, being considered dead to them from the moment he left on his foolish venture. Any taiga elves who learn of his trip to the forest will consider him a dangerous threat.

One such taiga elf is the White Druid. Although the forest is now living icewood, nothing in the druid creed prohibits them from caring about such places. As a youth he desired to tend the wild forest and become its guardian, an act that cost him his family.

Of advanced years, the taiga elf has spent centuries roaming the Frozen Forest, tending the trees, driving away orcs, and battling the fell undead when their paths cross. He has no interest in looting the abandoned settlements, despite their containing relics which would aid him in his great endeavor, though he knows the location and layout of many of them.

The druid has had little contact with the outside world over the years save for a few parties of dwarf woodcutters and lone Hearth Knights. During this time he has forgotten his name and that of his clan. Today he introduces himself only as the White Druid, naming himself after the color of his robes.

WHY COME HERE?

The Frozen Forest is a huge realm shrouded in winter as deep and hard as the Hellfrost, and populated only by undead and evil fey. So what might lure the heroes to this Thrym-cursed realm?

* Orders. Several organizations have reason to send members to the Frozen Forest. Characters owing allegiance to these groups may end up treading the lifeless realm. Lance and Sword Knights, clerics of Kenaz and Hoenir (and sometimes Scaetha and Sigel), Lorekeepers, and the Reliquary, all have good reason to travel here, though for different reasons.

* Treasure. The demise of the taiga elf realm of Morenelion occurred in an instant, giving the inhabitants no time to stash their treasures. While some tomb robbers have prospered here, most found only death. As a result, the great treasuries of the noble houses, replete with coin, gems, and relics, remain intact and, relatively speaking, unguarded.

* Passing Through. One passes through the Frozen Forest for only three reasons—to reach the White Stair, beyond which lies the Hellfrost, to reach the lost dwarf realm of Karad Khan, or as a means to reach the Icedale Freeholds without entering the Liche Lands.

* Glory. A man who can claim to have entered the Frozen Forest and return with evidence, while not assured of immortality in skalds' tales, is on his way to glory. Similarly, there is plentiful opportunity to acquire glory through the slaying of dread beasts.

With every taiga elf settlement frozen, exploring them can quickly become a boring, repetitive chain of "dungeons." The GM should remember that every settlement was once bustling with life and every structure had a purpose beyond becoming a future adventuring site. Exploring an abandoned ruin can be fun, but venturing into the rime-coated halls of a temple of Sigel carries far more meaning to the heroes, who have likely been in active temples before, and adds to the greater backstory that this was a living land ravaged by cruel fate.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Hauld Vortigern the Beardless and six of his huscarls entered the Frozen Forest in search of a young dwarf noble and his woodcutting party who failed to return on schedule. Now Vortigern and his guards are missing. The council can't approach Nerenel for aid, for the elves will not step foot in the cursed realm. While they would prefer to enlist the help of proven dwarf-friends, they will hire any outsider willing to swear oaths of loyalty.

* A cleric of Kenaz has heard vague stories of a sacred temple which has not yet been defiled by the winter. He wishes to pray to Kenaz at the site, believing that doing so may provide a divination as to what has befallen his deity. What he needs are reliable guards experienced in surviving the bitter cold.

* Someone is killing off taiga elves who have ventured into the Frozen Forest and survived. Although Forestlord Elethenel of Nerenel, like all his people, considers the victims spiritually dead, he has no wish to see his kith and kin murdered. He asks the heroes to find the killer. Visiting the Graveyard of the Living is likely a good place to begin the investigation, as it may lead the heroes to the killer's next intended victim.

Giant's Throne

For 40 years the inhabitants of the Giant's Throne have been gathering their strength in preparation for a major invasion. Though an ill-fated attempt to invade the western Low Winterlands was recently thwarted at Watchgap Fort, the frost giant ruler, King Kaldr, has not given up his dreams of stamping his authority over the surrounding lands. From his windswept fortress, the icy king watches over a frigid domain of rival orc tribes and barren jagged peaks.

Rules of the Realm

These setting rules apply in Giant's Throne.

* **Eyes Everywhere:** King Kaldr is a paranoid ruler. The hills, mountains, valleys, and caves are seeded with spies—animal, goblin, and orc. Each day, intruders must make a Cooperative Stealth roll with the character with the *lowest* Stealth as the lead opposed by a Group Notice d6 roll (a generic value used to represent the many sentries) in the foothills and d8 in the high mountains. Failure means the characters' intrusion has been discovered. An orc attack is likely to occur in the next 2d4 hours.

* **No Trading:** Giant's Throne has no shops or craftsmen open to the characters. Once the characters enter this realm they must rely on whatever resources they have at their disposal or can scavenge from the dead.

* **Wintry Realm:** The presence of so many frost giants combined with the spells invoked by loyal hrimwisards and clerics of Thrym has an adverse effect on the weather. Although geographically in the Low Winterlands, treat the realm as being in the High Winterlands with regard the temperature.

A Hostile Land

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents a brief overview of the major geographic features, but it says little of the atmosphere or difficulties of travel within the frost giant and orc infested mountains.

The southern border of Giant's Throne is delineated both by geography, the Frostwater River, and the grisly remains of those who dared to trespass here. Pyramids of severed skulls, the most recent still with flesh clinging tenaciously to bone, and the grisly spectacle of unwanted guests impaled on long spears, their flesh flayed so it flutters in the biting wind like ghastly wings, clearly state who is in charge here and what fate awaits those who do not retreat to safer lands. For those who have traveled the Withered Lands the site is a token show of pain and despair, but for most it is a ghastly image.

Along the western flank, tendrils of fog from the Mistlands stretch and feel their way into the low-lying valleys. When the mists rise the orcs flee to higher ground, for the mists' malign power is no less dangerous here than in the cursed land of perpetual fog and shadow. Few travelers have the willpower to enter the region along this border.

Progress through the realm is painfully slow. Relentless biting wind, deep snow, and steep climbs sap strength and willpower. There are no roads, and few navigable passes. Wanderers must often backtrack for many miles in their attempt to reach the higher peaks, draining their morale, as well as precious supplies. Cold seeps into bones difficult to keep warm, for lighting a fire is a sure way to summon the many orc tribes who call this realm home. As one climbs higher, the temperature drops and the air thins. Breathing becomes painful, and every step exhausting. Actually climbing the steep mountains, the only way to avoid being spotted by sentries, is a challenge few survive.

The constant wind has stripped away much of the soil, leaving only barren exposed rock. Lichens and short, tough grass grow in crevices, but there is little for horses to eat and nothing for men. Without suitable vegetation there is little wildlife save for small mammals, insects, and birds. An ill-prepared party faces weakness through starvation in an already deadly landscape.

Indeed, travelers must be cautious to the point of paranoia, for King Kaldr has many sentries on constant patrol. A loose rock tumbling down the mountain might be the result of a goat stepping off the track, but it might also mean orcs are on your trail. It is said Kaldr has spies among the mundane animals, as well. A flock of birds might be nothing to note elsewhere, but here, it forces wise parties to stop and hide. And everywhere there are signs of orcs—slaughtered animals rudely stripped of meat, dead orcs killed by avalanches, falls from the higher precipices, or squabbles with their kith and kin lie strewn at random intervals, reminders of the living danger lurking in the dank caves that dot the mountains and the danger of a careless step.

While giants and orcs are a constant threat, they are not the only predators. Hellfrost dragons roost here, albeit in small numbers, and only at high altitudes. Cryohydras, ice trolls, Hellfrost vampires, hrimgangers, hvitrwyfs, and packs of dire wolves haunt the lower slopes, while coldfire salamanders and sprites dance on the higher, colder peaks. Even the orcs must tread carefully, for King Kaldr's rule does not extend to these deadly creatures that share his realm.

Military

As far as the Hearth Knights' best intelligence can deduce, King Kaldr has at his disposal a force of some 300 frost giants, 2,000 orcs, and 1,000 goblins. These numbers include only warriors, not females, children, or slaves. Hrimwisards, frostborn, and clerics of Thrym from other races have flocked to his banner. The Knights do not have accurate intelligence on their numbers, but a best guess collectively places them in the low hundreds. They are assigned to serve as Kaldr desires, meaning they can be encountered anywhere in Giant's Throne.

Unlike most rulers, Kaldr governs a divided army. The orcs are split along tribal affiliations too ingrained for even his might to crush. The king has slowly come to realize that a divided nation can be beneficial—while the orcs are busy squabbling among themselves, they present no threat to his rule. Tribes who please him are well rewarded with spoils, fuelling the animosity of the other orcs and forcing them to work harder to earn his approval. In order to ensure continued loyalty, and prevent open warfare, each tribe hosts what Kaldr calls a "defensive force," the low guard from one of his ten frost giant companies.

Frost Giants

Kaldr's bodyguard is the Frozen Death, a company of 20 greater frost giant warriors. In battle they ride mammoths, though their sole function is to protect the king, not charge the enemy.

His frost giants are divided into ten companies, each of 30 giants. Each company comprises three guards—high, middle, and low. A warlord (a Wild Card greater frost giant) commands each company. He also leads the company's high guard. The warlord is assisted by two sergeants (both greater frost giants), each responsible for one of the other guards. In terms of actual troops, six of the companies comprise lesser frost giants, and four are greater frost giants.

GOBLINS

When he came to power, Kaldr took overall control of the goblins in the realm, molding them into a single force under his personal command. The orc chieftains' bitter resentment of this policy was swiftly quelled by a few very public and messy executions.

Kaldr has divided the goblins into seven infantry companies and three wolf rider companies, each of 100 goblins. A Wild Card greater frost giant commands each company, with five elite orc warriors serving as his sergeants. In cavalry companies, the frost giants ride mammoths, while the sergeants have dire wolf mounts.

ORCS

With regard the orc tribes, Kaldr currently has ten at his disposal, though none can be considered a large tribe. Each is briefly described below. The number in parentheses is their current military strength. All the tribes have a single chieftain. For every 50 orcs or part thereof there is one sub-chieftain. Use the chieftain stats, but treat him as an Extra. The exact percentage of warriors, elite warriors, berserkers, priests, apothecaries, and so on has not been detailed. This gives the GM leeway to create exciting encounters as he desires without being tied to canon. In general, every tribe can muster a number of runts equal to its core fighting strength.

* **The Biting Wind (200):** Although the Biting Wind makes use of bows, they are not especially skilled archers. Every orc warrior carries a short bow and 20 crude arrows in a quiver.

* **The Bloody Bears (250):** In order to prove himself a warrior, every orc of this tribe must kill a bear in single combat. After being crudely skinned, the bear's fur, replete with strands of flesh and sinew, is worn as a badge of honor. Outside of the rite of passage, the tribe has little to differentiate it from countless others aside from the number of berserkers—a full 20% of the tribe's strength are insane killing machines.

* **Death Chanters (280):** Taking their name from their practice of chanting what misery and pain they will inflict shortly so as to unnerve their enemies, the Death Chanters always use their first action once within 12" of an enemy to Intimidate them. Increase the orcs' Intimidation skill die by one step, to a maximum of d12. Orcs without the skill gain it at a d6.

* **Frostriders (100):** A small clan of the polar bear-riding orc tribe has sworn loyalty to Kaldr. They serve as his elite heavy cavalry.

* **Hailstorm (100):** The smallest tribe, in terms of actual fighting strength, is made up of 50 artillerists supported by just 50 warriors. They have ballista, catapults, coldfire throwers, and trebuchets at their disposal. Twenty ogres are used as loaders and bearers.

* **The Headhunters (150):** Warriors of this tribe take the heads of their foes to prove their kills. Their mythology holds that the number of heads they gather in life will determine their place in the afterlife. After Incapacitating a foe, they always perform a Killing Blow the next round, even if still being attacked, severing their enemy's head. They carry a mixture of swords and axes, but never employ blunt or piercing weapons.

* **The Impalers (200):** Renowned for impaling foes on vertically planted long spears after battle, the Impalers are also considered masters of the thrown spear. Every orc with the Throwing skill has the Spear Twist Edge (see *Rassilon Expansion*).

* **Snarling Fury (300):** This tribe favors mounted combat. Two-thirds of its strength is mounted on dire wolves, while the remainder is on foot. Regardless, every orc used the Rider statistics. When a rider falls, an infantryman is expected to mount up in his place.

* **Sudden Death (150):** Mounted or on foot, the warriors of this tribe are renowned for their guerilla warfare tactics and mastery of ambushes. Increase the orcs' Stealth skill die by one step, to a maximum of d12. Orcs without the skill gain it at a d6. Their dire wolf mounts have Stealth d6.

* **Whirling Death (250):** The warriors of this Dargar-worshipping tribe carry long chains tipped with a spiked metal ball (Str+d6+1, –1 Parry, Reach 1, 2-hands, ignores enemy shields). In combat they advance in a widely spaced formation, swinging their chains over their heads in long arcs. Every warrior and elite warrior has the Sweep Edge, while chieftains and sub-chieftains have Improved Sweep.

MAJOR LOCALES

In addition to the sites mentioned in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, Giant's Throne has a number of other locales that might serve as the basis of adventures.

THE CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS

High altitude and cold temperatures can do strange things to the body and mind. Also known as the Castle of Clouds, it is commonly held that this site is naught but a hallucination brought on by a disturbed mind. Its "discovery," if the majority of skalds is to be believed, dates back nigh on 80 years.

A Shield Knight seeking to prove his mettle against frost giants ventured into the high peaks. Keen to avoid the orc patrols that keep an eye on all the easy routes into the Giant's Throne, he entered the Sigil Peaks in the Unclaimed Lands, even though it meant a longer and more perilous journey. At some point along the route he found himself on part of the mountains so high that he was level with the clouds, in a realm above which lived only mighty eagles and Thunor's servants. There, to his surprise, he saw a great castle, its towering gray-white walls rising out of the turbulent clouds. Thinking it to be a frost giant's lair he sallied forth to do battle with its terrible occupants.

Before he got there, though, the clouds parted in front of him. Before him lay not the ice-encrusted rock of the mountains, but empty space, a sheer drop to certain death many thousands of feet below. Shocked to his core, and believing himself to now be walking on the clouds rather than the mountain, the Knight promptly abandoned his quest, fleeing with all due haste to lower altitudes.

Those who believe the story cannot agree on the nature of the builder. A powerful fey noble, a race of mysterious giants, an elementalist of formidable power—all have at one point or another, being charged with creating the castle in the clouds.

CLOUDCAP MOUNTAIN

Straddling the northern border of Giant's Throne rises a towering, solitary peak, one of the tallest in the range. Permanently shrouded in a blanket of thick, block storm clouds, the mountain is aptly named. Lightning crackles and rages across the higher slopes and deep, rumbling thunder booms relentlessly like the beating of a gigantic heart.

Many myths relating to Thunor are associated with the mountain. The most common claims that Thunor himself appeared here during the Blizzard War, the god of thunder and lightning locking blade with Thrym in a titanic struggle that caused the earth to shake. Many clerics of Thrym refer to the mountain as "Thunor's Whetstone." They believe the storm god sharpens his weapons on the summit in preparation for his next engagement against Thrym, which will occur on the eve of the Fimbulvintr.

Were one to peer through the clouds, or make the treacherous ascent toward the unseen summit, one would gaze upon a monstrous castle constructed many millennia ago. Here dwells a clan of storm giants. The storm giants have long been enemies of the frost giants, and the two races have warred openly on and off since the Blizzard War. Despite their animosity toward the ruler of Giant's Throne, the storm giants are no allies of the civilized races.

EIRA'S SPRING

Long ago, before the Ice Wall rose, a cleric of Eira who suffered from leprosy was walking through the southern Sigel Peaks when she stumbled across a steaming pool in a secluded valley. She entered the warm waters, seeking only to warm her chilled bones. When she rose, she discovered her condition had been cured.

News of the water's wondrous healing properties quickly spread across the land, for the cleric declared her healing a miracle. The sick came in droves, seeking cures for their various ills, for in those days the world was a safer place and the valley in which the spring lay was far more accessible. Over time the spring became a pilgrim-



Giant's Throne

Population: 300 frost giants, 3,000 orcs and goblins (both estimated)
Ruler: King Kaldr the Wicked
Religion: Thrym
Imports: None known
Exports: None known

age site, where those even in good health would come to offer thanks for their well being and make donations to the cult of Eira in return for continued health.

As donations flowed in, the cult of Eira erected buildings to house the clerics and visitors. Eventually the springs became the heart of an extensive temple complex, the water off limits to all but the clergy. Instead of bathing in the springs, pilgrims could buy flasks of the holy liquid to take with them.

As money flowed in, the cult became avaricious, more concerned with its growing influence and power than caring for the sick. Corruption gnawed at the hearts and souls of the clergy. The high priest became insane, convinced that perpetually bathing in the waters would make him immortal. At first he simply refused to vacate the spring, spending his days and nights there, and even conducting services from the pool. Slowly his madness grew more insidious. He came to suspect his peers of desiring his death, for, in his mind, they had become jealous of his long life.

The magic in the water combined with the priest's desire for eternal life has worked a potent and fell charm. He is now a liche. He has no clerical powers, for Eira has long withdrawn her love and Hela has no interest in him, but he has developed supernatural power over water. A practitioner of previously unknown magic, he uses the Spellcasting skill. He is still susceptible to the Siphoning as normal.

Time and calamity have erased the location of the springs, leaving most, even the cult of Eira, to believe the story a fable. The water is not, however, a magical cure-all, despite the legend. Rather, when infused with the right herbs it forms a potent healing (regenerative) or antibiotic (see *Hellfrost Expansion*) herbal brew. Using the water grants a +2 bonus to create these remedies.

THE FIDDLER'S CAVE

Fiddler's Cave is another site that may or not be real. The story is certainly old, but versions of it exist concerning other locations. Critics have pointed out that placing it in Giant's Throne is a sure way to prevent anyone searching for the truth.

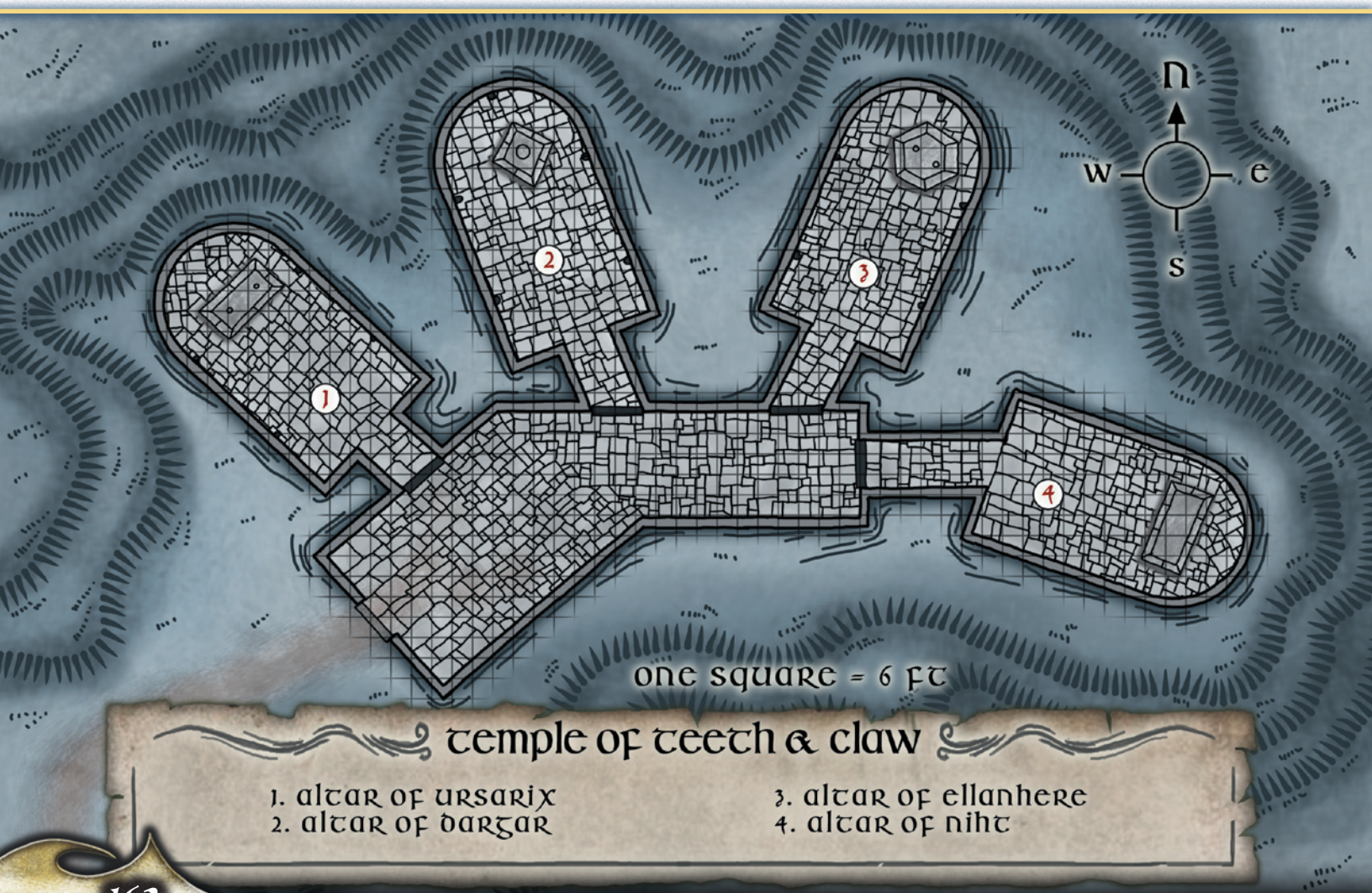
The story, which predates the Blizzard War, tells of a band of prospectors searching the peaks east of the Mistlands for rich veins of precious ore. Many days into their venture they stumbled upon a cave whose walls appear to have been worked smooth. Curious as they were as to what lay beyond the dark opening, they were too scared to step into the unknown. Eventually, one of their number summoned up his courage and volunteered.

In that order his friends might know the distance he had traveled, he took with him his trusty fiddle, which he would play continuously. The sound of the fiddle grew steadily fainter and fainter, and eventually could be heard no longer. His friends waited for three days before abandoning their comrade to his fate.

On windless nights, or so it is said by storytellers, the faint sounds of a fiddle drift from the cave mouth. Whether it hopes to attract heroes prepared to find the fiddler's bones and give them a proper burial or lures them to a grisly death is a mystery waiting to be solved.

FORTIFIED ORC CAMPS

While orcs do live in caves, they have no innate ability to see in poor light. That said, caves offer security against predators and protection from inclement weather. As well as their well-defended caves, the orcs make use of small forts dotted throughout their



tribal lands. Some of these are permanently garrisoned, while others are used only by patrols as shelter for the night.

Their favored form is a square structure built of stone. No mortar is employed, for over the centuries the orcs of Giant's Throne have become masters of dry stone walls. Dozens of spears thrust upward from the felt-covered conical roof, protection against airborne foes, such as dragons. The walls are thicker at the base, becoming thinner halfway up. This creates a natural ledge inside the fort, which is reached by stone steps and handholds cut into the inner surface. No windows are found at the lower level, and those on the upper reaches are just narrow slits, ideal for firing bows and thrusting spears through at targets below. A central hearth, fuelled by dung, provides light and heat. The narrow slits also act as chimneys.

The doorway, often little more than a sheet of reinforced hide, is actually located high up the wall. This prevents intruders from gaining easy access, but allows the orcs a quick escape—jumping down eight to ten feet isn't difficult for an orc warrior. Size varies, but a typical fort holds just 20 orcs in very crowded conditions.

THE LOST MINE OF THE HELIGI

Stories of lost cities are two for a silver scield across Rassilon. The destruction wrought by the Liche-Priest and Blizzard War toppled many a tower and caused entire cities to crumble to dust.

Among the plethora of tales is the legend of the lost mine of the Heligi. According to the most popular version, the Heligi operated many mines in the Sigel Peaks, where miners excavated precious stones and minerals. Legend has it that one was particularly fruitful, supplying the Heligi kings with gems and gold enough to fill their treasuries dozens of times over. Although scholars agree the mine, if it even existed, was likely abandoned after the fall of the Heligi, rumors persist that the Anari found it and worked it. Beyond that, nothing is known of the lost mine of the Heligi. To most it is an interesting tale, a lure for the foolish or greedy, but nothing more.

The mine is a real place, and was indeed a rich source of metal and gems for the Heligi kings. The Anari never found the site, though they searched high and low. The reason for their failure is one of simple geography—the entrance was concealed behind a waterfall.

During the invasion of Silverdale, the Liche-Priest's army found the mine and began reworking it. While the undead tyrant had little use for gold and silver, he knew men could be bought by shiny baubles, for they thought only of the here an now, not of their eternal soul. A small army of zombies toiled day and night, tirelessly hacking through the rock to reach the precious fruits of Ertha.

The Liche-Priest fell, but his zombies received no orders to abandon their work. During the Blizzard War, a powerful spell struck the region, freezing the waterfall into a cascade of solid ice and sealing the undead inside the mine. Centuries have passed, but still the zombies toil. Who knows how many tons of ore they have excavated in that time? The mine is a vast complex of tunnels and shafts. Natural attrition has thinned the ranks of the undead, but there are still a sizeable number. Their master, a powerful zombie lord (see *Rassilon Expansion*), is now quite insane. He has taken the title King of the Underworld, and believes he is master of a powerful realm dedicated to the worship of an entity he knows only as Death. Whether this supposed entity (who grants him no special powers) is Hela or a faded memory of the Liche-Priest is yet to be seen.

Perhaps when the Liche-Priest rises he will remember his forgotten army beneath the mountain and summon them to break free. Perhaps the passage of so much time has erased them from his memory.

THE TEMPLE OF TEETH AND CLAWS

The official religion of the Giant's Throne may be that of Thrym, but Kaldr allows his orcs to worship whatever gods they wish. It is a small concession, but one that has earned greater loyalty from his minions. However, he has permitted the construction of just a single temple to gods other than Thrym.

Within the temple, which is located in the eastern foothills, are altars to Dargar, Ellanhere (minor goddess of wolves), Niht, and Ursarix (the bear god more commonly honored by the Vendahl). The constant religious disputes between the various tribes keep the tribes' attention away from thoughts of combining their strength and overthrowing the frost giant king.

Sacking the temple would greatly reduce the cults' authority over the tribes, something that Kaldr would actually welcome, as he could claim their gods' inability to protect the site is a sign they should follow Thrym. On the other hand, an attack on such an important structure (in the eyes of his orc troops) deep inside his territory would make Kaldr look weak, and that is something he can ill-afford. Unfortunately for any attackers, the temple is home to dozens of priests and is protected by scores of fanatical warriors, not to mention bears and wolves.

VALLEY OF CROWS

The Valley of Crows is a deep, steep-sided gorge cutting into the foothills of the Sigel Peaks near the border with the Mistlands. The valley floor is littered with boulders and piles of stones that have tumbled down from the unstable cliffs over the centuries. More recent debris is the wind-scoured remains of orc patrols too stupid to ignore the legends concerning this gods-forsaken place.

Two legends tell similar yet competing stories of the valley. The first, as told by the clerics of Scaetha, tells that during the Liche-Priest's reign a necromancer known only as the Crow Witch took up residence here. A fearsome hag clad in a cloak of crow feathers, she imbued innocent crows with unholy powers, so creating the first sluagh. The cult of Thunor tells a different story. In their version, the Crow Witch was a servant of Thunor who fell from grace after being corrupted by some dark power.

Regardless, both parties agree the Crow Witch was evil and had at her disposal flocks of black, flesh-eating birds. With scant records dating from that era, no one is entirely sure what fate befell the Crow Witch.

Some say she is still alive, residing in the crumbling ruin that stands at the end of the valley. Flocks of murderous crows still haunt the area, attacking trespassers without mercy. Both cults, as well as the Reliquary, have attempted to breech the valley and search the castle, though for different reasons. Scaetha's clergy seek to destroy any surviving necromantic texts and relics lest they fall into the wrong hands. Thunor's clergy claim the Witch had powerful relics relating to birds, which are rightfully theirs. The Reliquary just wants to clear the site of any vestiges of power.

Unfortunately, no expedition has managed to reach the castle walls. Attempts to circumvent the valley by flight have met with disaster, as swarms of crows as dense as thunderclouds ravaged the airborne clerics. Those who dared to walk the snaking valley bottom fared little better.

KEY PLAYERS

King Kaldr is most definitely the riving force in Giant's Throne, yet there are others the heroes may encounter during their adventures here.

AELFRIC THE DAMNED

Stories of woe and misery are common in Rassilon. Few are definitive, for there are always those who heard the tale differently. One such tale concerns Aelfric the Damned. The story, depending on who tells it, is set either during the Liche-Priest's invasion of Silverdale or the Blizzard War. Who suffered here concerns a force of Heligioland soldiers seeking to outflank the Hellfrost army, refugees driven south by the advancing hoard, or refugees fleeing north from the vile undead. Who died and when is perhaps less important than how, for it is on this the tale hinges.

Scouts had reported no safe way through the mountains, for snows blocked the high passes. The column was set to turn back and seek a longer, more exposed route, when a shepherd approached the leaders one dark and stormy night. He told them of

a secret pass, one free of snow. He charged a high price for his knowledge, yet it was one willingly paid.

So it was Aelfric led the column into the Sigel Peaks, in the region that is now Giant's Throne. After two days he bade farewell, telling the column he was needed at home, where his wife was with child, and that all they needed to do was follow the path they were on. The next day, the column was destroyed, betrayed by Aelfric, who has been paid a handsome price to lead them into an ambush. Again, reports vary, but most tales indicate many thousands of innocents died that fateful day.

Aelfric lived out the remainder of his days a rich man, his crime only coming back to haunt him after his death. He was judged guilty of gross betrayal and denied a place in the Afterlife. Perhaps he should have been banished to the Abyss, but Eira, who took pity on him, spared him that fate. She acknowledged his crime was foul, but believed that no sin could not be rectified.

So it was Aelfric's spirit was banished to Rassilon as a ghost. There he would remain until he atoned for his sins by leading a number of travelers through the secret pass equal to those whose deaths he had caused. Such is the infrequency of travelers here that Aelfric still haunts the desolate peaks, desperate to fill his quota. Although a ghost, Aelfric cannot be *banished*—his god-imposed curse prevents an easy escape from his quest.

DIPSY

Dipsy is an engro "prospector." She doesn't live in Giant's Throne, but she does spend a great deal of time there. Dipsy has long been convinced that much of Silverdale's true wealth came from mines in the Sigel Peaks. She believes that the abandonment of Silverdale when the mists rose meant the mines were hastily closed, their contents left *in situ*. In her mind, the empty tunnels are stocked with piles of precious ores and gems, just waiting for someone to claim them.

Unlike most engro she has a poor sense of humor—surviving in Giant's Throne for months on end will do that to an engro. When not "prospecting," she spends much of her time at the trade mission (see *The Unclaimed Lands* section). She has found a few stray nuggets, but the mother lode she seeks still eludes her. Still, she is nothing if not tenacious.

Dipsy knows the dangers of the Giant's Throne. She is quite prepared to hire adventurers to aid her search, but she will never offer more than 50% of the spoils split between them, no matter how many willing explorers she hires.

HRUNGNIR

Hrungnir (not his true name) is a frostborn, though one whose muscles exceed that of any orc. Outlawed from his village after using his innate powers in public, he eked a pitiful existence in the lands west of Heligioland until he strayed too close to the Giant's Throne border. Ambushed by orcs, he managed to beat six of the armored warriors to death with his bare hands before being overpowered.

The orcs dragged him in front of King Kaldr, expecting their liege to order a slow and painful execution when the death of the orcs was revealed. Instead, Kaldr roared with laughter at the story before giving the frostborn a fighting chance. He was pitted against a lesser frost giant in a fight to the death. Hrungnir, unarmed, killed the axe-wielding giant in under a minute. Kaldr, impressed by the small creature's strength and courage, offered the victor a choice—serve him or die. With nothing left for him outside the castle, Hrungnir knelt before the king and vowed loyalty.

Hrungnir, whose name means "Brawler" in Auld Saxa, is one of Kaldr's top assassins. He goes where the frost giants and orcs cannot, removing those Kaldr feels are a threat to his hegemony.

WHY COME HERE?

A frozen land crawling with hostile giants and orcs is not exactly the sort of place sane adventurers visit, regardless of their Rank. So what does draw them here, and what can a GM do with them once they enter Giant's Throne?

* Orders. Characters with the Orders Hindrance are at the GM's mercy, though it is not a tool one should overuse. The occasional nudge is far more rewarding than a constant barrage of orders. Hearth Knights and clerics of Kenaz are the prime candidates for a trip into the icy mountains. With a little thought, most characters bound to an organization or patron can be sent here, but it is unlikely more than once.

* No Choice. Sometimes fate plays its hand and forces the characters to venture into places they would rather not. Heroes hired to track down a band of marauding orcs may find their quarry hails from Giant's Throne, or discover the missing daughter of a Heligioland nobleman is being held captive in one of the many orc nests. In order to complete their mission, the characters will need to follow their prey.

* Glory. Located close to Heligioland, a prime adventuring base, Giant's Throne is an ideal place to visit if one wants to kill giants, orcs, or icy creatures. Just the thought of some many Hellfrost-related beasts in one place is a lure for clerics of Kenaz. This is not quite so true of Sword Knights, but Sword and Lance Knights will find plenty of worthy foes to test their mettle.

* Treasure. Heroes looking to grow rich ransacking tombs and ruins will be out of luck, for Giant's Throne was never populated by the civilized races. The orcs and frost giants do have treasuries, but often the reward is not worth the risk.

One of the problems with Giant's Throne is that it can devolve into an endless string of combat encounters as the characters battle through goblin lairs and orc encampments. To prevent the game devolving into a miniatures skirmish game, the GM should endeavor to devise interesting missions and turn locales into more than just killing grounds. A temple to Thrym, for example, will be more exciting than yet another cave system (even if it is in a cave system). Instead of blindly wandering around looking for something to kill, maybe the characters have orders to assassinate an orc chieftain, gather covert intelligence, or rescue a prisoner. There will still be plentiful opportunities for slaughter, but now the characters have something to focus on and plan for.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* Reports have reached the Hearth Knights that King Kaldr has been sending patrols into the Mistlands or increased patrols into the Frost Hills. It is obvious he is searching for something, and the Hearth Knights need to know what. It may be the frost giant is merely seeking treasure, but he may be on the trail of something far more powerful, such as a relic.

* The cult of Thunor has acquired a relic imbued with the power over the warm southern wind. Following many rounds of arguments put forward by various high priests, the cleric in charge of protecting the relic has decided to offer it to Thunor.

After performing a divination, he learned that Thunor desires the relic to be placed on the summit of Cloudcap Mountain. Unwilling to trust his comrades, many of who desire the object for themselves, he is seeking brave heroes to complete the deed. The cult of Thrym has learned of the relic and has passed the information to King Kaldr, who is planning a welcome party.

* A man short of money and hounded by debtors offers to sell the party a map. He claims it shows the location of the lost mine of the Heligi. He asks a high price (more than the characters can easily afford, whatever their current financial status), but he promises rich rewards to those brave enough to take him up on his offer and find the fabled lost mine.

* The Sigil Peaks are believed to be home to a number of adult storm dragons. Although they have few ties to the cult of Thunor, the Hearth Knights are keen to strike a deal with the dragons, who would be a major asset in their ongoing struggle against the vicious hordes of the Giant's Throne. All they need are suitable volunteers prepared to brave both watchful orcs and the potential wrath of the dragons.

GLITTERSANDS

Surrounded by mountains and sea, the Glittersands is an isolated realm, a cold desert broken only by melted stone ruins and the great dunes that rise in the west. An inhospitable wilderness of unnatural origin infested with orcs, trolls, and giants, the frost-covered sands are nonetheless home to sturdy souls.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Glittersands.

* **No Nobles:** No native Glittersands hero may have the Noble Edge to denote noble status. He may take the Edge to simulate another position, such as a merchant or priest. Characters elected to the council gain the Noble Edge's +2 Charisma for the year they are in office, but no other benefits.

* **Survival:** There is no flora and very little fauna in the Glittersands proper, as opposed to the mountains and their foothills. All Survival rolls to find food and water are made at –4.

* **Temperature:** The average temperature is on par with that of the Low Winterlands, though it strays into Hearthlands' levels many years. At night the temperature drops two levels.

* **Trade:** Despite being at the start of a trade road, the Glittersands receives few shipments each year. All settlements are treated as villages for the purpose of buying goods.

ORIGIN OF THE GLITTERSANDS

The Glittersands is not a natural realm. Aside from anecdotal evidence, explorers have discovered the charred remains of forests beneath the sand and ice. The presence of settlements indicates the land was once suitable for agriculture. Exactly how many people lived here, or who they were, is long forgotten, but the Glittersands was once a thriving realm. The Anari, the great southern empire, never reached this far, and if the neighboring Selari left behind any records they have yet to be uncovered.

The cults of Kenaz and Sigel both believe that the origins of the Glittersands is somehow tied to their gods' disappearance, but quite how is a mystery. While scholars point to a falling star as the origin of the Glittersands' formation, the cults remain convinced that the fire that scorched this land into extinction was a direct manifestation of the gods.

The Glittersands is a desert, for little precipitation falls, but it is a cold one. Although frost covers much of the sand, the desert is warmer than the surrounding realms, despite the southern wind being thwarted by the Iceblade Mountains and cold blasts from the Icewall and off the White Sea frequently tearing across the land. Something beyond the ken of mortals is keeping the winter at bay, though only barely.

Although the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents two theories as to the origin, Bryan ap-Reeve, the local high priest of Kenaz, has recently put forward a new theory. He claims that Thrym broke the Compact and descended from the stars in the guise of a fiery comet, which smashed into the mortal realm, destroying the culture that dwelt in the Glittersands. Kenaz and Sigel, at the behest of the other gods, were compelled to follow the god of winter and give battle, for Thrym's presence among the mortals was the worst violation of the sacred law. They first trod upon the mortal realm in Al-Shirkuh, where there is reportedly a larger version of Glass Lake (the Mirrorsands), an area of desert transformed into glass.

Halfdan goes on to say that Thrym emerged victorious, severely wounding his two rivals and forcing them to retreat. Lacking the strength to return to the heavens, Kenaz and Sigel withdrew to the warmer southern realm to recuperate. Thrym, wounded but less severely, also remained on the mortal realm. While he licked his wounds, his armies smashed south, only to meet with eventual failure. Thrym summoned the last of his divine power to erect the Icewall and give rise to the Hellfrost.

Perhaps there is a grain or truth to his tale. And perhaps there is not. The answer may one day be revealed, for Roderick ap-Gwin, an elderly sage and member of the Lorekeepers, is currently engaged in an expedition to Al-Shirkuh to study the glassy expanse and determine if there might be a common bond between two areas separated by many thousands of miles.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

A single council based in Glaston governs the two civilized settlements in the Glittersands. Nine of the dozen councilors are elected each year by popular vote. Of these, three are always from Isvik and six from Glaston. Any citizen, regardless of race, gender, or financial means, may stand for election, so long as he or she is resident in the realm for the entire year and swears the sacred oath to support Glaston and Isvik. The remaining seats are automatically taken by the senior clerics of the cults of Kenaz and Sigel, and the commander of the watch, currently a Knight Hrafn employed by the towns out of communal funds to oversee their military forces.

In many lands governed by councils the same officials are elected time and time again, the citizens growing complacent and unwilling to upset the proverbial apple cart by introducing new ideas. No laws prevent this occurring in the Glittersands, yet elections are always hard fought.

The full council meets on Raestdaeg each month to discuss business. With such a small population and little bureaucracy, meetings tend to be short and to the point. Survival is a daily chore, and the citizens have no time to waste discussing matters of decorum or the finer points of politics. Because the weather can turn ugly at any time, the three Isvik councilors appoint a single proxy to vote on their behalf in case they are unable to attend.

These twelve citizens are the nearest the realm has to a social elite, and with elections held every year no citizen can be sure of continued social status. There are those with more money than others, but most have learned that the citizens do not respect them any more for having wealth.

The result is that the citizens are egalitarian, boasting no nobility, at least none with any authority, or social divisions. The high priests and commander of the watch are treated with respect due nobility, though they do not act as social superiors. Indeed, the current high priest of Kenaz is a frequent visitor to Glaston's hostelries, happily sharing drinks with those other high priests might consider below their station.

Life in the Glittersands is tough and everyone is expected to earn his keep. While the land has its poor, it has no underclass of beggars. Thievery is a capital offense for crimes involving goods in excess of just 10 gold scields, and outlawing is imposed for lesser amounts. Withholding taxes is considered thievery.

EDUCATION

Children in Glaston attend school at the temple until they reach the age of ten, while those in Isvik attend a cult-run school for a similar period. After this, children are expected to begin learning a trade as apprentices.

Education is rudimentary, covering basic literacy and numeracy, and the religions of Kenaz and Sigel. Basic survival techniques are compulsory, for the Glittersands is a harsh land. Little attention is given to other realms, though many children in Isvik know something of the Lakelands from visiting merchants and nomadic Finnar traders. Children who wish to learn about more advanced subjects, such as law, history, heraldry, or geography, or who wish to master languages must attend the sole private academy in the land (see page xxx).

RELIGION

Religion in the Glittersands, at least in the two civilized settlements, is dominated by worship of Kenaz and Sigel in roughly equal numbers. The two deities have been strongly associated with the region since the Blizzard War, though worship of them only came with the colonists who drifted here in the years after the War.

As well as catering to spiritual needs, the cults provide additional military support, through arms as well as magic. Many of Kenaz's clergy venture out each year to lay waste to any Hellfrost beasts they encounter, while those of Sigel are intent on exploring the many ruins. Both cults are convinced the disappearance of the deities is somehow tied to the formation of the Glittersands.

Var receives worship, though only as a token gesture. While glass is the only export the realm has to offer, the trade god's clergy see little hope of establishing a market in either settlement due to the council's monopoly. A few merchant-priests make the longer journey to sell exotic wares, but the number of sales is small and the profit minimal, especially when balanced against the risks of the long journey.

Thunor receives lip service. Rainfall is scarce, but strong winds often sweep across from the White Sea or down from the mountains. Shrines to Freo stand at each end of the Glittersands' trade road, a common practice rarely related to any particular devotion. Neorthe and Ullr have adherents in Isvik, but are unknown in Glaston.

Worship of Eostre is so rare that many settlers know her name only in passing from legends related to the more popular deities. Most citizens eat grains (as barley porridge or bread), but few have ever seen grass, yet alone crop fields.

Although Thrym is the most worshipped deity in the realm, none of his true followers are human. A handful of frostborn hold secret allegiance to him, but it is the orcs, frost giants, and ice trolls who make up his congregation. While the citizens of many lands gripped by relentless winter make token offerings to Thrym to appease him, the civilized inhabitants of the Glittersands are a defiant bunch, refusing to kowtow to the god of winter.

MILITARY

The entire military might of the Glittersands comprises just 130 infantry, all of whom are mercenaries, divided into four companies. The entire army is answerable to the council at Glaston, though in practice daily operations are left to the commander of the watch.

The Glaston Guard, a company of 50 men, is heavy infantry. While all wear chain hauberks and carry medium shields, the choice of melee weapon is personal. Treat them as veteran mercenaries. Typically, just 15 mercenaries are on watch during the day, with the rest serving as the night watch. While orcs are more active during the day, visibility from the single watchtower is good, and any attacks come at night.

The Caravan Guard spends much of their time traveling as a single company between Glaston and Isvik. They are equipped the same as the Glaston Guard, save each carries a short bow and quiver of 20 arrows in addition to other weapons. While they spend much of their time aboard ship, none are particularly skilled mariners.

The Glaston Scouts are a 20 strong company equipped with leather armor and medium shields. Most carry spears and short bows. Their primary role is to scout along the trade road before ships are sent out to ensure orcs and trolls are not gathering in preparation for an ambush. When not performing this duty they explore the area around Glaston for signs of foes and ruins uncovered after storms.

The Isvik Guard musters 30 heavy infantry. They are equipped as per their counterparts in Glaston, and serve a similar role (and use identical stats).

In addition to these meager forces, every able-bodied citizen is required to practice with the short bow. Most citizens are completely inept, preferring to put their faith in the mercenaries, but when an attack comes a cloud of arrows, even poorly aimed ones, stands a better chance of striking home than just a handful.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

When one thinks of caravans, one naturally tends toward imagining wagons and horses, or perhaps pygmy mammoths in the Winterlands. In the Glittersands, few have any desire to spend any longer outside the two settlements than is absolutely necessary, and water and animal feed are expensive luxuries.

To that end, Glaston maintains a fleet of two knarrs fitted with outriggers. Chunks of glass are loaded on at Glaston and sailed across to Isvik. In return, the cargos of merchant vessels and caravans at the port are sent back on the returning ships.

The Glittersands sole export is raw glass. Chunks are sawn or chipped out of Glass Lake and shipped south. The glass trade is governed by the council, who, in addition to setting quotas, employs all the glass miners. The miners are paid a flat wage. All profit from the sale of the glass is funneled back into the council treasury. This government monopoly allows the council to keep taxes extremely low.

Virtually everything else the townsfolk need to survive must be imported. Because of its location, trade caravans are few and far between, and citizens must plan ahead. A common misconception describes all the citizens as notoriously tight-fisted. In fact, they are merely prudent. When a trade ship arrives laden with new goods, the citizens throw communal feasts, using up much of their older supplies to make way for new stores.

To prevent a lone merchant or storeowner holding the town to ransom or profiteering when supplies run low, the council is responsible for purchasing all imports. A portion of these are put aside for emergencies, and the rest is sold to local businesses for resale to the general populace. Inclement weather and orc activity can often delay shipments. When this occurs, the council breaks out its emergency supplies of food, ale, and firewood, which it distributes with no markup.

Taxation in the Glittersands is light. With the council responsible for all imports and exports, the profit they make is enough to cover fresh supplies, essential repairs, and wages for the miners and mercenaries.

Citizenship Tax: On reaching their 14th birthday all citizens pay a nominal 10 gold scields. This enables them to claim full citizenship. Citizens may run a market stall or other business, stand for election, and work in the towns. Outsiders who wish to become citizens must pay a one-off fee of 20 gold scields.

Income Tax: All working citizens pay 10% of their earnings to the council treasury each year. Businesses pay the same rate, though it is known as business tax.

Poll Tax: Citizens who wish to vote in the annual elections pay 1 gold scield when they cast their vote.

Relief Tax: At the end of each year the outgoing council's last decision is whether or not to impose relief tax. This special tax is paid only in good years. The money is set aside to purchase extra supplies for when life is not so good. Relief tax is never popular with the citizens, but all benefit from it on a regular basis.

Temple Tax: A non-compulsory tax. Most citizens donate around 10% of their earnings to the temple in Glaston.

ARCHITECTURE

The Anari are the dominant culture in the Glittersands, and the architecture is a reflection of that. Many of the older buildings are

made of wood, though newer ones are constructed of stone, one of the more visible indications of the region's increasing wealth.

Regardless of the material, the walls are built thick to keep out the cold wind and reduce the amount of firewood needed to keep the structure warm. Houses tend to be small for the same reason, often with just a single room. Most houses appear very low from the outside. This is because the floor level is three feet beneath the street level, the sand providing an extra layer of much-needed insulation. Even the Saxa, who prefer longhouses elsewhere, have adopted the smaller, squatter design, though they still favor wood over stone.

In warmer realms houses are often divided into two, with one area for the inhabitants and another for livestock. Aside from the occasional dog, livestock is extremely rare in a realm devoid of water, grasslands, and game. Furnishings and decorations are simple. Spending money on such things is not considered a sign of wealth, but of stupidity—the money (as luxuries such as art and furniture are costly) should be spent on more important things, such as extra firewood or preserved food.

Municipal structures, such as the council chamber, are built for function, rather than to impress.

MAJOR LOCALES

Outside of Glaston and Isvik, there is little to see but half-buried ruins and the mountains that border three sides of the Glittersands. This section concentrates on the two settlements.

GLASTON

Glaston sits behind a strong wooden palisade. No ditch encircles the settlement, for windblown sand would require constant clearing and extra timber to shore up the sides. A fighting platform atop the palisade gives the defenders a solid firing position against encroaching enemies. A tall watchtower provides sentries with a clear view of the surrounding landscape.

Entrance is through a double gate large enough to accommodate a knarr (with its mast down). When the trade ships set forth, they are hauled out of the gates before the mast is erected and the sails unfurled. Visitors are warned not to venture far from the perimeter wall without a guide, for the clerics of Kenaz have seeded the outlying approaches with many incendiary *glyphs* carved onto small, innocuous stones.

Academy of Higher Education: Glaston has no temple to Hoenir, and just one private school. The school teaches advanced subjects, such as heraldry, geography, law, and languages relating to lands beyond the Glittersands. The dean, Margaile ap-Varocher, a Gray Sage, makes little money through teaching, for the school's total student body numbers just six. Fortunately she is a lady of means, being the scion of a noble house from Aspiria. When not teaching she researches the history of the Glittersands, visiting ruins and collecting fragments of pottery and engraved stones.

The Bread Oven: Glaston's only bakery is also one of its taverns. The owner, Brantome ap-Doolin, came to the conclusion that if he was paying for fuel to bake bread, he might as well make use of the warmth. As well as ale, and more rarely wine and spirits, Brantome sells hot fresh bread and warming soup (the common choices are fish, mammoth, or penguin).

Cemetery: Glaston's cemetery borders both sides of the main gate. With wood too valuable to use for funeral pyres and undead essentially unknown, the citizens of Glaston inter their dead in shallow pits. Corpses are left to wither in the cold, dry air before being placed in the grave with wares they will need in the Afterlife. Visitors to Glaston are often disturbed to see corpses seated outside houses, but the custom allows friends and neighbors to pay their respects before the dead are buried.

Glass Miners' Guild: Although the council oversees all glass excavation, the miners have a guild. The guild is responsible for negotiating wages, ensuring quotas are set fairly, and providing compensation to miners injured in the line of work or who fall ill. Members pay 3% of their wage in guild dues.

Healing House: No clerics of Eira reside in the Glittersands. Glaston has a single hospital operated by the Sisters of Mercy. Although importing healing herbs, even dried ones, is very expensive, the Sisters still offer their services for free. At present there are just two Sisters stationed here, along with a single Sword of Necessity.

House of Flame: The Convocation's sole official representative in the Glittersands is Magus Ernaut Breast Rope, so named because of his thick matt of chest hair. The Convocation has little interest in the region, but Ernaut was so persistent in his demands to be sent here that the Four relented just to be rid of him. Ernaut is largely free to spend his time as he wishes, with just two caveats. First, the mage must provide hospitality to fellow members of the Convocation venturing into the Glittersands. Ernaut happily allows them to sleep in his small house, but he does not provide food or water. Second, he must accept and train apprentices should they present themselves.

Ernaut barely scrapes a living selling alchemical devices of his own manufacture, and he often goes hungry for days on end. While many mages waltz around in fine robes, Ernaut's clothing is threadbare. His main interest is exploration, for he has a theory. The elementalist believes that the disaster that struck the Glittersands was the result of the inhabitants dabbling in powerful magic. It was their attempt to create an artificial fire locus that laid waste to the land. He believes that Glass Lake forms the center of the locus.

Lightbringer Hearth: Despite its small population, Glaston maintains a large temple sacred to both Kenaz and Sigel. Built at no small expense from stone blocks imported from quarries in the Borderlands, it is a symbol of defiance toward Thrym. The roof is pure gold, made up of gold coins donated by the faithful nailed to wooden shingles. A myth has grown up that when the last inch is covered in gold, Kenaz and Sigel will return. Thus, worshippers are encouraged to donate generously.

While remote, it boasts a sizeable contingent of clerics. Many see a station here as a promotion, believing that Kenaz and Sigel touched this land with their divine fire. It is thus the nearest one can get to physically touching either deity. At present, there are six priests and ten paladins of Sigel, and four priests and 22 paladins of Kenaz resident here. Hearth Knights are infrequent visitors, but the clerics always make sure accommodation is ready for them.

The cults use part of the donations to purchase supplies. When the caravans fail and supplies of essentials are running low, they freely give away fagots of wood and flask of oil. During the Great Winter of 427, when blizzards made travel impossible, the clerics exhausted themselves using magic to provide light and heat to the major buildings, in which the citizens had gathered for warmth and protection.

The Marker Stone: This small menhir, which stands just inside the main gate, is the shrine to Freo. With few visitors coming this way, the locals do not leave shoes and boots at its base. Instead, they make small donations of food and water to the trade ship crews heading to distant Isvik.

The Market: With space at a premium and large buildings costly to heat, most traders and crafters do not own stores. Instead, they are allotted space in the market. Built in traditional Finnar style, the market is nothing more than a vast tent made of felt and wood. Food, supplies, weapons, and miscellaneous goods can be found for sale here every Marketdaeg. A market is also held on Raestdaeg.

ISVIK

Population: 922
Ruler: None (governed by the council)
The Glittersands' only other permanent settlement is located on

CORRECTION

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* states that Glaston is the only settlement in the Glittersands, and yet the realm's population and that of the town are out by some 900 souls.
At the time of writing I hadn't realized this error—having 900 souls wandering aimlessly around the Glittersands went unnoticed. As such, the discrepancy is now corrected by the inclusion of a second settlement, Isvik. Its inclusion has necessitated a few small changes to what is stated in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. We hope this does not spoil your enjoyment of the setting.

Glittersands



Population: 2,468 (70% Anari, 25% frostborn, 5% Saxa), plus unknown numbers of orcs, giants, and trolls
Ruler: None (town council in Glaston)
Religion: Thrym, Kenaz, Sigel
Imports: Ale, clothing, grain, meat
Exports: Glass


Ice Hills
Ruins
The Frozen Moor
Ruins
Dragon Maw Cavern
The Worlds Edge Mountains
Avalanche Pass
Hvergelmirar
Glittersands
Glass Lake
Glascon
Isvik
Isvik/Vimmar
Mere
Glass Pass
N
W
E
S

the western shore of Serpent Lake. Until earlier this year it was part of Lakeland, a remote fishing village with just a few hundred inhabitants. After lengthy negotiations that lasted many years, the council of Glaston purchased the thin stretch of land, finally linking the Glittersands with the water.

The native inhabitants were given the option of staying and swearing allegiance to Glaston's council or making a new home elsewhere. Money was set aside for the latter. Most of the Finnar left, feeling that an expansion would conflict with their way of life, but the Saxa stayed. All but a handful of the Glittersands' Saxa population resides here, along with a goodly number of frostborn. New prospects brought citizens from Glaston to Isvik (the name means Ice Harbor) and the village became a small town almost overnight.

Isvik serves as the main trading center for the Glittersands. With the overland route now blocked, all trade comes through the bustling town. Very much a frontier town in appearance, it nevertheless has a vibrancy uncommon in such desolate regions. Many of the inhabitants are involved in fishing and hunting.

Dalgar's Furs: Dalgar, a Saxa furrier, is widely renowned as one of the best proponents of his craft in Rassilon. He could make a fortune plying his trade in more populated lands, yet he prefers to remain in Isvik. He pays well for fresh or ice-reserved animal carcasses, especially mammoth and polar bear fur.

Dalgar's furs cost twice as much as normal, but they provide a +2 bonus to resist the effects of cold rather than the usual +1 bonus.

Dung Collectors' Guild: Although the citizens of Isvik keep very little livestock, members of the dung collectors' guild earn a decent living. When the spring dawns they head out into the wilds around Serpent Lake, towing behind them long sledges. The dung collectors follow the mammoth hunters, scooping up huge piles of steaming dung, which is then air dried before being sold as fuel. The council sets prices for dried dung.

The Smoke House: Fish and meat hunted around the Serpent Lake are brought here to be smoked before being sold to the council. Most of the produce is smoked not over wood fires, but animal dung.

Wharves: Designed to operate in all seasons, the wharves are divided into the Low Port and High Port. Low Port's wharves are just above water level, as one would expect. They are used only in summer, when the shore ice has sufficiently melted to allow ships to pull up alongside. High Port's wharves are higher, for they cater for vessels mounting ice rigs, which ride above the frozen surface of the lake.

PENGUIN BAY

Population: 75 (seasonal)

On the east coast, penguins have little fear from man, for they spend the short summer months on the relatively ice free coasts of the Sunken Realm and the Liche Lands. On the west coast, the penguins make shore in the Glittersands. Warmed by the southern current, the pack ice retreats, giving the penguins access to the fish-rich waters.

Each year in late spring, hunters make the long trek from Glaston across the frozen sand. Setting up a temporary camp on the lower coast, they make the most of the long days, killing hundreds of penguins. These are buried in the sand to freeze and hide the scent of blood from marauding polar bears who have come ashore from the pack ice, before being hauled back by sledge and stored in preparation for winter.

RUINS

The Glittersands boasts more than its fair share of ruins, though most are little more than jumbled stones, melted and charred by the doom that befell the land in ages past. Those on the surface have been picked clean by orcs and treasure hunters, but there are many which had sub-levels. Orcs have explored, and indeed lair in, some of these, but most have not been entered in five centuries, at least not by anything humanoid. Forgotten temples, the sprawling cellars of toppled castles, and ever partially collapsed sewers may all be found beneath the surface, if one can find an entrance.

Undead may lurk in these forgotten halls, though if they do it is likely they possess strange powers relating to fire and heat rather than the more traditional necromantic abilities. Blackened skeletons with balefire glowing in their chests, ghosts that reek of burnt flesh or take the form of clouds of ash, and perhaps worse, may haunt the dark tunnels beneath the glittering sands. Fiery creatures, such as elementals, trapped here since before the Blizzard War may still exist.

A storm tearing through the Great Dunes might reveal intact ruins. This presents the heroes with a time-based challenge, for the next storm will bury them again.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons can serve as patrons, friends, or simply people the characters may have cause to visit during a trip to the Glittersands.

HEARTHKEEPER BRYAN AP-REEVE

Current high priest of Kenaz in the Glittersands, Bryan is convinced that Kenaz (and Sigel) are trapped somewhere on the mortal realm, and has made it his life's goal to find them and replenish their energy. He believes that the key to the mystery lies concealed beneath the sands. Unwilling to spend too much time away from his flock, and some say a warm seat in a tavern, Bryan hires passing adventures to help the search.

As well as being a scholar and a priest, Bryan is renowned for being extremely down to earth. He often frequents the taverns, swapping stories and jokes with the other patrons, occasionally talking with visitors about news from elsewhere, and sometimes selling alchemical devices crafted by the clergy. When hard times befall Glaston, Bryan hits the streets, visiting citizens in their homes, delivering bundles of firewood, praying with the scared, and lightening the mood with myths of brave heroes overcoming the terrible forces of Thrym.

As such, while previous high priests have come across as haughty, Bryan is much loved by the citizens of Glaston. He is popular in Isvik as well, which he has been known to visit simply in order to taste new kegs of ale.

KNIGHT HRAFN GWENDOLYN AP-STERN

Commander of the watch for just the last two years, Gwendolyn was posted here by her superiors. A former commander in the war against Orcmark, she commanded a mission which went disastrously wrong. Although cleared of any wrongdoing by a tribunal of her peers, they thought it prudent she was transferred far from the front, if only to avoid retribution by family and friends of those slaughtered that bloody day.

As a result, Gwendolyn has lost all faith in her abilities. In public and in front of her men she acts like a true professional, but she spends many nights alone, weeping for the men who died under her command. She has strongly favored a defensive approach to the Glittersands, for she is reluctant to send men into battle lest history repeat itself.

SUN KNIGHT TABITHA AP-PEREDUR

Bryan's counterpart in the cult of Sigel, Tabitha is also the Hearthkeeper's opposite in other ways. Not only is she a paladin rather than a priest, but she sees her posting here as punishment rather than a blessing. She accepted the post because it meant promotion to high priest status, something harder to achieve down south, where her brethren are more numerous and competition is stiffer.

But while she hears stories of fellow clergy battling demons, breaking up evil cults, and hunting down frost giants, she is stuck combating orcs, goblins, and trolls.

Stern, humorless, and bitter, she performs her duties in perfunctory fashion. She cares for her flock, for her calling and devotion is as strong as ever, but she desires more adventure. Now in her late forties, she feels time is against her. She has considered resigning her post, but she knows that if she does she is unlikely to be granted the title ever again.

GREAT SWAMP ,THE

In days of yore, the Great Swamp was home to the advanced gatorman race. Now reduced to a state of primitive barbarity, their role as rulers of the swamp has been usurped by the lizardmen, led by the Tyrant Lizard King. A dank land of ever-hungry thunderlizards, crumbling ruins, and bloodthirsty inhabitants, the Great Swamp is no place for the weak of heart.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Great Swamp.

* **Biting Insects:** Each day every hero must draw a card from the action deck. A numbered Spade indicates biting gnats and midges plague him. He must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue from itchy bites. On a Spade face card, his Vigor roll is made at –2. Fatigue from the bites is removed after 24 hours or with the application of a single dose of antihistamine rubbed into the skin.

Because these swarms don't have stat blocks, use of insect repellant works somewhat differently. A character using repellant suffers an attack only if the card value is 2–4 or an Ace of Spades. Otherwise, the insects are just a buzzing annoyance.

* **Disease:** Disease festers in the Great Swamp, and the privations one must suffer leave the immune system weak. All Vigor rolls to resist disease have an additional –1 penalty.

* **Language:** Bufomi, gatormen, and lizardmen all speak variants of a language known to the civilized races as Lesarde.

* **Natural Healing:** With no clean water, constant biting insects, little food, and generally insanitary conditions, it is very hard to keep wounds clean and patients comfortable. All natural Healing rolls suffer a –1 penalty.

WHO IS THE TYRANT LIZARD KING?

Perhaps a better question would be what is the Tyrant Lizard King, for if even a tenth of the rumors about his powers are true it is readily apparent he is no ordinary mortal.

Countless stories abound about his size, which some claim places him akin to a frost giant, of how his scales are so thick they deflect ballista bolts as if they were stinging flies, how he can kill with a simple glance and transform into a monstrous lizard at will, how his god protects him from all forms of magic, and that he wields powerful, unknown magic. As scary as these stories are, none compare to his reputed power to devour the souls of his victims. Those who whet his endless appetite do not pass onto the Afterlife or to the Abyss, but instead feed the spiritual hunger of Ssslak, the lizardmen's monstrous deity.

No non-lizardman who has seen the Tyrant Lizard King has ever survived the encounter, yet still the stories circulate the taverns and inns of the southern Hearthlands. In truth, no one actually knows if the King even exists, or whether he is a figment of the imagination, conjured by the fevered mind of an explorer suffering the ravages of disease.

Sutmark's warriors have no doubt something powerful rules over the lizardmen, for never before had the tribes united and mounted a concerted attack. Veermark is unsure as to the veracity of the King's existence but keeps a wary eye on Zigzag Pass, while Midmark is taking no chances, and has greatly strengthened its southern border as a precaution. Even if the Tyrant Lizard King is a myth, it is one that has directly affected several nations.

Sages and clerics have pondered the mystery of the fearsome king, yet have reached no firm conclusions, for study of the lizardmen was never high on anyone's list of scholastic ventures. Some dare to hint that the creature is an immortal, a servant of Ssslak sent to Rassilon to unite his worshippers. While this would break the Compact, no one can prove for certain whether or not the non-human gods ever swore the oath. Other suggestions include him being a demi-god, sired by Ssslak from a mortal female and a mutant whose physical size may be extreme but whose powers are fictitious.

Perhaps one day someone will venture into the Great Swamp, encounter the fiend, and live to tell the tale. Or maybe clues exist elsewhere, amid the endless inscriptions that adorn the countless ruins dotting the landscape. But as some warn, perhaps the truth will be proven to be worse than the myth, and ignorance should be considered a blessing.

GEOGRAPHY

Midmarkers have a saying—only a dead man enters the Great Swamp. While slightly over-dramatic, it does contain a kernel of truth, for few who venture deep into the depths of the vast mire ever return.

Traveling through the Great Swamp is an experience few ever wish to repeat. Walking through the thick, cloying mud saps one's strength and makes movement slow going, while wading through the many streams and rivers subjects one to leeches and parasites. It is virtually impossible to keep clean, and any injury can quickly fester. Disease is a constant problem, and few adventurers come back without having contracted some illness.

Although the "constant rainfall" mentioned by many explorers is a myth, when it rains it does so heavily, penetrating cloaks and armor in minutes. Visibility can be reduced to a few dozen yards in the heaviest storms, and meandering streams quickly becoming fast-flowing rivers, sweeping unsuspecting travelers off their feet.

Movement by day subjects one to constant swarms of biting insects, and it is little better at night. Explorers must be constantly vigilant, for that log floating in the stream may be a crocodile. The bufomi and gatormen are expert ambushers, and what looks like a pool of mud may be bottomless quicksand.

When rations run out, or more likely spoil, explorers must turn to foraging. Bloodberries are nutritious, but it takes a skilled eye to tell them apart from bileberries, and little other vegetation is digestible. Hunters may have more luck, for there are great flocks of ducks and geese native to the region, as well as edible frogs, toads, and lizards in abundance. Crocodiles make fine eating, and their skin makes for waterproof cloaks, but catching one can be a risky venture. More serious is a lack of potable water, though again those trained to live off the land quickly learn how to spot water-storing vines.

With rations taking up valuable encumbrance, edible game never guaranteed to be available, and water scarce, wise parties will invest heavily in *feast* alchemical devices before leaving civilization.

FLORA OF THE GREAT SWAMP

Described below are some of the more common plants found in the Great Swamp. Entries marked "*" can be used in herbal remedies.

Bileberries*: Consuming these requires the diner to make a Vigor roll or suffer from vomiting and stomach cramps. He suffers a level of Fatigue (maximum of Exhausted) for the next 1d4 hours. Unfortunately, they are almost identical to bloodberries (see below). Telling the two berries apart requires a Survival roll. Bileberries can be used to create purgative herbal brews.

the great swamp



Population: 100,000+ (85% lizardmen, 10% gatormen, 5% bufomi)
Ruler: The Tyrant Lizard King (nominal)
Religion: Ssslak (lizardmen), Sarkeb (gatormen), K'kroakaa (bufomi),
Imports: Armor, weapons
Exports: Narcotic herbs

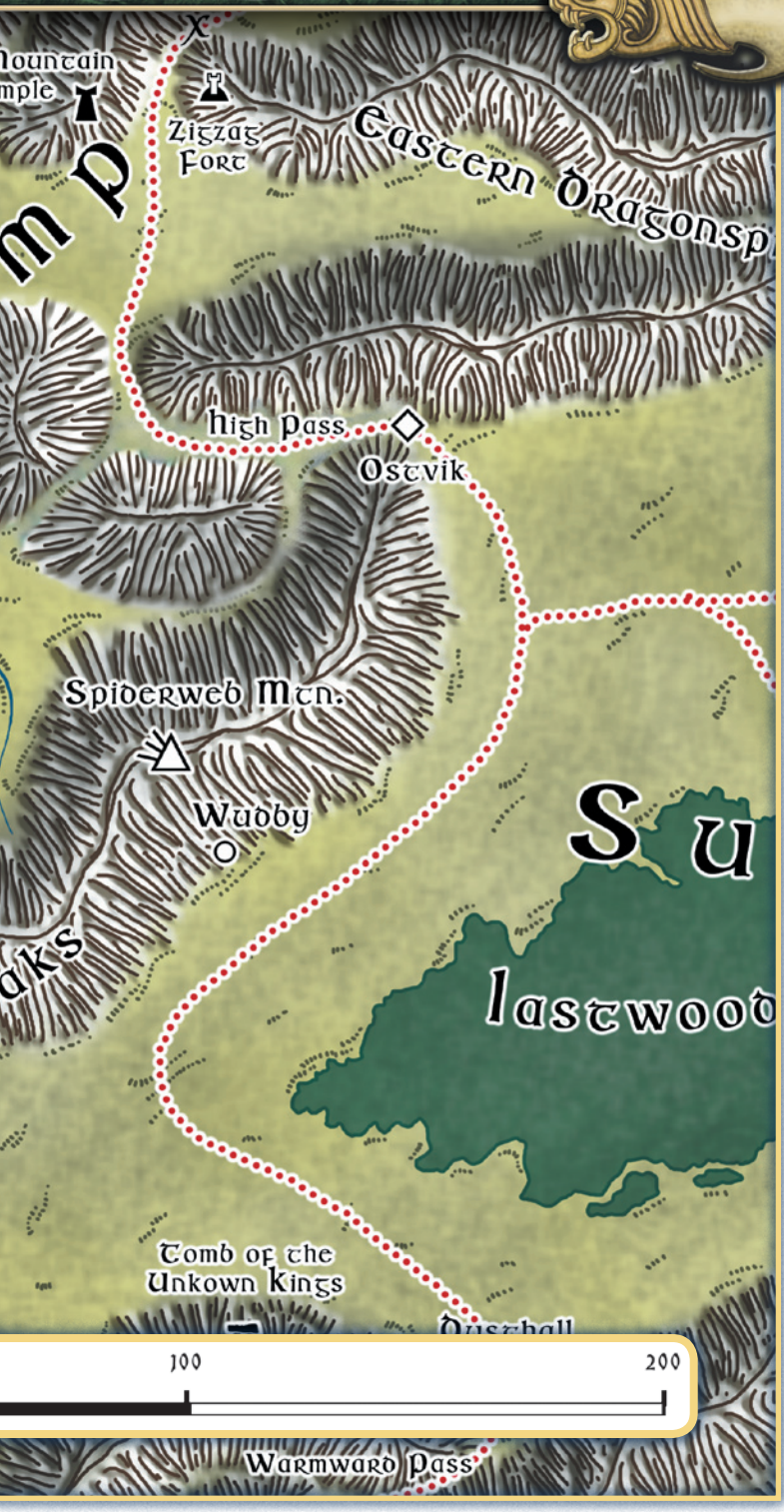
Bloodberries*: A plump, round berry which oozes viscous, dark red juice if crushed. Blood berries are edible and can be fermented into wine. They are common components in food substitute and hydrating herbal brews.

Bloodstalk: A thick vine found smothering many ruins. When cut the stalk exudes a sticky red fluid. Waterproof, the fluid can be used to mark walls when exploring ruins. A typical foot-long stalk (weighs one pound) can be repeatedly whittled down to force out new seepage, providing eight hours of use before it finally dries out.

Bogwort*: A wide-leafed plant with mottled leaves. Bogwort oil is a key component of many insect repellant herbal remedies. The leaves can also be used to create a healing balm that gives +1 to Healing rolls made to cure wounds inflicted by insect bites and stings.

Knotweed: A thin but strong ground vine, knotweed can be woven into makeshift rope. It requires one hour and a successful Survival roll to create a 2" (12 feet) strand from raw ingredients. Once cut, the strands dry out and become brittle. Knotweed rope can support no weight after a week and automatically snaps if any weight is placed on it.

Stinkberry*: Beloved of young pranksters everywhere, stinkberry is named after its bright purple berries. When crushed, they exude a foul-smelling yellow paste that lingers for days on skin and clothing. Handled carefully, the berries can be collected. Some stimulant herbal brews make some use of stinkberries.



Anyone who moves through a patch of stinkberries suffers –1 Charisma. This is cumulative up to a maximum –4 Charisma penalty as the odor builds from a pungent whiff to an all-pervading, stomach-churning stench. The only way to remove the foul odor is to wash in wine, vinegar, or similar acidic liquid (a gallon is required to ensure thorough cleansing), or wait four days until the stench fades naturally.

Sucklevine: While the swamp's inhabitants can drink the water, it is inadvisable for other races to do so. Sucklevines are thick, woody creepers found growing throughout the swamp. The vines are hollow and filled with a liquid the color of watered down milk.

Though it is bitter, the liquid is quite drinkable. However, it does not keep long, spoiling 24 hours after being collected.

MILITARY

The armies of the bufom and gatorman tribes are based purely on the number of warriors available to an individual tribe. Small tribes might be able to muster only a handful of warriors, while the largest can field a hundred. Supporting them are small numbers of specialist troops, such as bufomi, gatorman fleshtearers, and shamans and priests. Were the scattered gatormen tribes to combine forces, an unlikely event since all tribes are rivals for resources and such a gathering would attract the attention of the Tyrant Lizard King, they could field an army of some 3,000 warriors, while the bufomi could summon perhaps a third of that number.

The true military might of the Great Swamp lies with the lizardmen, ruled by the Tyrant Lizard King. All told, the inhuman king has around 20,000 warriors at his disposal, plus a large number of thunderlizards. His horde is divided into ten regiments, each carrying a unique name. Examples include the Feeders of Ssslak, the Ones Who Bring Death to Unbelievers, and the Divine Teeth of the Thunderlizard King. Each regiment contains exactly 2,000 lizardmen and is broken down as follows:

Commander: One senior war captain (treat as a Wild Card war captain) mounted on a Wild Card triceratops. Unlike most thunderlizards (see below), this beast acts as a regular mount.

Headquarters: 16 temple guards, one standard bearer, two heralds, and five messengers. There are normally eight velociraptors assigned to the company. They fill a role similar to guard dogs.

Priests: Five priests. One generally serves with the headquarters, one alongside the shock troops, one with the cavalry, and two with the thunderlizards.

Shock Troops: One company of 100 temple guards.

Cavalry: One company of raptor riders, plus their vicious, intelligent mounts.

Infantry: 1,400 warriors divided into 14 companies of 100 warriors each. A war captain leads each company.

Archers: One company of 170 archers. Normally 100 form a company which fights together while the remainder is divided among the thunderlizard units. Archers also operate any siege weapons. A single war captain is in command of the entire company.

Thunderlizards: 50 lizardmen, one of whom is a war captain. Different thunderlizards are employed depending on the situation, and each requires a different number of handlers. An ankylosaurus requires three handlers, a diplodocus seven, a pterodactyl one, and a triceratops three. Velociraptors are never included in this company, as they serve as cavalry. See below for further notes on thunderlizards.

Typically one handler barks orders while the others use the reins to maneuver the beast. Unlike with a horse or pygmy mammoth, controlling a thunderlizard requires a cooperative roll from all the handlers. Treat thunderlizard handlers as regular lizardman warriors but with Riding d6.

Others: 150 lizardmen serving as baggage handlers, medical orderlies, artillery loaders, foragers, food for the thunderlizards, and so on.

Currently, three regiments are actively engaged in the battle to conquer Ostvik with a further two kept in reserve. Two regiments are garrisoned in Slik'al'ssla, and the other three are dispersed among the remaining cities.

THUNDERLIZARDS

Ankylosaurs are employed against enemy infantry and cavalry, where their sweeping tails can cause maximum impact, as well as to smash light fortifications.

Diplodocuses are mobile siege towers and missile platforms. They may carry 10 archers, two ballistae, or five archers and one ballista. When used as missile platforms, a wicker and leather fighting platform protects the archers. This provides Cover (+3 Armor).

Triceratops can carry two archers in addition to their handlers, but are generally used as battering rams or to plow through enemy ranks.

Pterodactyls are primarily used as scouts. However, the rider can

throw spears, fire arrows, or shoot slings at his enemies. They can also be used to land troops behind enemy lines, albeit only at the rate of one per pterodactyl. It is no coincidence the defenders of Ostvik keep one eye to the sky and a bow always close at hand.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

No inhabitants of the Great Swamp have any official trading ties with the wider world, but this does not mean no trade takes place. The lizardmen, gatormen, and bufomi are all eager to acquire metal weapons and armor, and don't care how they acquire these items. Raids net a small quantity, but not enough to feed the demand. Human traders of unsavory character have no qualms about selling armor and armaments to the vile denizens of the swamp, so long as their coin is good.

Midmark, Veermark, and Sutmark, all of whom have reason to fear a well-equipped lizardman army, have declared trading with the inhabitants of the Great Swamp to be a capital offense. Guilty parties are thrown naked into the Great Swamp. Unfortunately for the perpetrator, none of the races they traded with have any sense of loyalty, and all desire the flesh of sentient beings to feed their stomachs or those of their equally vile gods.

Sadly, Freetown has no such restrictions on trading with the lizardmen, though all shipments must be sent by sea to avoid Midmark's over-zealous customs agents.

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* lists narcotics as a major export. While this is true, none of the inhabitants are actively involved in the trade. Rather, heavily armed criminal gangs scour the land for narcotic plants, taking them to small camps to be prepared by herbalists. They are then sold to crooked merchants or the cult of Vali.

MAJOR LOCALES

GMs and heroes looking for exciting and deadly places to explore need cast their eye only into the stinking swamp. From border forts to towering, stepped pyramids, and mausoleums to entire cities, the swamp contains countless gatorman ruins ripe for plundering. Detailed below are a few sample locales.

CITIES (GENERAL NOTES)

When the gatormen ruled Rassilon, they erected cities of stone to honor their once many gods. At the heart of each city stood a pyramid-temple, a monumental stepped structure dedicated to the city's patron deity. Surrounding the pyramid was a sacred plaza, where only priests could walk except on holy days. A grand plaza, lined with smaller temples devoted to the other deities, led from the main gate to the plaza.

What gods the gatormen once worshipped in these impressive structures has been wiped away. Those the gatormen still inhabit are devoted entirely to Sarkeb, while those in the hands of the rebellious lizardmen honor their barbaric gods. Even in the lost cities, and many exist, for the Great Swamp was the center of the gatorman empire, the names of the old gods, carved in stone to immortalize them, cannot be deciphered, even with magic. Such was the fate of the gatorman gods that when Sarkeb devoured them even their names were eradicated from existence.

Smaller avenues radiated from the plaza, each laid down in accordance with a celestial alignment no longer visible in the heavens, for such is the great antiquity of these sites. Homes, barracks, slave pens, warehouses, shops, and workshops lined the avenues, creating bustling, vibrant cities whose grandeur belied the cruel barbarity of the gatorman race and their bloodthirsty gods.

CITY OF BLOOD

Population: 2,500 (80% gatormen, 20% slaves)

Even before Sarkeb became the gatormen's sole deity he was patron of this city. So many slaves and captives were sacrificed to Sarkeb in orgies of violence that the streets ran deep with blood. The slave revolt was crushed with brutal efficiency, but as the rebellion gained impetus elsewhere the city was abandoned. The victorious lizardmen refused to settle here, for they claimed the shades of their ancestors, slaughtered to appease an alien god, roamed the streets. Eventually the gatormen drifted back, reclaiming the crumbling ruins from the vines and creepers that had encroached in their absence.

Located some 50 miles from the border with Midmark, the City of Blood remains a major gatorman stronghold. The Tyrant Lizard King keeps a close eye on the city, but so long as the inhabitants do not threaten his plans he allows them to exist—when Ostvik is crushed, he will avenge his people, ensuring the city lives up to its ancient name one final time.

CITY OF DEATH

Population: 3,000 (66% lizardmen, 33% slaves, 1% various humans, plus an unknown number of undead)

While many high priests were buried in their home city, close to the god they worshipped, the majority were entombed in the City of Death. Amid the temples stood only houses for the dead, colossal mausoleums and crypts tended by priests devoted to the god of the dead and protected by temple guards.

The Tyrant Lizard King recently ordered the city reclaimed and the entombed priests' corpses destroyed, but the lizardmen were not the first to visit the city since its abandonment. Clerics of Hela, realizing the untapped potential of the site, began arriving many moons ago. Progress has been slow thanks to the presence of traps and monstrous guardians, but they are slowly animating an army of ferocious undead gatormen. Unable to retreat, the lizardmen labor on, desperately trying to clear the streets of undead.

CITY OF GHOSTS

As word of the slave revolt spread, the priests of this city invoked powerful magic, reforming the very patterns in the heavens into a new celestial alignment to empower their ritual. One second the city was there, the next it was gone, transported into a pocket dimension. The dimension was time-locked, set only to open when the same celestial alignment reoccurred naturally. Such was the haste of the priests that they paid little attention as to when the conjunction might occur.

Many thousands of years have passed, and the time of the alignment draws closer. As the magical veil begins to weaken, the city shimmers in and out of existence in the mundane world, sometimes remaining for a few hours, other times for many weeks, before vanishing again.

What might emerge from the city when it finally materializes for good is a mystery. Sarkeb's blight had already affected the cities by the time of the rebellion, thus if the gatormen still hold power they are likely savages. But it may transpire the slaves here also revolted, and that an entire city of lizardmen may spring into existence overnight. Would such creatures be loyal to the Tyrant Lizard King, or would thousands of years of independent cultural evolution have taken them down a different road? Could they, for instance, have replaced the gatormen as an enlightened race, wise in lore and less committed to violence? Do they, perhaps, know the secret of celestial magic?

CITY OF HUNGER

Population: 12,000 (80% lizardmen, 20% slaves)

As the pre-downfall gatormen hungered for knowledge, so their god of learning, to whom this city was then devoted, hungered after blood sacrifices. In return for continual offerings, the deity allowed his worshippers to glean more understanding of the universe. The great temple, a center of scholastic endeavor, ran red with blood as scribes recorded what the priests had learned on the flayed skins of their victims.

Today the city is ruled by the lizardmen, and Ssslak's presence hovers in the main temple. While many of the libraries were plundered and burnt during the slave revolt, some survived. The Tyrant

Lizard King forbade further destruction. Now lizardman priests pour over the texts, seeking to unlock the wisdom of their former masters and increase the power of their king.

CITY OF POWER

Population: 9,000 (85% lizardmen, 15% slaves)

Located just 20 miles east of the old capital (now renamed Slik'al'ssla), the City of Power was the heart of the mage-priests and their astronomical studies. Today it is just another lizardman city, home to a large garrison watching the approaches to the capital.

At the base of the great temple stands a calendar wheel. In days of yore priests would turn the wheel by hand, marking the passage of days, years, centuries, and millennia. During the early days of the slave revolt one of the great mage-priests etched mystic runes on the calendar, marking a future date.

Ever since then the wheel has turned by itself, unstoppable, indestructible, slowly, inexorably incrementing the passage of time toward the appointed date foretold long ago. What the great dial counts down toward is unknown, but some lizardmen recall a tale in which the gatormen's great mage sealed himself away in a secret vault when the revolt began. Those who know the story claim the mage-priest vowed to return in the future to reclaim his people's empire. The Tyrant Lizard King scoffs at such talk and has those who speak of such matters sacrificed, but tension is growing in the City of Power, for the appointed day is now very close.

CITY OF THE SUN

Population: 7,800 (75% lizardmen, 25% slaves)

Though the gatormen knew much, their knowledge of metalworking was remarkably primitive. They worked with beaten gold and silver, sacred metals, but knew naught of bronze or iron. Located near the Dragonspine Mountains, the City of the Sun was the center of gold smelting. Dedicated to the god of the sun, once the chief deity of the pantheon, the walls of the great temple were clad in beaten gold, a shining beacon of the power of the gatormen. Many glyphs were inlaid with the precious metal, and of the withered corpses of the priests in the great catacombs, most had gold-plated teeth in addition to wearing heavy gold necklaces and rings.

Much of the visible gold is gone, plundered long ago. But the catacombs, sealed behind complex locks and warded by magical traps, remain intact. A king's ransom and more await any heroes brave enough to infiltrate a city of hostile lizardmen and find a way into the crypts.

An orc tribe has recently moved into the long-abandoned gold mines, for the veins are still rich in ore. Although they do not threaten the lizardmen dwelling in the city, the Tyrant Lizard King has ordered them destroyed, for the Great Swamp is his domain and the orcs offer no tribute for their trespass.

CITY OF TRADE

Population: 5,200 (15% bufomi, 25% gatormen, 25% lizardmen, 35% slaves)

Standing on the banks of the southern river, the City of Trade once bustled with gatorman merchants haggling over cargos from across Rassilon and their holdings in Al-Shirkuh and the dense jungles beyond. Its great temple was sealed during the revolt and has never been opened since. The rest of the city suffered plundering and numerous fires, and contains little of value.

Until recently, a small tribe of bufomi were the sole inhabitants of the overgrown ruins. Then a tribe of gatormen, intent on opening the pyramid and looting its treasures, moved into one of the suburbs. Their presence in turn forced the Tyrant Lizard King to dispatch troops, for if the gatormen held the city they could build up their strength.

All three races are involved in armed struggle for the city. No side has the strength to crush both its enemies, no alliance is possible, and launching a full raid against one side would leave the troops open to counterattack. The battle is being fought slowly, with raids preferred over frontal assaults. For now at least, the bufomi hold the great temple, but their grip is slowly weakening.

CITY OF TREASURE

In the center of the Great Swamp is a large lake, its deep waters fed by no streams or rivers. In the center stood a proud city, famed for its fabulous treasuries. When the lizardmen revolted, the high priest called upon his god to destroy the city in order to ensure it never fell into the slaves' hands. The earth began to sink and water bubbled up from the soil, for in these days there was no Compact between the gods and the power of the inhuman gods was felt more often in the mortal realm. Within a day, the entire city lay under 100 feet of water, its inhabitants and slaves drowned.

All that marks the site today is a small island covered in thin soil and thick weeds. This is in fact the flat top of the city's highest pyramid and thus marks the center of the conurbation. Far below the rest of the city lies submerged, its treasuries intact.

No myths or legends exist among the denizens of the Great Swamp regarding the nature of the treasure. It might be gold and silver, for both were precious to the gatormen, but it might equally be knowledge, for once the savage race were erudite scholars, possessed of advanced lore.

MOON MOUNTAIN TEMPLE

Moon Mountain sits at the top of Zigzag Pass, territory now considered part of the Great Swamp. Small amounts of Maerathril were mined here in bygone days, but these deposits did not give the mountain its name.

The highest peak in the region, it gave clerics of Maera a commanding view of the night sky. A temple to her honor was built on a high ridge, just below the snow line. For over nine centuries clerics honored their goddess, studied the stars, seeking wisdom in their patterns and movements, and delved deep into the mysteries of magic. So skilled were the clerics at deciphering the future that they predicted every major event since the Demongate War. Then, 26 years ago, two years after the start of the Siphoning, all communication with the small community was lost. The last message, relayed through a *voice on the wind* spell, made cryptic reference to the cause of the Siphoning, indicating only that a "dark force has arisen in the east beneath a forest of spires."

Relief missions were sent by the cult, while the Reliquary, Sutmark, and Veermark sent expeditions to try and loot the store of magic believed stored there, but the only ones to return were those who failed to reach the site. The others, presumably penetrating the interior of the remote temple, were never heard from again.

Former visitors still speak in wonder at the glass-domed ceiling of the great temple hall, the impressive library of arcane treaties, the well-stocked laboratories of the resident alchemists, the grand divination room, onto the roof of which was magically projected an image of the heavens, allowing the diviners to work their strange art even in cloudy nights, and the ornately decorated council chamber in which all practitioners of magical arts could meet to discuss grievances and theories on neutral territory.

An adventuring party who can penetrate the defenses of the temple might well find a cache of alchemical devices, tomes of learning, and even relics, but more importantly they may uncover the cause of the Siphoning. However, in order to reach that goal they must overcome the conqueror and new master of the temple, a gray rider, and the small army of undead he commands.

STELAE

In the days of the great empire the gatormen priests were divided into two sects. The true priests were servants of the gods, receiving power through divine will. Socially lesser than them were the mage-priests, who worked their celestial magic by channeling the power of the sun, moon, and stars. Across the land, the mage-priests erected a network of stelae. Imbued with glyphs of power and placed on specific alignments to match the heavens, these towering pillars of stone stored and transmitted magical energy in a convoluted web.

Through the power grid, the ruling priests could communicate with their peers in distant realms, open portals through which entire armies could march, and channel magical energy to aid other cities

in times of crisis. Each stela needed to be within 100 miles of its nearest neighbor in order to transmit energy and have line of site.

Although millennia have passed, the storage glyphs still work, though due to the movement of the heavens they are less effective at storing and transmitting energy than they once were. Though it is impossible to tap directly into the stored energy, for the art has been obliterated by Sarkeb's greed, some residual leakage occurs.

Any mage who speaks Lesarde, studies a stela (any one will do) for 2d6 weeks, and makes a Knowledge (Arcana) roll at –4 learns how to tap into the stored energy. Failure means the mage learns nothing, but he can try again after a month of contemplation on where he went wrong. While within 50 yards of any stela, a mage who understands their basic working ignores the effects of the Siphoning. Because each stela was placed on specific alignments, moving it drains the energy, leaving it a mundane pillar of stone.

While a small part of the network remains standing in the Great Swamp, the rituals required to activate the stelae are long forgotten. Were the Tyrant Lizard King to discover the ancient incantations, his rule over the Great Swamp would be absolute, for his divine presence would be felt in every city still linked to the network, and potentially in neighboring realms where stelae still stand.

PERSONS OF NOTE

ITCHY SVEN

A native of Midmark, Sven is an herbalist by trade. Although the interior of the swamp is too dangerous to explore, Sven wanders the dank marsh along the border searching for unusual herbs and plants. He suffers from a non-contagious skin condition that leaves his flesh flaky and causes red blotches to manifest. It doesn't help that he constantly scratches to the point his flesh weeps, and his personal hygiene is less than savory.

Sven knows the location of several ruins within a day's march of Midmark, though he has never entered any of them, preferring to view the ancient stones from afar. In return for escorting him while he gathers herbs, he is prepared to guide explorers to these sites.

"LORD" AELFWULF LESARDEDOOM

"Lord" Aelfwulf travels southern Midmark looking for worthy recruits to join his Order of Thunder Slayers, a brotherhood of knights dedicated to ridding the Great Swamp of lizardmen and gatormen, and seeking donations to help raise a mighty army.

Aelfwulf cuts a striking figure. Of average height and build, his left leg is missing from mid thigh, replaced with a wooden prosthetic, and his right arm is gone from the elbow. Both injuries were inflicted by gatormen. He wears armor that is too big for him, and carries a sword that is rusty almost to the point of being useless.

"Lord" Aelfwulf is in fact a former trapper and has no claim to any noble title. Following the gatorman attack he staggered back to Midmark, half delirious with fever and blood loss. During his fever he hallucinated that Tiw came before him and tasked him with cleansing the Great Swamp. When he recovered, he formed the knighthood and set out to recruit brave warriors.

Unfortunately, most true warriors considered him mad, for while a man might fight a dragon or vow to defend the Hearthlands, only an idiot would voluntarily venture into the Great Swamp to wage war. Aelfwulf did attract recruits, but they were peasants who wanted titles, youths with delusions of becoming mighty warriors, and those with little left to lose.

Aelfwulf claims to have a castle within the Great Swamp. In fact he and his "order" live in a ramshackle village of shacks and tents, the mighty castle nothing but a disused and rotting Midmark border fort, and the great fortifications a weak palisade. Aelfwulf has little combat prowess and no tactical or strategic knowledge, making him a very dangerous commander, but only to the health of his followers.

While it might suit some to think of Aelfwulf as a con man or cult leader, the sad truth is that he does truly believe he follows a divine calling and that he can lead his army to a glorious victory.

WHY COME HERE?

The Great Swamp is a realm of dank, disease-ridden stinking bogs, bottomless pools of quicksand, hostile inhabitants who eat flesh and perform grisly sacrifices to their dark gods, deadly trolls, giants, dragons, and orms, swarms of biting insects, and species of giant animals who think heroes make good eating. So, why would the adventurers risk life and limb coming here?

* Orders. To be honest, very few heroes are likely to be beholden to an organization or individual who sends them to the Great Swamp. The Reliquary might send field agents to scour the ruins for relics, as might the cult of Hoenir for ancient knowledge. Midmark's queen may occasionally order warriors to rescue a kidnapped citizen or destroy a raiding party, and Sutmark's king may desire intelligence on its enemy's plans and attempt to sabotage the lizardmen's supply lines running from the core cities to the siege at Ostvik, but few others care much about what occurs in the desolate swamp.

* Knowledge. That the gatormen once ruled an advanced yet simultaneously barbaric culture is unknown to sages and scholars. What is known is that the great ruins are a mystery from olden times, possibly the remnants of a lost human empire, and mysteries attract certain types of people. Even if the heroes have no desire to explore the ancient ruins of their own volition, a Lorekeeper or cleric of Hoenir may hire them as escorts.

* Treasure. The Great Swamp is a land of ruins, for the lizardmen occupy only a few cities and the gatormen have largely abandoned their ancient homes. Talk of fabulous treasure hidden in secret chambers within towering, crumbling pyramids and protected by devious traps are commonplace. In many cases the stories are true, but treasure is not always coin and gems. Relics, and scientific and historical knowledge are all valuable items in Rassilon, if one knows where to sell them.

* Glory. Heroes who want fame through slaughter will find no end of foes lining up to test them. Bufomi, and giant toads, leeches, and mosquitoes may challenge low Rank parties. Those of proven ability can battle marsh trolls, dragons, giants, and orms, or pit their strength against the ferocious gatormen and lizardmen.

* Shortcut. Quite frankly, going through the Great Swamp is rarely a shortcut, but heroes are a breed unto themselves. The only logical shortcut is from Sutmark to Midmark or Veermark, and sensible heroes will buy, hire, or steal a ship rather than risk the doom-laden swamp.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* Jarl Illugi of Marshwatch (Midmark) seeks heroes to enter the Great Swamp and bring him a number of fresh triceratops' eggs. He plans to raise a number of the beasts to serve his huscarls as mounts, and use any others to pull his farmers' plows, thus enabling them to plow more land for crops. In return, he will train one of the beasts as a mount for the heroes.

* A standard adventure plot is a rescue mission. In the Great Swamp, the heroes are always up against a time limit, for prisoners are either eaten or sacrificed in some manner. With movement rates hampered by the terrain, many dangers lying in wait, and then the need to enter a heavily populated city where every inhabitant is hostile, the heroes will need to use all their resources to the best of their abilities.

* Horse-Cyning Thrand's power extends only as far as the top of Zigzag Pass. While little of the High Road is in the hands of the lizardmen, orcs, ogres, and giants prevent Veermark from sending troops to attack the armies besieging Ostvik from the rear. Were he to attack in force in a bid to clear the road, the lizardmen would undoubtedly be alerted to the threat and fortify their positions accordingly. Thus, he is hiring adventurers to quietly clear the path by eliminating the creatures that live along its winding route. Thrand's plan is noble, but not selfless—with the siege lifted, Veermark would benefit from renewed trade with Sutmark.

HELDALUND

Heldalund is a demoralized nation. Orcs control the northern reaches and the second largest town, Hellfrost dragons circle in the west, the army has withered to a shadow of its former self, and trade has been crippled by a loss of exports and high taxation in Cul. Heldalund stands on the brink of disaster, but all is not yet lost.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Heldalund.

* **Languages:** All Heldalunders must take Saxa as their first language, even if they are of non-Saxa stock.

* **Nobles:** As noted below, unless a character is the head of his family he carries a half title. He does not gain the Rich benefit of the Noble Edge or govern any lands directly until he achieves a full title (something he may never do if he is not the first born). The highest noble title achievable in Heldalund is thegn, and then only if a character becomes the realm's ruler.

* **Trade:** Times are hard in Heldalund. The base price for all goods is 25% higher than standard. While there are plenty of people desperate for even basic goods, few can afford them. Characters trying to find a buyer for their wares suffer a –2 penalty to Streetwise rolls.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

In days long past the citizens of Heldalund were subjects of the Vindari king and ruled over by a thegn. While the Vindari are no more, the title of thegn has been used by the rulers of this beleaguered nation ever since. The old Vindari method of choosing of rulers has never disappeared either. The Vindari culture is briefly described in *The Cairn Lands* section.

The title of thegn is open for election, for the old Vindari kings were judged not by their bloodline but by the support of the nobility. By law, any noble, regardless of title, may stand. The nobles of the land gather in conclave to debate the candidates' worthiness. In order to prevent wrangling dragging on too long and leaving the nation leaderless, a decision must be reached within 32 days. Should the council fail to reach a majority decision, it is left to heralds to determine who is closest in blood to the thegn. Most candidates are quick to make promises to earn support, though the wiser nobles know hollow words when they hear them.

Politics plays its part not just among the nobility. Merchants and clerics, while not directly involved in choosing the thegn unless they happen to hold a noble title, can sway decisions with well-placed words in the right ears. Vote for the wrong candidate, and the merchant may take his business elsewhere. In return for future favors, a merchant might go so far as to offer bribes to ensure an election victory.

The thegn, while technically the sole ruler, is not an autocrat. Tradition dictates that he must appoint a council of no less then nine members, though he is free to appoint his own councilors. As in many realms, true power extends only as far as the thegn is willing to extend it. The current thegn is weak, for not only has he failed to retake Held, but it was the nobility who ceded the western territories to Cul without his permission.

Lesser noble titles may only be held by the head of a familial line. The noble's children always take the title of ridder, adding a prefix of their parent's title to show their status. For example, every child of a hauld carries the title hauld-ridder. The children of a ridder carry the prefix "squire." Grandchildren of a ruling noble have no separate title or feudal authority, though they are considered of noble birth. Nobles without a full title (i.e. one with no prefix) are forbidden from ruling except in the absence of their parent, such as if he falls ill or is away from his holdings on business.

Primogeniture governs haulds and below. That is, when a noble dies, his eldest child, regardless of sex, acquires the title. His children then gain an appropriate title. When a noble has no issues, heralds are employed to determine who is entitled to the noble seat. By ancient law, it may only be someone with a half-title. This prevents a hauld of one domain being a lendmann in another, for example.

The nobility are beginning to fear for their status. A mere five years have passed since Held fell into orc hands, but their presence has killed trade. With most mines owned by the nobility, their personal fortunes have suffered a grievous blow. The more benevolent families have merely tightened their belts in preparation for even harder times to come. Others, less lenient, have raised local taxes to ensure their opulent lifestyle is not overly diminished. Some nobles feel that if the situation worsens, the peasants will rise up against them.

Beneath the nobility is the wealthy elite. They are mainly merchants and clerics, though anyone with enough influence and wealth can qualify. No exact figures determine when one rises to the upper class—if one is accepted into high social circles, one has reached the dizzy heights.

Forming the middle class are merchants, clerics, mages, master craftsmen, and the like. Everyone else falls into the lower class. Heldalund's small population means it has very few beggars. The lowest members of society are dung and fagot collectors.

EDUCATION

Formal education has never been of much interest to the clannish Saxa. There is a single academy in Norvik, but it caters only to the scions of the nobility. With their offspring unable to wield any power and military life a poor option, many nobles send their children to the academy just to get them out of their hair. For most, home schooling is the norm.

Unlike the Cairn Landers, who are widely regarded as idiots, most Heldalunders are aware of the greater world, at least in their immediate vicinity. Before Baron Frostweaver conquered Cul merchant caravans frequently arrived from Heligioland, crossing through the hills before turning south to Norvik. They would bring with them news and stories, as did merchants visiting the once-bustling port. But the younger generation has only secondhand knowledge for the most part, passed on by parents.

History is important to Heldalunders. In recent times history has been viewed with a rosier tint than reality should allow. The Liche-Priest's story is told as a warning, but it is tempered with the knowledge that Heldalund resisted invasion. The Blizzard War wrought chaos and death, but Heldalund was spared the worst.

Sadly, the truth is less glorious. Heldalund fell to the Liche-Priest's army as they drove south behind the mountains toward the more densely populated Barony of Trond. Fortunately, the withered devil was more interested in eliminating Trond than claiming land, and while Heldalund suffered badly only its most northern reaches were corrupted and made part of the Liche Lands proper. In the Blizzard War, geography saved the land from the worst devastation. Most older Heldalunders know the truth—they just don't want to accept it. Still, the names and deeds of great heroes are as revered today as never before, for Heldalund is in dire need of heroes.

The latest generation is being taught to fear Cul and despise Trond for the pain they have inflicted on Heldalund. If the status quo remains, within a generation or two the citizens of this troubled realm will hate their neighbors to such a degree that no reconciliation will be possible without blood running first. Many are being brought up blaming the nobility just as much as outsiders. Though rebellion has not yet entered the minds of the masses, the seeds have been planted. The cult of Vali hopes to nurture them.

Saxa is not just the dominant language, it is the official language. Anari is a distant third after Trader for the majority. Even the Anari and engro learn Saxa as their first tongue. Auld Saxa is alive and well in more rural parts, and one may still find an old crone or wizened grandfather who knows more than a smattering of Vindari.

RELIGION

The citizens of Heldalund favor four gods above all others. Neorthe, god of water, is now the most worshipped deity, though his rise has occurred only in the last five years. Some dissension within the ranks has broken out in recent months. One faction believes that Heldalund should take up whaling in earnest, for whale oil fetches high prices. Others refer to the books of scripture, which state that sea animals must only be hunted for meat, and that other by-products still constitute a sin even if the meat is eaten. Since no whales have yet been hunted in Heldalund, the arguments are likely to rage for a little while yet.

Ertha, once the most honored deity, has suffered a decline in worship since the gems and copper stopped flowing from Held and its surrounds. Mining villages in the west of the realm still hold her in great esteem. More tragically, citizens are now extremely reluctant to make offerings of metal objects to appease the goddess, since replacements are expensive. Her clerics cry that this is part of the problem—the citizens' lack of faith has led to a fall in copper and gem production. Give generously, the clerics claim, and Ertha will unveil rich new seams in the hills.

Sigel, champion against darkness, is also riding a wave of renewed popularity. He has been popular since the days of the Liche-Priest, when his clerics helped hold back the forces of the damned on what is now the modern border. Scaetha, whose role as defender against undead came after the war, has enjoyed little worship here—the Liche-Priest is a distant, though still horrific memory, while Hellfrost dragons and orcs are a very real threat.

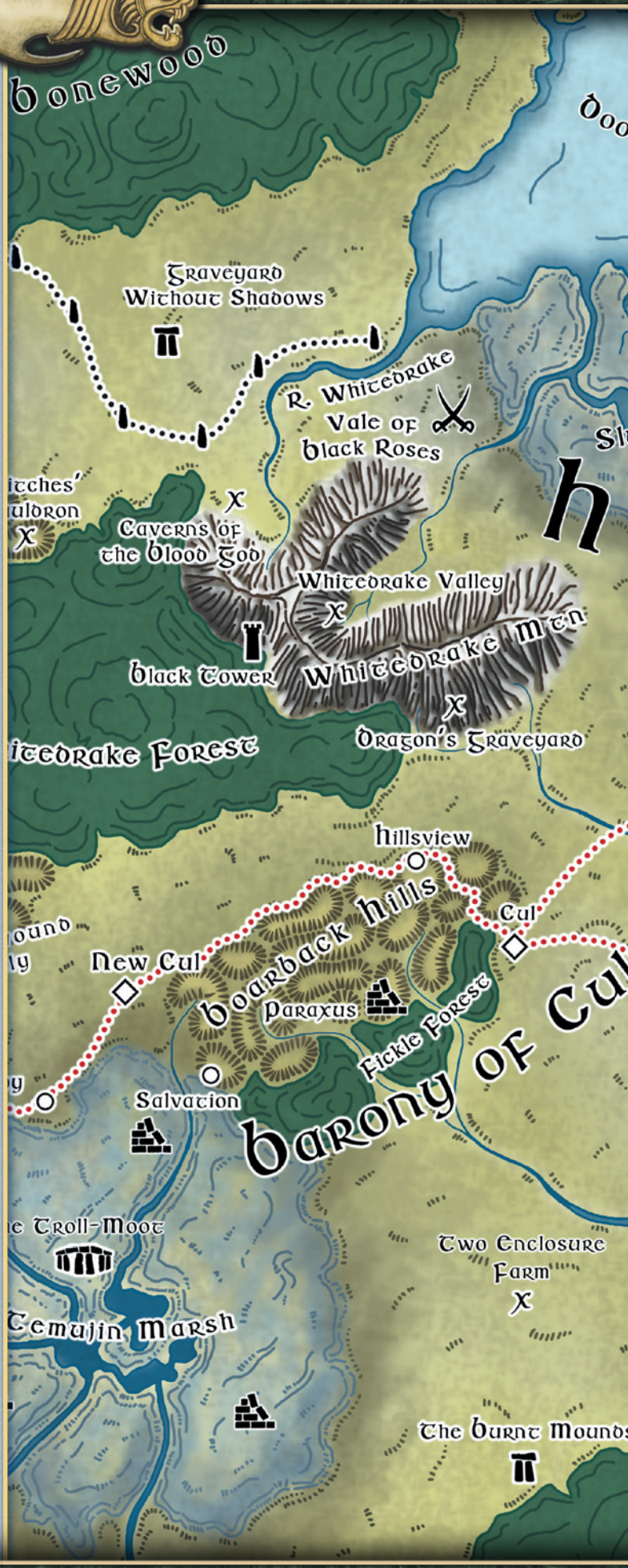
Kenaz is honored both for his role concerning smelting metal and for helping combat Hellfrost beasts. His cult is only slightly smaller than that of Sigel, but only because the flow of copper has diminished. The last five years have seen the balance of power shift from the Hearthkeepers to the Ashen Blades.

Many of the other gods enjoy widespread worship, but the cults are not as strong as those above. Agriculture and animal husbandry are common outside the main towns, and Eostre has much support. The cult is striving to increase the amount of produce harvested each year in a bid to provide Heldalund with a new export.

One god enjoying a sudden boom is Nauthiz. As prices rise, so more and more citizens are turning to the black market to acquire goods. Although the few clergy feed a greedy god, they are not stupid—so long as prices are lower than the stores, customers will keep flocking to them. Unfortunately, in order to acquire goods the clerics have turned to wholesale banditry, though much of their activity is confined to Trond. This has kept the thegn from issuing decrees against them, and earned the citizens' begrudging respect.

The Norns have become the center of much attention of late, with desperate citizens clamoring to know what Heldalund's future holds. So far the omens have been mixed, and the handful of clerics reluctant to push their triple goddesses any further.

Var's cult has suffered many ups and downs here. With trade on the decline and Trond growing in popularity with foreign merchants, many clerics have left the realm in search of better profits. A few have stayed behind, believing that copper and gems will soon flow again. A small few have joined forces with Var's wayward brother, Nauthiz, and become heavily engaged in the black market. This constitutes a minor sin, but it is a small price to pay to keep the ledgers in profit.





heldalund

Population: 24,063 (82% Saxa, 11% Anari, 6% frostborn, 1% engro)
Ruler: Thegn Franmar Barrisunu
Religion: Neorthe, Ertha, Sigel, Kenaz
Imports: Oil, pottery, wine
Exports: Copper, fish, gems

In terms of the dark gods, there are a handful of worshippers. Heldalund's vicinity to the Liche Lands and the presence of ruins in the foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains, which flow into northern Heldalund, makes it a popular destination for Hela's fell brood. Thrym is the orcs' major deity, though Dargar has some adherents. The cult of Vali sees Heldalund as an opportunity for spreading mayhem. With its coffers almost dry, Heldalund cannot afford to import produce should a famine strike. Unemployment is beginning to rise, and with it comes desperation. Desperation will lead men to do almost anything to put bread on the table, and down that path lies corruption.

MILITARY

Heldalund's once mighty and proud army is a demoralized remnant of its former prowess. Decades of neglect, loss of the northern territories, the worsening trade situation, poor wages, lack of leave, inferior equipment, harsh punishments, and idiots for officers have sapped its morale.

The army consists of five companies, each comprising 150 medium infantry and 25 light cavalry. Treat them as common mercenaries, but with Spirit d4. They are equipped as per the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* entry for Heldalund. Each company is led by a captain. He is supported by three sergeants-of-infantry and one sergeant-of-cavalry. These incompetents use the same stats as the common soldiers.

Just one company protects the borders with Cul and Trond, a distance of some 200 miles. Half a company is assigned to protect the countryside between Norvik and the edge of the orc's territory. Three and a half companies guard Norvik. The public is unsure of exactly why so many troops guard the capital, when they would be better served elsewhere. Rumors are starting to circulate that Cul, Trond, or the orcs are preparing to mount an attack. There is no truth to these rumors—the soldiers are kept here in a bid to reduce desertion.

The cults of Sigel and Kenaz can muster 45 paladins between them. These are hardened warriors, sent here in preparation for the day the orcs grow adventurous and strike south. They have petitioned the thegn over and over to bolster the army, but their threats, pleas, and warnings have fallen on deaf ears—the thegn is too afraid of antagonizing Cul, despite a more imminent threat not on his doorstep, but inside his house. Scaetha's cult has a total of 20 clergy stationed in a small village close to the orcs' territory. They too are keen to see the orcs gone, but only so they can move closer to the Liche Lands.

What Heldalund desperately needs is leaders of men. Knights Hrafn are the obvious choice, but the thegn refuses to pay a small fortune for each commander. While the knights are skilled tacticians and strategists, Thegn Franmar believes that morale will be boosted by mighty heroes, common men who have fought dragons and undead in hand-to-hand combat and carry the scars of victory like trophies. Not only are they likely to be relatively cheap, but their stories and first-hand experience of battle as soldiers, not generals, will raise morale. By dealing death to the foul King Ragkar and ending the threat of the dragon at his beck and call, the army will be able to rally behind a glorious victory. The only problem is finding heroes willing to deal with a badly demoralized army.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Heldalund's main trade road runs between the orc-conquered town of Hela and the capital at Norvik. Trade between the towns has stopped since Warlord Ragkar seized power five years ago. The road to Cul is little used by outgoing merchants, and only rarely by incoming ones. Most merchants heading for Heldalund prefer to go via Trondavoe first, in order to benefit from the trading ships frequenting its ports.

Heldalund has rich deposits of copper and gems, but unfortunately most of these lie in the northern territory now claimed by orcs. As a result, exports have dwindled to a trickle, rapidly bringing increasing hardship on its citizens. Prices are rising steadily since the last stocks were sold, and shortages are common, for merchants cannot afford to import much-needed goods.

Thegn Franmar has ordered prospectors to begin scouring the hills to the west of the capital for new deposits, but progress is slow. Even when a vein is located, it takes a year or more to set up a mine capable of generating any sizeable exports.

Fishing is now the prime export, though it is not a lucrative one. Most major settlements further down the coast have fishing fleets, and Cul charges a hefty 10% levy on goods crossing its borders. Fortunately, Heldalund is largely self-sufficient in foodstuffs, and so far famine has been averted. Unfortunately, much of the stocks have been sold off, meaning that a single failed harvest could lead to widespread disaster.

Heldalund's primary imports are whale oil, pottery, and wine. With the native clay being of exceptionally poor quality, pottery must be imported. Brae and Myre are the biggest suppliers, though thanks to Cul's taxation policies even basic wares are costly. While citizens are content to use wooden plates and cups, wood is not ideal for cooking pots. As existing pots break, citizens are forced to rely more and more on eating meat, using the animal's stomach as a cooking vessel.

Nordmark is the main supplier of wine, though the distances involved have always made it a luxury. The recent civil war has stifled trade, though things are beginning to pick up. Fortunately, wine is shipped to Heldalund via Ostmark, avoiding Cul's tariffs. Unfortunately, without exports to offer in return and with Trond enjoying better trade relations with Cul, fewer ships are calling here.

Much of the oil Heldalund imports come from Sutmark, or at least it did. As the lengthy siege of Ostvik drags on, so the beleaguered army requires goods once used for export. Enough smaller supplies exist to keep trade flowing, but it is nowhere as brisk as it was a generation ago.

ARCHITECTURE

Wooden Saxa longhouses dominate the country. While Held and Norvik are large towns, over half the population lives in steads or small villages. The latter are often just two or three steads built near each other for common protection. The greatest population densities, outside the towns, occur along the trade roads and in the foothills of the mountains. Those nearest the mountains erect sharpened wooden stakes in their homes to protect dragons thinking of swooping down and crashing through the roof.

Before Held fell the citizens would buy reeds harvested from Slush Marsh, believing that because they grew in the cold swamp they would be resistant to Hellfrost dragons' breath. Today, houses in need of new thatching must make do with wooden shingles, instead. Many houses are marked with Kenaz and Sigel's holy symbols, further warding against the fearsome dragons who roost not far away.

MAJOR LOCALES

While Held and its orc conquerors present an ideal adventuring locale, Heldalund has several other sites of potential interest to visiting heroes.

BARE-HAND FORGE

The ability to work metal is, some scholars say, one of the things that separate men from animals. It is an act not just of creation, but of transformation bordering on the miraculous. One noted worker of metal certainly deserves the epithet of miracle worker.

The man is not a native of Heldalund—he was found washed up on the shores some 30 years ago. No one knows from whence he came for he is both mute and illiterate. Tall and powerfully built, his skin is as black as pitch, his hair as red as flame. Since no one knows his name, he is universally referred to in Heldalund simply as The Smith.

The Smith is no ordinary metalworker. For a start, he needs no forge to heat metal. Instead, his hands can generate heat sufficient to bring iron to a white-hot glow and yet they inflict no burns on objects or people. Similarly, he uses no tools, bending, kneading, and shaping the metal with his bare hands.

His unearthly talents have brought him great acclaim. His forge, located on the edge of the Central Hills outside Norvik, has become a place of pilgrimage for followers of Ertha and Kenaz. Some have started to claim he is of celestial origin, both of the gods of earth and fire. Others have dared to utter the unthinkable—that the mysterious but amiable stranger in their midst is none other than Kenaz incarnate.

DRUID WOOD

The dark, tangled forest known as Druid Wood stands on the western side of the Central Hills. It is a fell place, shunned by all but the bravest souls and the followers of Scaetha and Sigel. Around the fringes the trees appear normal, but deeper in they are black and warped, the bark sculpted like faces frozen in anguish. Strange cries emanate from the wood at night, and when the Deorcmonan rises unearthly wails of torment carry forth into the surrounding landscape.

The name comes not because druids live or gather here, but because of its supposed origins. Popular legend has it that during the reign of the Liche-Priest a small army of druids gathered here, on what was once a grassy slope, to help stem the dark flow. A fell enchantment was cast upon them, warping their flesh and transforming them into twisted trees. It is said Eostre wept openly for the great loss her followers endured that terrible day. To hide the blight, she caused trees to grow, encircling the unholy forest and hiding it from sight.

Scaetha's clergy make periodic forays into the forest, but they have reported no undead. They remain wary, for the Liche-Priest employed many tricks to conceal his forces as his armies were driven back. Some clerics hold that the trees are indeed damned souls, undead transformed by dark magic in preparation for their master's eventual return to unlife.

Druids rarely come here. They claim the wood predates the Liche-Priest by eons and was always a dark place. That the Liche-Priest may have made it worse they do not contest, but he only fuelled an ember of evil that already smoldered. They claim it is home to many dark tree men and Unseelie faeries.

THE FIELD OF MEN-AN-TOL

Men-an-Tol comes from the Vindari and translates as "holed stones." As odd a name as it might seem, it neatly describes the site. Standing proud in the landscape are two dozen menhirs. They are arranged in an unbroken line, spaced some six yards apart, and aligned north-south. Roughly carved into rectangular form, each stone is approximately six feet high. Drilled through each stone are two holes—one a few inches from the top and one about two-thirds of the way up from the ground.

Erected long before the Blizzard War, their purpose is a mystery. Many clerics argue they served a religious purpose, though few agree on the specifics. Possibly worshippers would peer or pass offerings, perhaps even body parts, through the holes. Another belief is that they fulfilled some military purpose, perhaps for cavalrymen to practise the aim of their lances.

There are, of course, more fanciful theories. Tales abound of worshippers turned to stone for some terrible sin, creatures of darkness caught in sunlight, undead placed in protected hibernation by the Liche-Priest, and that they are oracles who spout wisdom either from the head or the heart.

THE FORSAKEN ARMY

The tales of skalds are filled with ghostly armies, most of them fettered to the mortal realm through a lust for vengeance or ancient curses. The Tale of the Forsaken Army, though, recalls an oath that has kept an entire army from death's icy clutches.

The tale claims that long ago, when Heldalund was part of the Vindari kingdom and the Anari were simple island folk content to fish and farm, a band of warriors wore a holy oath. To the last they vowed they would come to the aid of Heldalund should they be summoned, and that death would not hold they back from performing their sacred duty. Why they swore the oath is lost, but the most common version of the story outside Heldalund claims they were condemned men who repented of their sins, took up worship of Tiw, and volunteered to lay down their lives in the defense of Heldalund as penance. Within the beleaguered realm, the warriors are described in song as the ultimate patriots.

To ensure the call would be heard, the captain gave the thegn of Heldalund a horn, a relic whose deep tone the warriors would hear, no matter the distance. The undead legions of the Liche-Priest invaded, the Hellfrost army sacked the coastal settlements, and orcs now control the northern realm, but the call to arms has never come, for the horn was lost before any of the great calamities befell the realm.

Somewhere beneath the Central Hills of Heldalund the Forsaken Army still waits, their bodies long rotted to dust, their spirits refusing to depart the mortal realm until they have fulfilled their sacred oath.

Summoning the army requires the horn to be found and blown within the confines of Heldalund. Whoever summons them must converse in Vindari, for the Forsaken speak no other tongue, and their orders must relate solely to the defense of Heldalund. Once the task is complete, the horn breaks and the spirits fade away, finally welcoming the Afterlife so long denied them.

NORVIK

Norvik ("North Harbor" in Saxa) sits in a wide cleft between the hills. A palisade comprising two rows of wooden stakes spaced three yards apart and filled with packed earth and stones completely encircles the town. A total of five fortified gatehouses, three landward and two seaward, provide access. Two wooden towers facing landward provide additional security.

Much of Norvik sits only ten yards above level, the ground sloping gently upward from the nearby shore. In the south the ground rises very sharply, ending in a long flat-topped hill atop which sits the thegn's palace and barracks for of the capital's resident two companies. To the north there is a lesser incline.

Warehouses dominate the central stretch just inside the sea-facing palisade. The houses of the merchants lie to the north, while those of the rich citizens and lesser nobility are to the north. The homes of the middle and lower classes start behind the warehouses and extend out to the landward palisade.

The Burnished Temple: Sigel's temple is the largest and grandest building in Norvik. While the interior is decked in gold ornaments, the roof is made of thin bronze tiles. Some claim the color of the roof is prophetic, for Sigel's Hearth has gone from being a brilliant gold orb to one of burnished orange.

Fervent enemies of all creatures of darkness, the cult is furious that Thegn Franmar has done nothing to cleanse Held of its fell occupants. So far they have obeyed the thegn's decrees, but many are now speaking of bypassing the noble's authority and calling for a religious crusade. Some go as far to suggest that Held, once liberated, should become a protectorate of the cult to ensure it never falls into orc hands again. Such an act would not only provide the cult with a secure military base close to the Liche Lands and Whitedrake Mountains, but it would give them control over the rich mines, giving the clerics significant secular influence.

The Lighthouse: The only stone structure is a squat, square, dry stone tower with a pyramidal roof. Strongly fortified, the lighthouse is surrounded by a ditch, a palisade, and a second ditch. Wooden bridges, designed to be easily destroyed, allow access over the ditches.

Stone steps lead up to the middle level, some ten feet above the ground level. This is where the three keepers of the flame leave. The lower layer, which is reachable only from the interior, holds bundles of wood and precious barrels of oil, as well as food, rope, tinderboxes, and other essential supplies. A gigantic brazier sits on

the upper level. On the west wall is a mosaic of polished mirrors. The only windows are a series of slits in the eastern wall. At night, when fog rises, and when storms rage, a fire is lit in the brazier, its light piercing the dark sky and guiding ships to safety in the harbor.

Although the lighthouse is not part of the temple of Sigel, the keepers are always clerics of the god of light. With the cult of Neorthe in ascendancy, the sea god's clerics are now demanding to be given stewardship over the lighthouse. While the two cults have not come to blows, they are engaged in a war of harsh words and public slander.

Markets: Norvik has two outdoor markets. The largest is reserved for livestock, though in recent years fishmongers have set up their stalls here. It is dominated by a carved menhir, a shrine to Eostre Animalmother. The other is a general market. While the livestock market is normally full, the price of animals being largely unaffected by the current economic problems, the general market has suffered greatly. Many stalls are all-but empty, and when goods are available prices are high.

Mayor's House: Thegn Franmar is the overall ruler of Norvik, but the mayor handles daily affairs. Appointed by the thegn, the mayor, currently Thurid Sirnirsdohtor, has great authority—only the thegn may overrule her decisions. While she shelters Franmar from matters troubling the capital, she can do little with regard to wider concerns. Unfortunately, because three of the major cults have their temples here, the boundary between capital and state is often blurred, for a decision that seems to be a local matter may have far reaching consequences. As a result, she finds herself drawn more and more into Heldalund's murky politics.

The Port: Norvik's port facilities, such as they are, lie outside the palisade. Three jetties extend into the cold sea, but most captains prefer to haul their ships onto the narrow beach. The only buildings are three boat sheds, two of which are occupied by Norvik's naval vessels, a custom's house, and the temple of Neorthe.

Temple of the Eternal Flame: Currently the second largest temple in the realm, Kenaz's holy house sits opposite that of his father, Sigel. The cult's power is in serious decline, having lost many followers in just the five years since the copper trade diminished. As a result, the more militant Ashen Blades are now the majority. While they desire the orcs of Held slain, they are wary that a rekindled copper trade will reverse their rise to power. They have yet to decide how to achieve their goal and maintain their position.

The Thegn's Palace: The thegn's palace is a traditional longhouse, albeit once with fine carvings marking its grand doors. The palace, which overlooks the sea and the town, sits within a separate palisade. The guard barracks are close by, but are not within the enclosure.

THE SKY MOUND

Dominating the skyline of the hills that run through central Heldalund is an artificial, conical hill known as the Sky Mound. Its presence is noted in surviving texts and inscriptions, and the construction dates back long before any of the current cultures rose to dominance.

Some believe it was a burial mound for an important king, but excavations down the centuries have revealed no tomb within. Others claim is was part of a fortification. It is true that a wooden palisade was raised on its crown during the war against the Liche-Priest, when it served as a temporary fort, but no evidence suggests this was its original purpose. Less popular theories include it being a pile of dragon manure, a spoil heap dumped here by giants searching for gems, a molehill dug (by a gigantic mole, one presumes), and a gateway to the realm of the faeries.

The most common explanation is that worshippers of Thunor raised it as a temple. The flat top is visible for many leagues on a clear day, and prayer kites flown here would be closer to the heavens. Although the latter cannot be proven, Thunor cultists have used it for centuries, when its modern name was applied.

A few months ago a passing goatherd noticed a fresh tunnel dug into the side of the mound. Fear won out over curiosity and he ran off before investigating further. Many folk who have heard his tale believe the tunnel is the work of treasure hunters, but others claim that something dug out of the mound, not into it.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Not everyone is Heldalund is concerned about the wellbeing of the realm. The following villains are intended to be at the center of complex plots, or perhaps an entire campaign.

ATGAROTH THE NECROMANCER

On a lonely peak in the foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains stand the crumbling remains of a mighty castle. Locals fear the place, blithely denying its existence when strangers point out the distant edifice. When forced to speak, they whisper only that it was home to Atgaroth the Necromancer. Atgaroth is a title, not a name. A bastardized Heligi term, it translates loosely as "Father of the Vile Host."

All surviving descriptions of Atgaroth paint a picture of a tall, thin, putrefying corpse, with sickly yellow skin broken by oozing red sores and vile green pustules which continually grow and burst. Where he walked, the twin specters of pestilence and death danced in his wake.

Some say in life he was a victim of a terrible plague that preceded the rise of the Liche-Priest. As his disease-ravaged body neared death, he turned to Hela, offering eternal servitude in return for continued existence. Others claim he was the cause of the plague, a worshipper of Vali betrayed by his god who sought succor in Hela's lifeless embrace. Regardless of his origins, he became a loyal servant of the Liche-Priest.

Many powers were attributed to him. Tales said his touch would rot flesh in an instant, and the stench from his perpetually rotting body caused sickness and decay. Those who fell to his vile hand arose as diseased zombies. He was attributed power over rats, sending forth great waves of diseased zombie rodents to spread sickness, death, and misery.

While the cleric of Sigel led the main campaign against the Liche-Priest, it was the cult of Eira which battled Atgaroth. Such was his power over disease that only they had the strength and knowledge to combat his evil host. After many battles he was driven back to his fortress home and slain, his flesh pierced by many enchanted spears imbued with runes of healing. The fell magic holding his body together was sundered, and Atgaroth dissolved into a festering pool of decayed flesh.

Hela does not give up her servants so easily, though. Flickering lights have been seen in castle towers in recent months. Rats are on the increase and instances of minor diseases have grown more common. Many locals believe the necromancer has returned to exact revenge.

REDMUND THE SNAKE

Thegn Franmar's closest advisor is a weasely, lank-haired man with pale, staring eyes, thin lips, and a hook nose. His nickname, given him by other members of the court, shows what his peers think of him.

Many suspect Redmund is an agent of one of the thegn's rivals, for Franmar has become befuddled and hesitant since Redmund came to court, refusing to act decisively in curing Heldalund's many ills for fear of upsetting Heldalund's neighbors or the orcs of Held. Meanwhile, the realm slowly withers. Redmund is an agent of another power, but it is not a mortal one.

He is in fact a priest of Hela preparing the way for the return of the Liche-Priest. With Heldalund paralyzed and demoralized, the undead will be able to conquer the land with minimal force. Protected by the Whitedrake Mountains, they will be able to marshal their strength in safety before beginning the great conquest of Rassilon.

He is currently poisoning the thegn's mind against the cult of Sigel, accusing them of plotting treachery and rebellion. Although his words are from his own imagination, he is closer to the truth than he realizes.

HELIGIOLAND

Terrorized during the reign of the Liche-Priest and ravaged by the Blizzard War, Heligioland remains a defiant bastion of civilization in the face of the advancing winters and hostile giant and orc raiders. Sparsely populated, Heligioland is a dangerous border realm of small settlements amidst a sea of ancient ruins.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Heligioland.

* **Democratic:** Whereas nobles govern many settlements in the Freelands, councils of elected officials rule most of Heligioland's villages. Noble titles mean little out here. Noblemen have the Charisma bonus from the Noble Edge reduced to +1 in Heligioland.

* **Land Grab:** Since there is no central ruler, heroes wishing to found a new settlement are free to do so, and will encounter little opposition unless they try to claim someone else's lands. Most of Heligioland's settlements lie along or close to trade roads. New rulers are invited to attend the semi-regular council of leaders to discuss matters of importance to Heligioland.

WHO WERE THE HELIGI?

Heligioland literally means "land of the Heligi," and refers to an ancient, pre-Blizzard War culture. Little is known about them. Some sages claim they once dominated the region between Giant's Throne and the Narfel Sea, their kingdom extending both somewhere into Seithrby, where its borders met those of the Selari, and south as far as the Icebarrier Mountains. Others insist this cannot be so, for Heldalund, Trond, and the Cairn Lands were inhabited by the Vindari people, a Saxa offshoot. It is a proven fact the Anari once built a great port at Trondavoe after conquering the Vindari tribes, yet ancient Anari records make only passing reference to the Heligi. If the Vindari were a client state of the Heligi, their masters put up no defense when the Anari arrived to form a trading port and shackled the natives.

Some sages claim the Heligi were too powerful for the Anari to conquer, hence no major northward expansion occurred in this region. Others say the Heligi were trading partners with the Anari, or a client state, offered protection in return for tribute and loyalty. A few suggest the Heligi were shattered during the early days of the Liche-Priest's reign, and were all but extinct by the time the Anari showed up. The ruins of Paraxus (see the adventure *S2 Lost City of Paraxus*), a center of learning in what is now the Barony of Cul, bear witness to a massive assault, but no evidence remains of when this occurred or who perpetrated the act.

Fragmentary evidence suggests the Heligi were powerful mages and devoted to scholarly pursuits rather than military conquest or trade domination. A line of hereditary kings ruled over the land, though the Heligi's unique calendar and dating system has made correlating reigns with those of other realms a fruitless endeavor.

It is, of course, virtually impossible to completely eradicate an entire culture. Even allowing for containment and systematic destruction, it is quite likely someone escaped the net simply by dint of being in another land at the time. Thus, while the Heligi culture is dead, their blood, thinned after many generations, likely lives on somewhere.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Although Heligioland is sometimes referred to as the "Freelands of the north," the two realms differ in several key ways. One notable area is governance. In the Freelands, the rulers of settlements favor noble titles. In Heligioland, such titles, while not unknown, are few and far between, and carry less weight.

Many village and towns (as opposed to lone steads and hamlets) elect a mayor. Candidacy and elections may be open to all adults, limited to members of a particular faith, or have other criteria. Rarely does gender or culture come into the equation, though most human communities draw the line at non-human candidates. Term of office vary, with three to five years being the norm. Other communities may be governed by the high priest of a specific cult (as in Ingby, Ram's Horn Fort, and Sprangaton); an elected, hereditary, or occupational council (as with Three-Gate); the oldest citizen (found in Brae); or whatever else the citizens deem appropriate. Regardless of who rules, they fill the social position usually held by the nobility.

Beneath them are the upper class citizens—senior clerics and notable mages, master craftsmen, rich landowners, wealthy merchants, and so on. Often the watch captain or fyrd leader is awarded high status out of respect for his occupation. Some have earned their position through hard work, while others have inherited or been awarded their status.

The middle class is filled with less wealthy or influential clerics, mages, landowners, skilled craftsmen, scribes, important bureaucrats, and the like. In Saxa dominated settlements, huscarls are usually slotted in here, awarded respect by dint of their friendship with the local ruler and their influence with him.

The lower class is formed by the bulk of the population—the farm workers, herders, hunters, milkmaids, laborers, novitiates, apprentices, guardsman or soldiers, junior bureaucrats, and entertainers.

At the bottom of the ladder are the charcoal burners, dung collectors, and firewood gatherers. Beggars are few are far between in Heligioland. Life may not be as tough as in the lands further north, but few communities can spare the resources to support freeloaders.

Social progression is relatively fluid here—those prepared to work hard can rise from lowly farmer to high status (and fall just as quickly if they prove inefficient). The boundaries between social strata are more blurred than in many other realms. One becomes middle or upper class when one is treated with greater respect, not because one has a large house and a stack of gold.

Similarly, social status usually comes with less snobbery. While a noble may never consider sharing a drink with the peasants in the local tavern, in Heligioland these peasants are one's kith and kin. In settlements where elections are held, being seen as standoffish or acting high and mighty can quickly lead to political death.

RELIGION

The inhabitants of Heligioland are varied in their faith. All the major gods, both good and ill, have followers here, though only a small few are dominant.

With Heligioland's settlements primarily devoted to farming, it is little surprise that Eostre receives greatest praise here. Her Plantmother aspect is the most popular, but Animalmother is not far behind. In most communities both are worshipped equally. The great majority of settlements have a shrine in her honor, and within any given region there is at least one temple where worshippers can celebrate major festivals. In more rural communities, Ullr receives plentiful praise, for hunting supplements an otherwise meager diet.

Kenaz and Sigel have cults of roughly equal size. Most citizens offer them lip service. Beset by hard winters and with Hellfrost beasts on the borders, Kenaz is worshipped both god of fire and enemy of Thrym. Sigel is honored as the god of light, with prayers offered that the short summer will be sunny and warm to ensure healthy crops.

Several communities honor Tiw in major ways, though worship elsewhere is primarily a token nod from the fyrd members. Ertha is popular in the Greenpot Hills, where clay digging and pottery manufacture are a major part of daily life, but has few followers across the rest of the country. Eira's cult has many adherents, most settlements having at least one person skilled at herbalism and healing, but her true strength lies only in Sprangaton. While every citizen has reason to pray to Scaetha, more devout worshippers are found only in the northeast of the country.

Despite the many trade roads that wind through the landscape and the regular markets, Var receives little active worship—unlike in the Confederacy, Heligiolanders are more concerned with survival than acquiring wealth. Freo, as elsewhere, has little permanent presence, but his name is always spoken when a journey begins.

MILITARY

Heligioland's settlements value their independence, but not at the expense of their safety. Each community maintains it own permanent watch or militia, can call upon the fyrd, and often has a number of clerics whose assistance can be sought in times of need. But these are not enough to thwart a determined aggressor, for the settlements are wide spread and their armies are comparatively small.

With no standing army to bar their progress, an invading army could sack one community after another, meeting determined but only minimal resistance. Since dangers lay at all the cardinal points, no settlement could consider itself safe. Prompted by the Hearth Knights, whose focus is defending Hellfrost Pass and the Hearthlands rather Heligioland, the heads of the communities met at Hellfrost Keep to discuss a mutual defense pact. After much debate, a treaty was signed.

The pact, boiled down to its basics, is remarkably simple. First, every settlement is bound by oath to come to the assistance of others in Heligioland. Second, every community must raise its fyrd as if its walls were being attacked. Despite the pact having been in place for many generations, Heligioland has no standing army—militias and fyrds do train together at a local level, but there is no overall commander and no large-scale gatherings to coordinate strategy. Thus far, Heligioland has yet to face a threat requiring more than a regional response, though many eyes are now cast fearfully toward Cul and its belligerent ruler.

As a general rule of thumb, a community maintains a permanent watch or guard equal to 2% of its population and can call upon a fyrd or peasant militia equal to 10-20% of its population in times of great need.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Heligioland may not be the most prosperous realm, but it boasts three major trade routes.

The Western Loop: Runs from Hellfrost Keep across to Watchgap Fort, north along the western flank of the Greenpot Hills to the town of Seithrby, back down and across to Brae, then south down the central road back to its starting point.

The Eastern Loop: Goes from Hellfrost Keep to Eastwatch Fort, north through Myre and the Bleak Hills, then turns west and south back to Hellfrost Keep along the central road.

The Great Loop: Runs from Hellfrost Keep to Watchgap Fort, north as far as the town of Seithrby, back through Brae, across the top center of Heligioland, down through the Bleak Hills to Myre and Eastwatch Fort, and finally back to the great castle.

The Far Run, a trade spur of the Western Loop continues north through Seithrby and into Shattered Moor in the west, while the Ghost Run branches off the Eastern Loop, follows the border between Seithrby and the Liche Lands of Old, before entering Shattered Moor in the east. The Frost Road branches off from the Eastern Loop, its route passing through Cul and terminating at the port of Vox in Trond.

All taxes are set and collected locally. In general, a citizen can expect to lose between 25% and 50% of his income in various taxes, depending on the size of the community. With few nobles to support, much of the taxes go toward the community, paying for maintenance of the defenses (a necessary expenditure), paying the permanent troops, giving elected officials a small stipend as reward for their service, and so on. Many settlements donate around 5% of their tax income to the Hearth Knights.

Import and export taxes are usually set low, typically never more than 3%, and sales tax is virtually non-existent. When it is found, it is usually where Var has a presence and where his cult controls the marketplace, the payment going directly to the temple's coffers rather than the local ruler.

MAJOR LOCALES

This section details more of Heligioland's many settlements and adventuring sites. GMs looking for additional information will find a map for typical Heligioland stead, including a full list of occupants, in *N3 Shadow of Darkness*, while *S1 The Siege of Watchgap Fort* provides a map of the western fort.

APPLEDORE

Population: 1,412
Ruler: Mayor Beranger ap-Fricor and council
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Kenaz
Imports: Glass, wood, meat
Exports: Apples, alcohol

Appledore lies in the northeast of Heligioland, where the trade road through the Bleak Hills meets the road between Hellfrost Keep and Icewatch Fort.

An agricultural community, Appledore is surrounded by well-tended orchards of hardy, frost-resistant apples vital to its economy. Much of the harvest is turned into cider or wine, the remainder being submersed in weak brine and exported wholesale.

At present only the village, and around 65% of the orchards, are protected by a palisade and ditch. While the citizens lack the manpower to patrol the entire perimeter, and the funds to hire mercenaries for said task, they are keen to encircle every orchard as a deterrent to cliff giant and orc raiders. Ordinarily a ditch is little deterrent to giants, but the citizens of Appledore keep the ditch flooded and line the bottom with sharp stakes. In winter, oil is poured into the ditch to prevent it freezing over.

A council of citizens governs Appledore. The five owners of the largest orchards sit in hereditary seats, alongside the resident clerics of Eostre Animalmother, Kenaz, and Var. The chair of the council is an elected mayor, who acts as spokesman for the village yet has little political power.

Every three years, the citizens hold a great market in late summer, during which time the inhabitants, visitors, and the clergy of Eostre Plantmother from across Heligioland judge the local ciders. Whoever brews the best is given the title of mayor.

About one-half of the citizens are directly involved in the orchards and associated businesses. Those not responsible for maintaining the orchards, picking fruit, or fermenting the crops work in associated crafts, such as barrel making, glass blowing, and pottery. The remainder tend the small vegetable fields and look after the sheep.

Appledore maintains a permanent watch of 30 soldiers, half of whom are mounted (treat as common mercenaries with long swords instead of lances) and patrol the orchards. The other half are infantry (treat as typical town watch) and guard the village proper. The watch is led by a constable, Horsa Octasunu, a grizzled warrior who takes half his pay in strong alcohol. In times of need, the settlement can muster 100 fyrdmen.

Apple Temple: In the center of Appledore is a temple dedicated

to Eostre Plantmother. A small shrine is dedicated to Kenaz (Var has a shrine in the marketplace). As one might expect, the goddess is worshipped as patron of apples, and is depicted carrying a basket of ripe fruit.

BARROW-FOG VALE

The trade road from Brae to Seithrby cuts through the Greenpot Hills. Halfway along is Barrow-Fog Vale, so named because ancient tumuli and mausoleums, many of the latter little more than piles of rubble and broken statues, dot the surrounding hills. No one has been interred here since the Blizzard War, and the graves are said to contain Heligi kings and heroes.

Sporadically, glowing fog drifts down from the hilltops to fill the valley floor, blanketing the landscape and reducing visibility to a few dozen yards. Caravans go missing all the time (this region is known to be troubled by trolls and goblins), and rumors abound that undead descend through the mist to slaughter the living. Scouts searching for caravans have discovered their cargos stashed in open burial mounds, but whether it was undead or goblins who hid them, none can say for sure.

A line of small towers, similar to the trade towers in the Hearthlands, decorated with Scaetha's runes, has been erected here to provide some respite from whatever horrors lurk in the mist.

BLACK WOUND GULLY

A deep, sharp-edged gully in the Bleak Hills, Black Wound Gully is said to have been created by one of the gods. One story says Tiw slashed at the earth with his sword while trying to kill Vali as a gift for his wife, Eira. Another says Eostre Animalmother scratched at the surface in a bid to find Vali, who has concealed himself underground to escape her wrath. Yet another tells how Ertha rid the Underearth of Vali's plague by causing all the sickness in her realm to well upward. Regardless of which other gods are present, Vali always features in talk of Black Wound Gully, and for good reason.

The entire area is a sickly place. Animals sport weeping sores and the ravages of disease; while plants grow blighted. Sickly yellow and green molds grow in vast swathes, releasing spores if disturbed. All the flora and fauna here is poisonous, and many of the animals have diseased bites.

At the very bottom of the gully is a deep crack in the earth, from which emanate foul-smelling vapors laden with disease. Paladins of Eira have entered the rent on more than one occasion in search of the pestilence's source. They tell of a maze of tunnels and immense caverns without end, in which dwell all manner of vile, diseased ridden creatures. Many Eira cultists believe a major temple to Vali lies concealed somewhere in the subterranean realm.

BRAE

Brae is detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. What follows is expanded information.

Messenger's Guild: Operated by Guthwynne Hosricsdohtor, the messenger's guild provides transcription and courier services throughout Heligioland, Seithrby, and Shattered Moor. *Voice on the wind* alchemical devices are available here, though at double the normal price. Guthwynne has 1d4 for sale in any given month.

Although she swears she provides a confidential service, Guthwynne is actually working for a number of orc chieftains and frost giant jarls, providing them with intelligence in return for gold.

Militia: Eight wooden watchtowers rise above Brae's perimeter palisade. Each tower holds three guards (treat as common town watch, all armed with crossbows) operating on an 8-hour on, 16-hours off shift pattern. While only one soldier is on duty at any time, one of the off duty guards is present in the tower. Normally it is the one taking his sleep break.

The remaining 20 soldiers are broken into ten pairs. Nine of these are responsible for patrolling the streets, working on the same pattern as the tower guards. Aiding each pair are four citizens. They are paid a small stipend to carry lanterns and provide extra muscle.

HEARTH KNIGHT FORTS

When at full strength, a Hearth Knight fort contains 100 Hearth Knights, 19 support staff, and one Sister of Mercy. The Knights are broken down into their respective orders, ranks, and responsibilities as shown below. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of personnel holding that rank.

Sword Commander (1): Fort's commanding officer
Sword Captain (1): Second in command
Sword Knight (3): Watch commanders
Shield Commander (3): Watch commander's aides
Shield Captain (4): Squadron leaders (each commands 22 men)
Shield Sergeant (8): Patrol leaders (each commands 8 men)
Shield Knights (80): Common soldier

Every fort operates around three watches. These run from midnight to 8 a.m. (the dawn watch), 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (the day watch), and 4 p.m. to midnight (the night watch).

Heading the militia is Captain Ingbert Fetter-Hound. A single pair of soldiers serves as his aides, processing criminals and handling the routine paperwork. They are swapped every month so everyone gets a share of street and administrative work.

Ingbert is in the pay of the local thieves' guild, and paid well to look the other way or reroute guard patrols. While he has amassed a large fortune, his seeming inability to break the guild is causing consternation with the Aldor Council. Ingbert plans to milk the guild for a few more months and then crack down on them, ensuring that anyone who knows of his bribe taking is killed while resisting arrest.

The Stable: Brae boasts a half-dozen taverns, but just a single inn. Officially known as the Greenpot Arms, it is more commonly referred to as the Stable, the building's original function. Although greatly renovated and expanded over the years, it retains the old stalls as private booths available for rent by the hour.

Run by a retired merchant named Styne, the Stable is frequented mainly by merchants and other outsiders, the locals preferring to drink at one of the taverns. Styne doesn't say much, though he's courteous enough to folk with money in their purses, but he hears everything that transpires within his inn.

Taverns: Brae's six taverns are the Claggy Pit (a rough dive frequented mainly by clay diggers), the Lucky Lady (the major gambling hall), the Potter's Arms (frequented by crafters), Red's (a den of prostitution), the Silver Gryphon (an upmarket establishment), and the Wounded Warrior (boasts an impressive display of war trophies donated by patrons).

Thieves' Guild: Brae is a settlement large and prosperous enough to maintain a thieves' guild. Known as the Green Fingers, due to Brae's pottery industry, the guild operates from the basement of the slaughterhouse. As far as the guild is concerned Brae is their territory, and any outsiders who wish to operate here must pay 20% of their ill-gotten gains or suffer a severe beating.

The Twin Temple: A large community, Brae boasts a joint temple to Ertha and Var, as well as smaller temples to Sigel, Eostre, Kenaz, and Eira. As normal, the Var temple serves as an indoor market. It is divided into two circular wings joined by a short, wide corridor, giving the impression of a stylized wagon axle. The west wing is reserved for local traders, and sees good trade every Marketdaeg, the only day trading is permitted. The east wing is used by visiting merchants and is open for business every day.

In the north wall of the joining corridor is a large archway. Steps worn smooth by the passage of feet wind down into a huge vault, the temple of Ertha. Resident here is Forge Daughter Jeneera Inglesdohtor, high priest for the past two decades. Half blind from living in the poorly lit temple and corpulent from lack of exercise and a rich diet of offerings made by worshippers, Jeneera leaves the temple only on holy days of Ertha, when festivals require her presence above ground. She is carried aloft on a huge metal shield, borne by six burly laity. On these rare occasions she throws small gemstones to the crowds.

Vangarth's Store: A general store operated by the old yet sprightly Vangarth Clenched-Hand (so named because of his reluctance to spend money). Vangarth is secretly a member of the Reliquary, stationed here to act on rumors carried by traders and adventurers. He is a close drinking friend of Styne, paying the innkeeper well for rumors relating to relics. Vangarth keeps his shop well stocked with V and T availability goods, knowing that happy customers are talkative customers.

THE COMMUNE

Population: 220 (60% taiga elves, 30% hearth elves, 10% engros)
Ruler: Archdruid Leilatha Forestfriend
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Eostre Plantmother, Ullr
Imports: None
Exports: Alchemical devices, herbal remedies

The Commune is a retreat and training center for druids located on the northern fringe of Drakewood. Although akin in size to a small village, the settlement is built to blend in with the natural surroundings. The druids live and work in wooden buildings with thatch or shingle roofs, and there are large areas of trees or undergrowth, as well as cultivated gardens and vegetable patches.

Druids have practiced here for many centuries, and while not completely natural, every part of the Commune is treated as such for the purposes of Druidism rolls.

The settlement is home to three clerics (one of each deity listed above, who provide for the other occupants' spiritual needs), 177 druids, and 40 Wood Wardens. Wood Wardens in such numbers are highly unusual in the Winterlands. The company was sent here on the direct orders of the Shining King.

While many druids come here to learn or retreat from the world in order to renew their spirit, all are expected to help fight against not only the forest dragons that lurk in the woods, but also the orcs, forest trolls, and hostile forest giants who call the region home. They are not alone in their quest, for they are aided by two families of "friendly" forest giants plus numerous fey. These creatures are openly welcomed in the Commune.

While they dislike visitors, the druids are not isolationists. Once the grip of winter loosens, they travel across Heligioland, peddling alchemical devices and herbal remedies in the steads and smaller villages, helping with chores, assisting clerics of Eostre and Ullr in their work, and ensuring the needs of nature are firmly balanced against the needs of civilization. During these months, only the Wood Wardens and around 40 druids are resident at any one time.

The Commune has only a single temple, though it is not a building. The holy site comprises three standing stones of great antiquity. The center stone is sacred to Eostre Plantmother. To its right is the stone of Ullr, and to its left that of Eostre Animalmother. Each stone is inscribed with the relevant deity's holy symbol.

Though they undoubtedly perform many good deeds for Heligioland's inhabitants, there are those who suspect the Commune exists for two unstated reasons—to plunder the (supposed) ancient elf city of its magic and to prevent others from doing the same. Why else, they say, would Wood Wardens come this far north?

The Woodman's Rest: A wooden longhouse standing just inside the main gates, the Rest is the only building open to visitors who are not clerics of the three local deities, druids, or Wood Wardens. It offers simple meals, basic accommodation, and a warm hearth. There is also a small store offering non-metallic Village items, alchemical devices, and herbal remedies (the latter being made to order), all at 150% of the standard prices.

DOOMDRAKE

Population: 890
Ruler: Council
Religion: Kenaz, Rigr, Eostre Plantmother
Imports: Pottery, stone
Exports: Bows, timber

No civilized being dwell within the forest that covers Whitedrake Valley, but there are those prepared to live on its borders in order to harvest its dense wood. Nestled between the western fringes and the slopes of the eastern Bleak Hills is the aptly named town of Doomdrake.

The town is heavily fortified against dragon attacks. Despite its proximity to the forest, the settlement boasts no wooden structures. The stone walls of its buildings are thick, the windows narrow, and the tiled roofs steeply pitched and dotted with iron spikes to dissuade dragons from perching on them. The narrow streets twist and turn sharply, a precaution against streams of coldfire spewed from the maws of Hellfrost dragons looking for a meal. Open topped stone towers placed evenly along the town wall are constantly manned, the eyes of the sentries turned ever skyward.

By law, every adult citizen must be competent with a bow (crossbows are permitted, but rarely used due to the reloading time) and long spear. Leaving one's house without either weapon, even to visit a neighbor, is punishable by a 100 gs fine. This necessity for carrying armaments has given the town its second major export—weapons. Bows, longbows, arrows, and long spears are plentiful in the shops, and can be purchased for 70% of the normal price.

A council runs Doomdrake. Ten of the seats are filled with elected officials, who serve a three-year term. The high priests of Kenaz and Tiw, and the High Captain, the head of the army, automatically fill the remaining seats. Every council member has a single vote, though those of the cults and military count double in matters concerning defending the town.

Odd as it may sound at first, the cult of Sigmundr, minor god of dragon slaying, is not welcome in Doomdrake. Its citizens train to fight dragons because they must if they wish to survive, but they have no desire to hunt the beasts down or antagonize them into attacking. Clerics do call here seeking information and supplies before venturing into the Whitedrake Mountains in search of their prey, but they are not permitted to stay for more than one night.

Doomdrake has a standing army of 80 highly trained soldiers supported by the three priests and five paladins of Kenaz's small temple (the only temple in the town).

The cults of Kenaz and Rigr make plentiful alchemical devices for the army. Such is their productivity that the army of Doomdrake is considered among the best magically equipped military force anywhere in Rassilon. Every soldier wears a cloak imbued with both *heat mask* and *energy immunity (coldfire)*, carries three alchemical *blast* arrows, and is armed with a longbow and long spear each imbued with *smite*. Every sentry is issued one potion of *altered senses* and one of *boost Notice*. Citizens can purchase alchemical devices, even destructive ones, for 75% the usual price. Outsiders, no matter their motives, must pay double.

DRAGON'S GRAVEYARD

Talk of the dragon's graveyard is popular in Heligioland, yet its location remains a mystery. Said to lie in the Whitedrake Mountains, would-be explorers must cope with freezing temperatures, howling blizzards, avalanches, crevasses, hostile frost giants, orcs, and of course, many Hellfrost dragons.

The most common tale says it lies behind a frozen waterfall in one of the many caves that cut through the treacherous slopes (dragons don't use this entrance). The passageway leading to it is labyrinthine and filled with many hazards and dangers, and adventurers have starved to death trying to navigate its fathomless route. By luck, fate, skill, or divine blessing, those on the right path eventually come across the gateway granting access to the graveyard.

Two enormous dragon's teeth, each thrice the height of a man, mark its entrance. Inscribed on these are warnings to venture no further, for only death on swift wings waits within.

Beyond, the cave opens into a wide valley, concealed from above by a permanent shroud of low clouds and protected by sheer mountain walls coated in perfectly smooth and rock hard ice.

Within lies a vast repository of dragon bones, teeth and glittering scales of all the species, built up over countless millennia. The lure of so much treasure, for the scales alone are worth the combined wealth of all of Rassilon, is a tempting site, yet one which leads only to death. Guarding the site is a monstrous beast, an ancient dragon a hundred yards long, with multiple heads (one for each species of

dragon). Capable of destroying an ancient Hellfrost dragon with ease, mundane adventurers stand no chance.

Or so the story goes. It is a frequently told tale, but one which no one has been able to yet prove.

GATORMAN RUINS

In the festering mire of Temujin Marsh stand many crumbling ruins decorated with pictograms and images of crocodiles, creatures now found only in the Great Swamp and in few numbers. Over the centuries adventurers have explored a large number of these ruins, gaining nothing for their troubles except insect bites.

Beneath one edifice, a flat-topped stepped pyramid almost concealed beneath a thick blanket of creepers, lurks a small army of gatormen. When the lizardmen slaves rebelled the inhabitants placed themselves in suspended animation, hiding from the angry horde. For millennia they slumbered in peace, but now the Siphoning has drained their enchantments, breaking the spells and releasing them from their magical sleep.

Scouts have witnessed the destruction wrought upon their former temples and cities, but the lizardmen do not rule the old cities. What the gatormen need now are sacrifices, for their god is hungry, and only through his divine blessing will the remainder of the army awaken from its long sleep.

HORSA'S STEAD

Population: 164
Ruler: Coelraed Aelfricsunu
Religion: Eostre (both aspects)
Imports: Metal goods, pottery
Exports: Cereals, cheese, horn, leather (untanned) livestock, meat, wool, vegetables

Named for its founder, the settlement has grown from a small stead to a bustling and prosperous little village. Horsa's Stead's exports are many and varied, far more than a village of its size should produce, but they follow a strict cycle. One year there are abundant cereals and vegetables, the next sheep-related produce, and the third cattle-related produce. The eternal cycle then begins again. This bounty is down to three relics housed in the small temple to Eostre's dual aspects.

The first is a bronze grain of wheat, the second a silver ewe, and the third a golden cow. The relics are small, no larger than a man's outstretched fingers, but extremely potent. Each spring, the appropriate relic is paraded through the settlement and touched to the fields, flocks, or herds, as appropriate. At the end of the year, the inhabitants reap a bounty. For reasons unknown, the magic of each totem works only one year in every three, hence the cycle.

There is a downside, though. During years the totems are not active, the crops, sheep, or cattle fair very badly—so much so that the villagers must carefully store provisions and goods gathered during the bountiful year to avoid serious shortages.

The origin of the totems is open to much debate in the local mead hall. Some villagers say the totems were a gift from the gods, though opinions differ on what Horsa did to earn such attention. Others claim they are fey-touched, though again there is no consensus on how the stead's founder came by them or what price he might have paid.

INGBY

Population: 294
Ruler: Mayor Grettir Iron-Arms
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Tiw
Imports: Pottery, weapons, wine
Exports: Cheese, vegetable, wool

Ingby is typical of many small villages. Its independently minded people farm the land and tend their small flocks, offer the gods praise, and mind their own business. It lacks the population to support a temple (worshippers travel to other villages for major festivals). Eostre Plantmother has a shrine near the communal granary, while in the village square is a standing stone that serves as a center of worship for the other deities. Ingby has a single inn, the Plowman's Retreat.

For one week a year, the sleepy village becomes a bustling community. In order to demonstrate the men's strength to those they were sworn to protect, the local fyrd participated in tug-o-war contests. Over time, the popularity of the contest spread to neighboring settlements. In the week preceding Battle Standards Day, held on the same day locally, fyrd members from across the region flock to the village for a tug-o-war contest. As well as prizes, there is much honor at stake, for each fyrd wants to be recognized as the strongest.

The teams are divided into two leagues. Each team wars against the other teams in the same league once. The top team in each league plays off against the runner up in the other league for a place in the grand final, which takes place the afternoon before Battle Standards Day. In order to make the contest more amusing for the large crowd, the teams face off over a shallow pit filled with rotting vegetables and dung. The losers suffer the ignominy of being dragged through the filth.

Similar events are held for women, children, and the elderly. As well as the contests, there is a great market that attracts merchants from across Heligioland.

On Battle Standards Day, the fyrds parade through the village in order of placing in the tug-o-war contest. Their standards are presented to a cleric of Tiw (at least one always attends, usually serving as a judge) and blessed.

An elected mayor, who holds office for three years, governs Ingby. The incumbent, Grettir Iron-Arms, is a semi-retired paladin of Eostre and captain of the fyrd. Now in the final year of his second term, he has led the local tug-o-war team to victory three times in the last five years. It is no secret that victory this year will ensure reelection for a third term.

Tug-o-War Rules: Each team must comprise eight members. Gender is irrelevant, but all team members must be sworn members of a fyrd. The Hearth Knights are also permitted to send a team. One member of each team is appointed the leader. He makes a Strength roll. Wild Card teammates make a Cooperative Strength roll, while Extras make a Group Cooperative roll. Compare each team's results. The first team to win three rounds wins the contest.

Magic is forbidden in the main tournament, though there are "fun" contests in which any non-damaging magic is permitted. These events are usually centered on teams devoted to one faith, and are fought for pride and bragging rights. Casting while participating in a tug-o-war incurs a multi-action penalty.

MUSHROOM VALE

Fifteen miles west of Myre, in the lower slopes of the Bleak Hills, is a small, shallow valley, its boggy soil fed by rain runoff from the barren peaks. A plethora of mushrooms and toadstools grow here. Among the edible varieties are king bolete, chicken mushroom, chanterelles, morels, puffballs, and polypores.

Every year in early fall, a small tent village springs to life, as citizens from Myre, herbalists, and merchants gather to harvest the abundant growths. At least one herbalist-cleric of Eira attends, for many species are poisonous (some if digested and others if merely touched), and accidents occur with surprising regularity.

Deeper in the valley, the mushrooms grow much taller and the ground is carpeted with strange growths. Stories claim the mushrooms grow as tall as trees in the furthest reaches, but few venture this far, for those who do rarely return. One popular myth, used to keep children from wandering too deep into the vale, tells of an engraved stone arch cut into the hillside, from which ravenous monsters emerge.

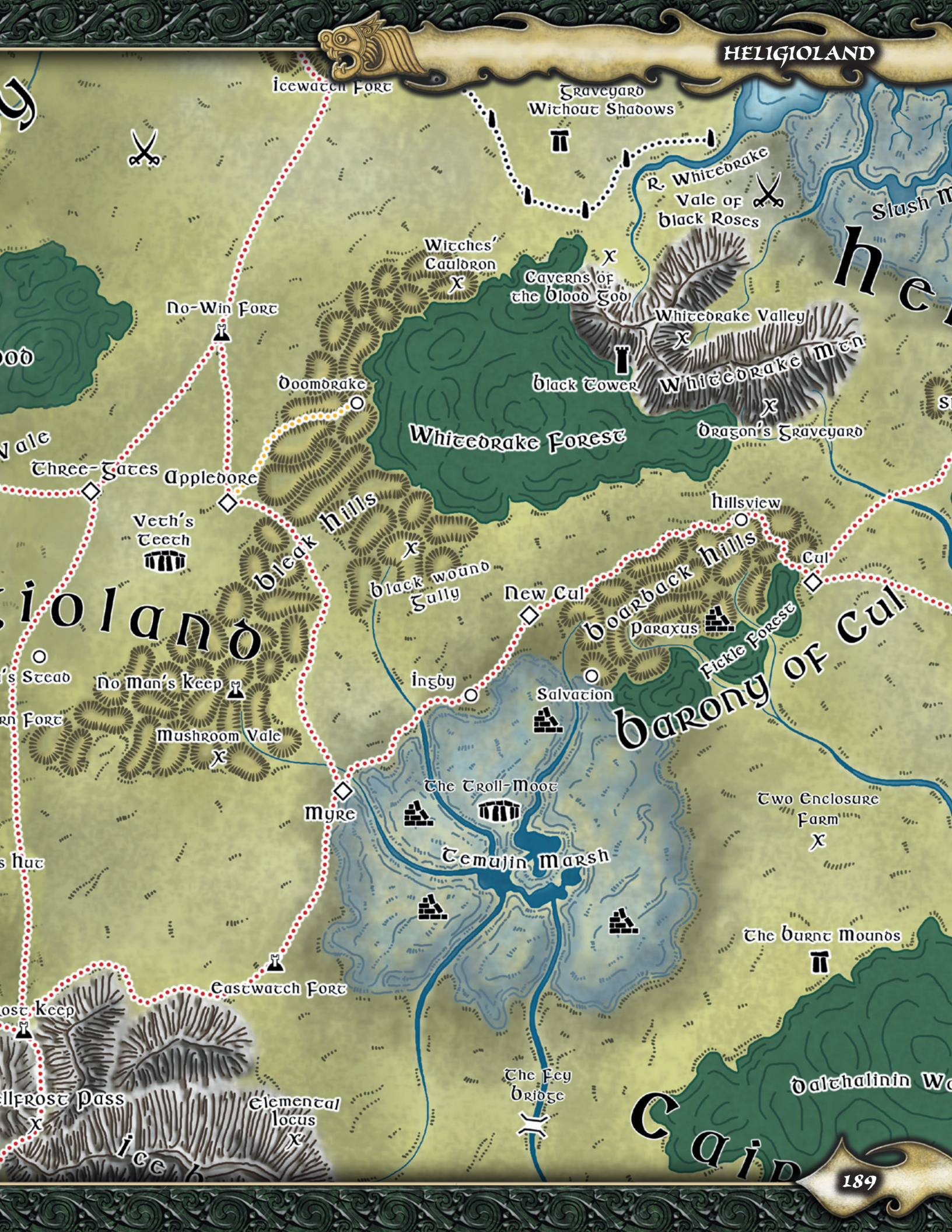
MYRE

Myre is primarily an agricultural town, with enough land to raise livestock and sow crops. Despite this, Ullr remains the most popular deity. This is a legacy dating back to the town's founding, when troll attacks were far more common and bows were deemed the safest way of dealing with the threat. The last great attack occurred in 418 IR, the so-called Year of Piercing Rain, when a mighty host

heligioland



Population: 65,630 (50% Saxa, 15% taiga elves, 15% dwarves, 9% Anari, 8% frostborn, 2% engro, 1% Finnar)
Ruler: None (independent settlements)


Icewatch Fort
Graveyard Without Shadows
R. Whitedrake
Vale of Black Roses
Witches' Cauldron
Caverns of the Blood God
No-Win Fort
Whitedrake Valley
Whitedrake Mtn
Black Tower
Doomdrake
Whitedrake Forest
Dragon's Graveyard
Three-Tates
Appledore
Hillsview
Veth's Teeth
bleak hills
black wound
Tully
New Cul
boarback hills
Paraxus
Fickle Forest
barony of Cul
No Man's Keep
Ingby
Salvation
Mushroom Vale
The Troll-Moot
Myre
Two Enclosure Farm
Temujin Marsh
The Burnt Mounds
Eastwatch Fort
The Fey Bridge
Elemental locus
Dalthalinin

TROLL BURNING DAY

Third Endedaeg of Fogmonan
Troll Burning Day is held only in Myre. A local festival honoring Ullr, and to a lesser extent Kenaz, it celebrates the defeat of the marsh troll horde that threatened the town.
During the first three weeks of Fogmonan, townsfolk craft ugly manikins. These are then thoroughly soaked in oil for days at a time. During the day, they are planted upright outside the southern defenses. Once evening falls, the inhabitants gather outside the palisade while the army and militia take up positions atop the fortification. Once the sun has set, they launch volleys of fire arrows at the arrayed manikins, cheering wildly as each one catches fire.
Following the display of archery prowess, everyone returns home and drinks heavily to toast the spirits of the brave defenders of Myre.
Come the morning, the "corpses" are inspected by clerics of Ullr. If more remain unburned than ignited, local superstition holds that the trolls, while no threat to Myre, will be populous in the marsh. If more are burned, then the trolls will be less numerous.

of trolls shambled from the marsh, only to be soundly defeated by volleys of fire arrows so thick the sky was black with their smoke trails for days on end (or so local skalds tell). Archery practice is still compulsory for the militia, despite few members actually owning a bow. The battle is commemorated on Troll Burning Day and in the poem of the same name as the battle.

Better Safe Than Sorry: Enough adventurers enter Temujin Marsh in search of trolls to slay and ruins to explore to keep this small shop in business. Run by Frago, a smooth talking engro, the establishment sells only insect netting, insect repellent herbal remedies (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*), waterproof scroll cases and satchels, and whistles. None of it is essential to exploring the marsh, but as Frago tells potential customers, his shop is named for a very good reason.

The Markgeard: Despite being a sizeable town, Myre is mostly self-sufficient and thus has little to offer traders—its main exports are never available in any great quantities, and its few major imports can be supplied by a single wagon. Merchants stop here to conduct what trade they can and because it offers safe refuge, but few dally. Myre also serves as the local market for surrounding villages and steads, but even this has not spurred the merchants to offer Var anything other than casual lip service.

The Markgeard still operates as the main shopping area. It opens for business daily between dawn and dusk, but only offers Village items. Only on Marketdaeg, when visitors from nearby settlements come to buy and sell, are Town and City items dusted off and put on display.

Temple of Ullr: Ullr may be the most revered deity, but most prayers are actually dedicated to Earhclud, the minor god of archery. While the temple honors Ullr, his affiliated cult has a major shrine. Nestled away in a corner of the town, the open-air temple is often missed by visitors. Neither cult demands tithes from worshippers. Instead, they make money selling bows, longbows, arrows, and alchemical devices.

The focal point of worship is a wooden statue of Ullr made, so it is said, from the bows used in the Battle of Piercing Rain. The deity's pose is that of an archer drawing ready to fire, but he holds no bow. According to folklore, one of the archers at the battle slew so many trolls that his bow became a legendary relic (see the free download by that name for details of these magical items). Known as Trollpiercer, it was worked into a new statue to honor both deities—Earhclud is represented by Ullr's quiver, which is full of arrows supposedly collected after the massacre.

The bow has been missing for a decade. The then high priest carried it into the marsh in order to slay a particularly fearsome beast that was threatening to unite the disparate creatures under its rule. Both hunter and prey were slain. The high priest's body was recovered and buried beneath the statue, but of Trollpiercer there was no sign. Local talk is the trolls carried it away so it could never be used against them again. The cult would pay well for news of its location or, better yet, its safe return.

In game terms, Trollpiercer is a longbow that inflicts 2d8 damage against marsh trolls (minimum Strength is unaffected) and causes +d10 damage on a raise against such creatures instead of the usual +d6. Wounds inflicted on marsh trolls by Trollpiercer do not regenerate. As a dormant legendary relic, it must first be activated. That requires it to Incapacitate five Extra marsh trolls (within a period of four days) or a single Wild Card marsh troll, each in a single hit.

The Troll Slayer's Den: Marsh trolls rarely trouble the town, but they are prone to attack reed gatherers, hunters, and explorers. Operated by Edwin Octasunu, this shop provides everything a troll hunter needs to survive his encounter with the feared beasts—axes and swords for decapitating trolls, flasks of oil for dousing them, and antibiotic and masking herbal remedies (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*) for combatting their filth-caked claws and fooling their infravision.

The Den is also the official outlet for alchemical devices produced by the cult of Kenaz, which lacks a temple from which to trade. All the devices are sanctioned by the cult and can thus be purchased legally, but those that cause damage (such as *bolt* and *burst*) cost 200% of normal. Other devices cost 125%.

Edwin is a retired troll hunter formerly employed by the town and has contacts in the mayor's office. While Myre doesn't advertise the bounty it pays on troll heads so as not to flood the town with would be heroes seeking fame and fortune, anyone who befriends Edwin and doesn't come across as a casualty waiting to happen receives a standing offer of 50 gs per head.

NEW CUL

Population: 1,346
Ruler: Elected council
Religion: Kenaz, Eostre Animalmother
Imports: Clothing, metal, pottery, timber
Exports: Wool

Until the conquest of Cul by Baron Frostweaver even years ago, the land occupied by New Cul was empty pasture. Now a large village occupies the land, which lies a mere three miles from the border. The earliest settlers were the lucky ones, those who fled the frostborn invasion before the purges and crackdowns began. Though they left much behind, they were fortunate enough to escape with many of their personal possessions. Those who settle here today have suffered the baron's cruelty, and have either been driven out from their ancestral homes or are escaping his vengeance.

Anari and Saxa dominate New Cul's population in roughly equal numbers, though all consider themselves citizens of Cul first and foremost. A few frostborn refugees, those who would not bow before the usurper, also live here, but their numbers are small and they largely keep to themselves, for the citizens of new Cul are suspicious of all frostborn.

Situated close to the trade road, New Cul survives by selling wool from the hardy sheep that graze on the thick grass. Forced to start again from scratch, its inhabitants have largely thrown off the trappings of wealth, having been forced to sell their valuables to buy timber, basic goods, and lambs when the settlement was founded.

An elected council, with each of the seven members serving a three-year turn, governs New Cul. The council is currently involved in negotiations with the Hearth Knights. Now New Cul is established, they hope to convince the knights to erect a fort close to the village. Both factions know Baron Frostweaver would react badly to this "provocation," and thus the discussions are focused on protecting eastern Heligioland from dragons in the Whitedrake Mountains rather than the true danger.

A small cabal within the population has grown frustrated at the other nations' and Hearth Knights' lack of interest in helping liberate Cul. In secret they have been sneaking into Cul to attack trade caravans, burn the steads of frostborn loyal to Frostweaver, and smuggle out refugees and wanted criminals. The council has publicly decried their actions, but it has taken no steps to uncover the members' identities or curb their activities.

NO MAN'S KEEP

Situated halfway along the valley that winds through the Bleak Hills, overlooking the trade road, is a solitary stone keep. Although the keep appears to be atop the main hills when viewed from below, it actually stands on a column of rock. A narrow track leads up from the valley into the hills, ending at a drawbridge that extends across the 20-foot gap.

Despite its commanding position, no lord rules from here and no soldiers patrol its battlements. With no army within several days march, it would make an ideal lair for bandits or orcs, and yet none reside within its walls. The Hearth Knights have never sought to occupy the structure, despite it making an ideal position from which to guard the valley.

The label "keep" is misleading, for the fortification comprises a solitary flat-roofed, three-story tower at the front corner of a walled courtyard. The thick, high outer walls are actually hollow, and hold many small rooms spread over two stories. At the bottom of the tower are stairs leading into the column of rock, into which the builders hewed several large cellars.

The walls are completely devoid of markings, giving no indication who built the structure, or when. Local legends claim it has stood for many centuries, and that even the Hellfrost armies left it in peace.

The sole visitor is an elderly man, Frey Vilsunu, an inhabitant of a small rest-stop village that lies at the base of the hills. Each day at dawn he enters the keep's gates, performs routine maintenance, and leaves before the sun sets. His father performed the same task, as did his father before him, and so on back as far as anyone can remember. He is well paid for his work, though he has no idea whom he serves. Every month on Raestdaeg, the only day he does not work, a man delivers a pouch of 200 antiquated gold coins of Anari origin. Although they predate scields, each coin is worth the same as a gold scield due to its precious metal content.

Frey makes no attempt to stop adventurers from visiting the keep, though he cautions them not to stay overnight. By day, the keep is a lonely place, its echoing halls and corridors cold and unwelcoming. No birds roost on its battlements, no bats hang from the roof, nor do spiders congregate here. It has the air not of a fortress or baronial home, but of a tomb.

By night, though, the keep is thoroughly menacing. The darkness is cloying and solid, reluctantly parting in the glow of lanterns; the hollow echoes that reverberate during the day are muted; and one has the constant feeling of being watched. The keep would make an ideal base for an aspiring ruler, yet those few who brave a night within the walls leave at first light, visibly shaken by terrifying nightmares, never to return.

The cult of Scaetha has ventured into its interior in search of renegade undead, for the keep's refusal to accept guests makes it an ideal haunt. Although undoubtedly a desolate place, their investigations have discovered no trace of Hela's lackeys.

NO-WIN FORT

The gap between Border Wood and the northern Bleak Hills has long been of strategic importance. Dominating the valley floor to the east is a large hill fort of uncertain antiquity. Despite its strategic importance and impressive ditches and ramparts, no army is garrisoned here, nor has one settled within its walls for many centuries. The reason for its vacancy is quite simple and widely known—No-Win fort is cursed.

Skalds claim it once belonged to a warlike tribe. Trusting in his own skill as a military leader and the mighty earthworks his people had inherited, the tribe's ruler (referred to as a king or chieftain in various versions) publicly and proudly proclaimed his people had no need of Rigr or Tiw to ensure their safety. When a vast army of orcs descended out of the mountains, the gods turned their backs on the defenders, quietly cursing them to suffer an ignominious defeat. Since that day, No-Win Fort has been cursed, for no defender has ever held it against assault. Because of this, no victorious army remains here, for they know that any counterattack will be successful. It is said the curse will be broken only when a captain successfully defends the fort against superior odds.

In game terms, the fort grants no fortification bonus in Mass Battles, and the commander of the defenders has –4 to all Knowledge (Battle) rolls while defending the fort. Miracles cast by clerics of Rigr or Tiw or activated through relics within the fortification automatically fail as if a critical failure was rolled. Those cast outside automatically end when the target steps inside the boundary. Alchemical devices created by clerics of these gods become mundane objects, the miracle instantly stripped from the device.

OAKSTEAD

Population: 57
Ruler: Heorl Elgansunu
Religion: Eostre (both aspects)
Imports: Luxuries
Exports: Pork, truffles, nuts

A traditional Saxa stead, Oakstead sits behind a ditch and palisade close to the trade road between Hellfrost Keep and Watchgap Fort, a scant half mile from the leafy boughs of Drakewood.

Heorl Elgansunu's family has lived here for six generations, raising pigs, which forage in the wood, harvesting nuts, and gathering expensive truffles. Largely self-sufficient in basic wares, they trade pork (dried, salted, and smoked) and nuts for the few luxuries they permit themselves. The family is wealthy enough to maintain a shrine to Eostre, at which neighbors and visitors are permitted to worship.

Heorl has six children aged between 17 and 6, all girls. With no sons to inherit, he is keen to marry off the eldest two, Hilda (17) and Lyzal (15), in the hope of seeing grandchildren come of age before he dies. Heorl has a brother, Arlest, but the two barely speak (neither will speak about why) and the stead owner has no wish for his brother to inherit.

Hollow Oak: A mile north of the stead, inside Drakewood, stands an ancient, hollow oak. Despite being hollow, the tree grows tall and healthy. Heorl's middle daughter, Gird (12), claims "talking squirrel men" live nearby. In a bid to appease the child, and just in case spirits do lurk here, the stead's inhabitants leave small offerings in the bowels of the tree.

Legend states that anyone who sleeps inside the tree can communicate with ancestor spirits, though those who have tried have fled in terror before daybreak, haunted forever by dark dreams of cold, fleshless hands rising from the earth to pull the sleeper under.

RAEDBURGH'S HUT

This simple hut of staves and hides is home to an aged crone, Raedburgh, and her two young female apprentices. It is widely said Raedburgh was old when the grandmothers of today were young, but such longevity has been attributed to many people. She is definitely elderly, for she is withered of frame and walks only with the help of her apprentices. She may also be insane, for she speaks to the wind and the earth, the fire and the water. She doesn't talk at them—it is readily apparent to any eavesdroppers she is holding an actual conversation, though only her words are audible. She is also prone to cackling at inopportune moments, something many visitors find unnerving.

A priestess of the Norns, Raedburgh knows how to read the future, achieved through the casting of rune stones. Like most fortune-tellers, she reveals the future only in cryptic words. When reading the omens she speaks only the truth and is afraid of offending no man, for it is said that the Norns protect her from harm and a terrible curse will fall upon the lineage of any who harm her. This may also account why bandits or marauding orcs have never troubled her.

RAM'S HORN FORT

Population: 1,105
Ruler: Watchman Kort Wiegersunu
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Tiw, Rigr
Imports: Vegetables, pottery
Exports: Goat meat, milk, and wool, timber

This ancient hill fort sits close to the central trade road, between Drakewood and the southwest end of the Bleak Hills. No records remain regarding the fort's builders, but the site has long been considered important to Eostre Animalmother due to its unusual shape.

Whereas most hill forts are vaguely circular and have multiple ramparts, the 40 feet high, steep sided defenses of this unique fort form a vast spiral, which loops around one and three-quarter times.

Too steep to scale, the ramparts are an imposing obstacle. The top is flattened and covered with logs to form a walkway and prevent erosion. A high wooden wall facing outwards runs alongside providing a fighting platform and is broken only by six watchtowers. A second palisade, much lower than the outer one, faces the inside curve of the spiral. Three wooden bridges span between the towering banks, allowing defenders to cross the spiral more quickly than at ground level. From the heavily fortified gate, visitors or attackers are forced to traverse three-quarters of the fort before reaching the settlement at the center, all the while under the watchful gaze of armed defenders.

The village maintains a permanent watch of 45 soldiers. These are divided into four watches of 11 men, each led by a sergeant. Commanding the garrison is Captain Eadbald ap-Barntome. All watch members must demonstrate keen vision and skill with the long bow.

The citizens of Ram's Horn Fort have an agreement with the other communities in Heligioland. In the event of a major invasion, Ram's Horn Fort is available as a refuge, so long as refugees agree to help defend the walls. In return, the fort receives donations of money and materiel each year to ensure the ramparts are maintained.

The inhabitants sell produce from their great herds of goats, as well as timber felled from Drakewood. Few merchants heading along the central trade road miss an opportunity to take shelter here overnight.

Hearth Knight Outpost: Although an independent settlement, Ram's Horn Fort maintains good relations with the Hearth Knights. Sword Knight Aelgifu Cuthredsdohtor is the current liaison, chosen because she was born here. Two Shield Knights aid her.

THE SLITHERING STONE

Deep in the Greenpot Hills is a colossal standing stones. Crudely worked, and carved top to bottom with spirals and wiggly lines, it forms the centerpiece of a larger megalithic site that covers five acres (approximately 220,000 square feet).

Sages have long debated the origin of the megaliths. Most agree they form a primitive temple, though who built it remains something a mystery. Those who favor a demonic origin suggest they are only around 900 years old, raised by insane cultists during the Demongate War. Others speculate the stones were erected millennia ago and served as the focal point for a crude religion.

According to skalds, scholars, and students of the arcane, the stone is a gateway to an extra-dimensional realm. Trapped within is either a powerful demon confined here after the Demongate War, or a very minor evil god. The latter is usually affiliated with Vali, but there are some who suggest it once served Eostre Animalmother, but was banished for some unspeakable crime. The cult of Ertha tells of a mighty worm that once dwelt deep within the bowels of the earth. After a fierce fight, Ertha wounded the beast and banished it from the mortal world. Whatever its nature, the creature is universally known in tales as Jalinex, the Lord of Slime.

The stone is solid to the touch, though it gives slightly, like pushing on a taut rubber sheet, and feels slimy. Too much pressure, and one can step through the megalith into the realm beyond. Sometimes it bulges of its own accord, as if something behind it is pushing to break through. Wise travelers and sages never venture too close, for there are many stories of that tell of slimy tentacles emerging from the stone without warning, the ropy limbs clutching and grasping at anything within reach before disappearing back into the nothingness. Unfortunate souls caught in their vile grasp are pulled through the veil.

Stories, some of them told by living eyewitnesses, tell of muted cries and the hands and faces of victims seen pressed against the surface of the stone from within, desperately trying to escape whatever fate awaits them. Usually this is followed by a piercing scream and the face quickly vanishing from sight. No one who enters is ever seen again.

Beyond the mystical barrier is a sprawling cave system inhabited by tentacled-beasts, swarms of slimy, flesh-eating worms, and shapeless, formless pools of living darkness that sprout pseudo-tentacles at random. Slime abounds, much of it secretions from the ghastly inhabitants. It coats the walls and floors, and drips from the ceiling in long, sticky strands.

Unfortunately, entering is much easier than leaving. The only way to escape the fetid dungeon is to slay its master, thus causing the realm to disappear from existence. Jalinex still resides in his prison, eternal if not truly immortal. No images of him exist. He takes the form of a mass of writhing, slime-coated tentacles with a single eye at the center. Inhuman and uncaring, there is no hope of opening any form of dialogue. To Jalinex, intruders are nothing more than fresh meat.

SPRANGATON

Population: 2,657
Ruler: Merciful Daughter Aileena Yngisdohtor
Religion: Eira, Scaetha
Imports: Meat, healing herbs
Exports: Alchemical devices, herbal brews, healing

Sprangaton ("the enclosure by the spring") sits west of the Greenpot Hills, six miles from where the trade road from Brae joins the coastal road.

Founded near a natural spring once famed for its healing properties, the village quickly attracted cultists of Eira. In turn, citizens suffering all manner of ills flocked here for cures, many settling permanently afterward, for the soil was fertile and trade brisk. During the reign of the Liche-Priest the village was heavily fortified, serving as a base for Scaetha's clergy and a field hospital, tending to wounded soldiers. Abandoned during the Blizzard War, Sprangaton was resettled 200 years later.

Although no one comes to take the waters any more, it remains a major center of healing, boasting a larger temple to Eira than its size warrants. Clerics travel the coastal road and across to Brae, offering their services to the steads and villages. See the adventure *S3 Descent into Madness* for details of a typical Eira temple.

The Healers' Bed: Ingara Veksdohtor, an attractive, middle-aged widow, runs Sprangaton's only inn. Friendly, attentive, and polite, Ingara is actually a priestess of Hela and has maintained her cover amid the cult of Eira for the better part of ten years. She has a deal with an orc tribe living in the northern Greenpot Hills, passing on information regarding small bands of travelers and merchant caravans. The orcs keep any treasure, while the cult of Hela receives the corpses.

THREE-GATES

Population: 1,974
Ruler: Council
Religion: Var, Freo, Eostre Animalmother
Imports: Iron, wood
Exports: Mercantile services, rumors

Three-Gates sits across the juncture of the main trade road north of Hellfrost Keep and the road which runs from Brae to Icewatch Fort. It is from this the settlement takes its name, for each of its fortified gates opens directly onto one of the three roads.

The village's main trade is not commerce, but catering for merchants. Blacksmiths, boxmakers, cobblers, coopers, cordwainers, farriers, hoopers, and wheelwrights work ceaselessly to ensure merchants can acquire new crates and barrels, and their wagons and horses are in top condition. A stable sells fresh horses and mules.

Three large warehouses are used to store wagons and mounts during the merchants' stay, thus ensuring security. The village

boasts two inns. The Merchant's Rest caters solely for visiting merchants and traders, while the Wanderer's Rest is open to anyone passing through.

The community has a full-time watch of just ten soldiers (treat as experienced town watch). For each merchant caravan staying, a volunteer patrol of five soldiers (equipped and trained as town watch) is appointed to protect the wagons and their precious cargos.

Located almost centrally in Heligioland, Three-Gates hosts merchants traveling along all the internal trade routes as well as those heading further afield. Gossip and news flow through the gates, making it an important stop for adventurers.

Three-Gates is governed by a nonelected council. Every master crafter has a seat, as does the resident cleric of Var, the latter currently being Eadberht ap-Gaidon. Eadberht has heard of Aelfmeet in Shattered Moor and believes Three-Gates could expand its focus from catering to merchants to acting as a major trading post, saving merchants from making longer journeys by acting as a middleman.

THE TROLL-MOOT

Few people have much need to venture far into the dank mire that is Temujin Marsh and those who know what evils dwell there do so only with hearts filled with fear.

For the most part, the marsh trolls that stalk through the fetid water and towering reeds live in small families that interact only to fight over territory and mates. Every few years, though, they gather in numbers to raid beyond their swampy home's borders. Such martial action is never spontaneous, however. Before the trolls sally forth they gather at a ring of standing stones. The inhabitants of Myre know of this place, which they refer to as the Troll-Moot.

Why the trolls decide to gather at this particular site and how they spread word of the impending moot are mysteries. If the inhabitants of Myre could determine when the moots were to be held, they could prepare their defenses in advance and send warning to other settlements bordering the marsh.

Experts in troll lore are few and far between, leaving the fertile imaginations of lesser minds to fill in the gaps. While Foulwater Swamp has a supposed Troll King of great intellect and fearsome reputation, no such horror haunts Temujin Marsh—if it did, word would surely have reached Myre by now.

The citizens of Myre, most often on the receiving end of troll raids, have developed two theories. The first holds that the gatherings are instinctive—as humans feel the urge to mate, so trolls must maim and kill. The second revolves around the belief that the gatherings are held only as a means of halting spiralling competition and violence. In essence, the trolls turn their anger outward rather than slaughtering each other.

The origin of the stones is equally enigmatic. They are undoubtedly of great age, for they are heavily weathered and stained with mold. Deep scratches on each surface, initially thought to be ancient text, have been proven to be written in Giant. Likely they indicate the name of a troll family and mark where its members muster. Those adventurers who have visited the gatorman ruins dotted throughout the marsh have discerned a similarity in the method used to carve the stones, but further investigation will be required before this can be proven beyond doubt. Of course, this would only raise the question of what the stones originally signified.

VALE OF BLACK ROSES

While Heligioland suffered gravely at the Liche-Priest's hands, neighboring Heldalund fared better. Although its northern lands were lost, the central and southern regions—the area comprising modern Heldalund—escaped serious harm.

Vast was the undead lord's army that threatened these lands, for he greatly desired to conquer Trond, but it advanced no further south than the land just beyond the river that marks the modern border. Crossing the river, the evil horde was forced into a narrow valley. Awaiting them was a mortal army. Soldiers from Trond and Heldalund stood side by side behind a thin wall of paladins of Sigel and the young cult of Scaetha.

The battle was long and fierce, but the mortals eventually held the field of battle. Countless were the honored dead, or so the skalds sing, and their earthly remains were quickly cremated, lest necromancers infest them with fell spirits and swell the dark lord's ranks. That night, the valley was ablaze with light from the funeral pyres, their glow visible for many miles. At dawn, as Sigel once again graced the world with his presence, the ash was scattered across the battlefield.

One year to the day after the great and terrible battle, soldiers set to guard the pass against further incursion awoke to find the valley floor swathed in a carpet of black roses. Clerics, duly consulted due to the sudden appearance and ominous color of the blooms, divined their number exactly equaled the number of warriors killed in the terrible battle. Thus did the black rose became one of the cult's earliest symbols.

Today, the valley technically lies in Heligioland. Neither nation truly claims the land for the Heligiolanders do not settle the land behind the Whitedrake Mountains and northern Heldalund is occupied by orcs. Despite the ever-present threat of orcs and dragons, the valley is a site of pilgrimage for clerics of Scaetha. Over time, it has evolved into a sacred place.

Spirit Name: Herfjötur ("Army fetter").

Ambience: The valley is a sorrowful place, for it marks the deathbed of thousands of brave warriors. Even on bright, sunny days, it is hard to raise a smile here, and laughter is impossible. Only on Dirge Day are joyous sounds possibly, and then only while remembering honored dead who fell in battle.

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d8. Herfjötur's senses extend across the entire valley, for it inhabits all the black roses. Its senses are basic, allowing it only to discern whether a traveler through its domain is mortal or undead.

Communication: None. Herfjötur has no desire to communicate with mortals, and cannot be compelled to do so.

Sacrifice: Only clerics of Scaetha can benefit from the sacred place. A cleric who spends the entirety of Dirge Day (dawn until dusk) in prayer in the valley may, come the next dawn, pluck a single black rose imbued with divine power.

Powers: Roses plucked after performing the necessary rite confer the cleric an extra benny each session. However, this benny can be used only on rolls directly targeted against a servant of Hela or an evil undead, or to resist spells with a necromantic trapping or the abilities of undead creatures which require a die roll to resist. It can be used to Soak wounds inflicted by an undead's mundane attacks, such as its claws or forged weapon. No cleric may benefit from more than one rose at a time—additional roses immediately wither, even if the correct ceremony is performed.

The rose remains fresh until the cleric dies or forsakes Scaetha, at which point it wilts. Should the owner commit a sin, the rose develops red stains, their coverage depending on the level of the sin. The bloom of a sinner confers no benefits until his sin is cleansed. Clerics venturing on perilous missions often leave their rose at a temple of Scaetha. Should the rose wilt, the clerics know their comrade has perished. (He might have lost his faith, in which case he is equally dead to the cult.)

Roses plucked by any person other than a cleric of Scaetha who has completed the ritual have no power, and wither to dust within a day. Roses stolen from their rightful owner retain their power, but only affect the one who cut them, never the thief.

Undead and clerics of Hela who trespass in the valley have a –1 penalty to all Trait rolls and lose their Fearless special ability.

VETH'S TEETH

Veth's Teeth is a small stone circle comprised of six-foot tall, inverted conical stones. In the center is a large boulder, which vaguely resembles a gigantic rat. Legends claim that Veth, the minor goddess of rat catchers, once transformed herself into a gigantic cat in order to better hunt Haratt the Rat King (a minor god associated with Vali).

The Unknowable One transformed a rock into an image of the Rat King, causing Veth, who fell for the ruse, to lose her teeth when she bit down around the stone. Eira regrew Veth's teeth, though

those she lost remain forever implanted in the ground. Veth learned her lesson well and never again changed shape.

Although she no longer needed her broken teeth, Veth set a kitten sired by her beloved and vicious ginger ratter, Fengr ("Catcher"), to watch over the site so Vali could not desecrate them. Despite being many leagues from a settlement, a number of hunting cats reside here, basking atop the stones and keeping a wary eye on visitors.

Veth's Teeth is a sacred site.

Spirit Name: Muskylja ("Mouse Killer").

Ambience: Vermin can sense the presence of Muskylja from a good distance, and are never found here. Giant rats and Verminlords who approach within 20 yards of the Teeth must make a Spirit roll or suffer Fear. A roll of 1 on the skill die, regardless of Wild Die, causes Terror, instead.

Deity: Eostre Animalmother.

Senses: Notice d10 (d6 Wild Die).

Communication: Muskylja is often present in the guise of a monstrously sized ginger hunting cat (a Wild Card specimen with Size +0). It is normally sleeping, waking only occasionally to hunt or wash. Slaying the cat greatly offends the spirit, and Veth, but does the feline no lasting harm—the creature reforms unharmed at the next sunrise.

Should the site be desecrated, the hunting cats resident here attack without warning. Typically there are 2d6 hunting cats present at any one time. Once a day for a period of one hour, Muskylja can enhance the animals. This spiritual energy gives them a d6 Wild Die, but none of the other Wild Card benefits.

Sacrifice: Anyone wishing to gain the spirit's boon must leave dead rats here, as detailed below.

Powers: Characters who deposit at least 20 rats or 5 giant rats (dead or alive) here in a single visit, receive Muskylja's blessing. The hero is granted a version of the Champion Edge which affects giant rats and all clerics of Vali, Veth's eternal enemy. The power lasts until used (a free action to activate) and remains in effect for 10 melee rounds. After this time it is lost. Only one boon of this type may be gained by an individual at any one time, no matter how many rats are left as offerings.

If a Verminlord (a paladin of Vali) or cleric of Haratt is deposited here, Muskylja rewards the paladin's killer with a hunting cat ally. It remains loyal until it dies, obeys its master's commands to the best of its abilities, and can benefit from its owner's bennies. Bringing a dead Wild Card cleric of Vali or Haratt is rewarded with a Wild Card hunting cat. If the animal (Extra or Wild Card) is mistreated or abused, Muskylja recalls it and the hero can never benefit from this boon again.

WHITE RAM HILL

Carved into the western flanks of the Greenpot Hills, just north of where the southern most river that flows into White Lake rises, is a huge stylized ram's head. No one knows who carved it or when, and the local stead owners claim it never needs tending, remaining brilliant white year after year.

Each Wulfmonan, local shepherds and goatherds brave the harsh winter, driving their sheep onto the hillside to mate with a neighbor's ram or billy goat. Although this is a risky act, for the winter snows fall deep here and the icy winds howl off White Lake, herders are willing to risk a few of their flock, for lambs and kids sired here are remarkably healthy specimens, more fertile when they reach maturity, produce finer wool, and better tasting when roasted.

The site is considered sacred to Eostre Animalmother. In olden days, 10% of the lambs sired that year would be left here as an offering in summer. Eostre, it is claimed, adds the lambs to her celestial flock, which worshippers claim runs across the heavens at night. Over the years, as the seasons have worsened, the number of lambs offered has dropped dramatically.

A local legend warns that humans who mate here will be cursed with bestial children. Many consider this a parable, no doubt designed to prevent misuse of the special place, but this dire warning contains a heavy element of truth, for while the site is sacred to Eostre Animalmother, its primary attendants are a band of beastmen who inhabit the western slopes.

Normally rapacious creatures, the beastmen have been pacified here for centuries due to the herders' practice of leaving lambs on the hill, which the beastmen accept as an offering. But things are changing. With no conflict to thin their ranks, the beastmen's numbers have steadily grown. With fewer sacrifices being left at the hill, the creatures are growing short of food. Half starved, the beastmen are preparing to sweep down on the isolated western communities and take what they need by force.

THE WITCHES' CAULDRON

In an isolated valley on the eastern face of the northern Bleak Hills, overlooking the leafy tops of Whitedrake Valley, is a bubbling pool known as the Witches' Cauldron. The liquid cannot be called water, for it is a thick slime of yellow-green hue, like pus from a rancid wound. The fumes emanating from the stinking fluid are noxious.

Despite appearances and odors, the site has long been linked with the Norns, not Vali, as first appearances might dictate. Anyone who sits beside the pool and inhales the vile vapors can make a Vigor roll at –2. Failure leads to a level of fatigue lasting two hours. Success induces visions revealing the future. As is typical with the Norns, the clues are cryptic rather than overt, forcing the inhaler to interpret them. On a raise, the visions are more easily deciphered.

While reaching the site is only mildly arduous, being able to spend an hour in meditation is more difficult. The surrounding caves are dotted with caves, many of which are home to orcs of the White Storm tribe, their ice goblin allies, and ogre slaves. The orc priests use the vision-inducing vapors to advise their chieftain on how best to act in the future.

WHY COME HERE?

Heligioland is a large, sparsely populated realm dotted with ruins from both the Liche-Priest's reign and the Blizzard War. Away from the trade roads and the settlements that line them, the land is populated by orcs, goblins, giants, and other fell beasts. So what brings adventurers to this outpost of civilization?

* Orders. Although they have vowed to protect the Hearthlands, it is Heligioland that is the Hearth Knights' primary theater of operations. Hence, Shield Knights are going to be ordered to patrol here at some point in their lives.

Clerics of all the gods can be found working here for their cult, whether engaged in crusades against orcs, searching for lost knowledge, brokering new trade agreements, or exploring the wilds.

Lorekeepers might be sent here to search ruins for lost knowledge; the Convocation may order junior members to find lost Heligi arcane wisdom; Iron Guild mercenaries have plenty of caravans to escort safely; and the Reliquary has a long list of ruins still to be thoroughly examined.

* Treasure. Crumbling castles, toppled temples, shattered cities, and deserted villages adorn the landscape in abundance. While many of the surface ruins have been scoured clean by generations of treasure seekers, many boast subterranean vaults, crypts, or dungeons which have lain undisturbed for centuries. The Heligi were widely regarded as powerful mages, and thus relics may await discovery in the monster-infested ruins.

* Passing Through. Heligioland cannot be avoided if the party leaves the Hearthlands intent on heading into the deeper or eastern Winterlands. Thus, even if they are not actively searching for adventure here they may be dragged into a tale simply by their presence.

* Monster Hunting. Orcs, giants, goblins, Hellfrost dragons, and other beasts lurk here in varying numbers. Adventurers looking for glory, or just to kill something, will find plenty of opportunity in Heligioland.

* Setting Up Home. Many heroes enjoy the freedom of being able to travel. Others seek to carve out a domain, somewhere they can call home and leave to their children. Heligioland, with its total lack of central authority and wide-open spaces, makes an ideal adopted homeland for such heroes.

HRIMTHYR ISLE

Since the time of the Blizzard War Hrimthyr Isle has been a bastion of evil, home to thousands of Thrym's barbarous servants. Although the frost giants suffered a bitter defeat a century ago, their strength is building once more. Huge longships packed with giants and orcs once again plague the eastern coast, while within the walls of the mighty fortress of Jarlshof, High Ice King Nagal plans an invasion.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Hrimthyr Isle.

* **Constant Patrols:** Orcs constantly patrol the isle. The party must make a Group Stealth roll each day to avoid encountering a patrol of 1d6+4 orcs (50% chance they are mounted on dire wolves, in which case they have Riding equal to their Fighting die). The lead character must be the hero with the lowest Stealth—the party is only as stealthy as its loudest member.

* **Hard to Survive:** There is no plant life on the isle, and very few animals (mainly polar bears and seals, and fish offshore). All Survival rolls to find food suffer a –2 penalty on the shoreline and a –6 penalty inland. No plants also means there are no herbs suitable for brewing herbal remedies.

* **Hazards:** Many are the dangers of Hrimthyr Isle. As well as weather phenomena and deadly denizens, explorers must contend with avalanches, bind snow, crevasses, geysers, glass snow, razor ice, red bow, and slush ice quicksand.

* **I Am the Land:** Among Nagal's many powers is mastery over the weather of his island home. Once per day, Nagal can summon any type of weather to swathe the entirety of Hrimthyr Isle. In game terms, this allows the GM to pick one entry from the weather table below rather than rolling randomly. Special weather conditions, such as blizzards and icicle rain, last for their standard duration.

* **Night Glow:** At night, Hrimthyr Isle is bathed in the white-blue glow of slushrock streams and the coldfire volcano. All lighting conditions are improved one level. For instance, a full moon provides lighting as per daylight, a partial moon is Dim lighting (–1), and so on.

* **No Firewood:** The only wood that grows here is icewood.

* **Rough Going:** Plains of rugged ice, jagged uplands, and snow-covered hills and mountains are the dominant terrain types. The tactical terrain is a mixture of difficult ground and rough ice. The overland pace terrain is difficult ground with no trail or path.

* **Temperature:** The temperature is equivalent to the outer Hellfrost.

* **Weather:** Use the weather table below.

d20	Weather
1–3	Clear skies
4–5	10% chance of precipitation, else overcast
6–8	25% chance of precipitation, else overcast
9–10	50% chance of precipitation, else overcast
11–14	Blizzard
15–16	Heavy Snow
17	Freezing Rain
18	Icicle Rain
19	Hellfrost Wind (treat as Outer Hellfrost)
20	Cold Snap

* **You're on Your Own:** There is no civilized life on Hrimthyr Isle. Characters cannot purchase or sell equipment here, forcing them to live on whatever they bring with them or can scavenge from fallen foes, nor can they hire healers or herbalists to tend to their wounds.

THE POWERS OF NAGAL

High Ice King Nagal ("Nail" in both Giant and Auld Saxa), the lord of Hrimthyr Isle, is more than a frost giant. Shortly after usurping control he undertook a decade long quest into the Hellfrost core. Whatever he encountered there transformed his body, bestowing him with powerful and unusual gifts.

Perhaps like the Ice Queen he found a way into Thrym's divine realm and knelt before his god. Maybe prolonged exposure to the deep Hellfrost altered him. Or maybe the Nagal who entered the frozen wasteland is not the Nagal who returned—ancient legends speak cryptically of a race of true frost giants, creatures far older than the civilized races who, in stories at least, were either created by or descended from the gods in an earlier epoch. Though widely regarded as mythical, a band of heroes recently reported defeating one who dwelt in an ice fortress on White Lake. He might alternately be a chosen of Thrym, or even a herald given free rein in the mortal realm.

Nagal's exact powers are unknown to the civilized races, but there is much conjecture that the king of the frost giants is a terrifying foe. No one has ever claimed to have faced Nagal, and thus separating fact from fiction is impossible. One story claims his skin is as hard as black ice and his blood freezing (or sometimes coldfire). Depending who tells the tale any injuries inflicted on him either result in him being swathed in crackling coldfire or the wound freezes over immediately, healing the king.

It is claimed he can pluck hairs from his beard, which is often described as being living coldfire, and cast them to the ground, whereupon they turn into frigid elementals of a type of his choosing. He can freeze the flesh and blood of those who gaze upon him or hear his voice (again, legends vary), spit streams of coldfire, and transform into a Hellfrost dragon of immense size or a raging blizzard. In some stories it is his axe, a relic known as Thrym's Tooth, that holds these powers, not the frost giant. Unfortunately, there are as many powers attributed to him as there are skalds who speak of him.

The only way any of these powers will ever be confirmed is for someone to encounter the fiend and live, and that will take a very special band of heroes.

ATMOSPHERE

Hrimthyr Isle is a terrible place, a miniature version of the Hellfrost but one that is densely populated by all manner of evil creatures. While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* speaks a little about the geography, such as exists, it says very little about what it is to explore the frigid land.

The bitter north wind and permanently cold temperatures are the first obstacle one must learn to overcome. Freezing winds batter at the body, penetrating all but the thickest clothing, hail stings exposed flesh, and temperatures can plummet to unearthly lows in a flash, literally sucking the warmth from the living. Blizzards may force the party to hole up for days on end, their precious supplies of food and firewood rapidly dwindling. Even those accustomed (but not immune) to the cold must don winter clothing and furs if they are to survive.

Yet it is not just outsiders who suffer. The orcs, many of whom are not snow orcs, can patrol for only a few hours at a time before being forced to seek shelter and warmth. Unlike intruders, they at least have ready supplies of firewood from Nagal's palace to help take away the bitter chill.

The landscape is rugged and swathed in snow. Winter footwear is essential, but even then explorers risk leaving visible trails in the virgin snow unless they take extra precautions or are prepared sally forth in adverse weather conditions. Being largely volcanic in origin, albeit of the ice variety, geysers spitting forth coldfire or water that freezes solid in an instant are added dangers.

The constant presence of orc patrols forces explorers to move cautiously and be ever-vigilant. Any adventuring party will be vastly outnumbered if an alarm is raised. Characters spoiling for fights will have plentiful opportunities, but a series of running engagements will be more harmful to the heroes than the thousands of denizens. While it is certainly possible to destroy a few watchposts, word will quickly spread, leading to the characters being ruthlessly hunted down not only by orcs, but by frost giants. Unless the heroes want to spend their time fleeing patrols hot on their bloody trails, they must learn to pick their fights carefully and avoid revealing their presence as long as possible.

Fires must be well concealed from view, for flickering flames stand out like burning beacons against the stark blue, white, and gray of the landscape. Much of the time intruders will be forced to forgo hot meals, only adding to the general feelings of misery. Rations are likely to lack any form of fresh food, especially vegetation—hard tack and dried meat will be the staples. At these temperatures liquids freeze in moments, and without drinking water the heroes are doomed (eating snow is a bad idea, since it reduces body temperature).

At night, much of the island is illuminated in a pale white-blue light from the ice volcano and streams of slushrock. While this added light can be beneficial, it also means true darkness is a rarity, even when the sky is blanketed in cloud. Day or night, adventurers moving across the island stand out as dark dots against the landscape, ever visible to the vigilant sentries.

All told, Hrimthyr Isle assaults the body and mind, quickly fatiguing even the hardiest of explorers. Many have ventured here in search of fame and glory—their frozen remains still litter the bleak wilderness, a warning to other intruders to turn back or risk the same fate.

MILITARY

In some cultures, military companies, and more rarely entire regiments (or their equivalent), are named after their commanding officer. In order that his officers do not get delusions of grandeur or consider themselves irreplaceable, Nagal employs a simple numerical system. Each of his orc regiments is numbered one through ten, as are their companies and battle squads.

The regimental commander, always a greater frost giant priest of Thrym, is awarded the title thegn to denote his position. Until recently, Nagal employed orc chieftains as company commanders. In a bid to increase the chances of victory and instill some discipline over the unruly troops, he has replaced them with orc war marshals (see *Hellfrost Expansion*). Each carries the rank of captain. Battle squads are commanded by elite orc warriors bearing the rank of sergeant.

The make up of each regiment is largely uniform. Company One is formed of elite warriors. Companies Two through Seven are regular warriors equipped as infantry. Companies Eight and Nine are archers. Company Ten is always a specialist unit and is left for the GM to determine. Some regiments have an artillery company, others runts trained as wall breakers (see *Hellfrost Expansion*).

Company One within each regiment always contains two specialist battle squads. Battle Squad One is the regimental headquarters. In order of superiority the troops are the frost giant thegn (the regimental commander), the war marshal (the company captain and the regiment's second-in-command), a chieftain (the captain's deputy and third in command of the regiment), a priest (third in command of the company and fourth in command of the regiment), a drummer (fourth in command of the company), a standard bearer, three huscarls, and two runners.

Battle Squad Two is much feared even among their allies, for it is made up entirely of berserkers.



hrimthyr isle



Population: 1,000 frost giants, 10,000 orcs, 1,000 frostborn mercenaries (estimated)
Ruler: High Ice King Nagal Blizzardbreath
Religion: Thrym, Dargar
Imports: None
Exports: None

The White Sea

Ruins

Penguin Bay

0 10 25 50 100 200

ALTERNATIVE GEAR RULES

The rules below are optional replacements for gear found in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*.

Skates: Ice skates allow for normal movement and running on ice. A character who runs while on ice doubles his base Pace before adding his running die. It takes two actions per foot to don skates, but only one action per foot to remove them.

Skis: Skies allow a character to move his normal Pace and run on snow. On gentle slopes, a character who runs doubles his base Pace and adds his running die. On steeper slopes, the base Pace is doubled before the running die is added. On other terrain Pace is reduced to 1 and the character cannot run. It takes two actions per foot to don skies, but only one action per foot to remove them.

Snowshoes: Snowshoes allow for normal movement and running on snow and ice, but prohibit movement on other terrain. On other terrain Pace is reduced to 1 and the character cannot run. It takes four actions per foot to don snowshoes, but only two actions per foot to remove them.

SLEDGES

Many animals can be used to pull sledges and war sledges. For ease of game play, assume two dogs or wolves can pull a sledge and four can pull a war sledge holding just the driver and up to 100 pounds of equipment. For each additional person and 100 pounds of gear or 200 pounds of just gear, another pair of dogs or wolves is required. Half the number of animals for dire wolves, which are much stronger.

For other animals, a single mule or horse equates to four dogs or wolves, while a pygmy mammoth or polar bear is calculated as being equivalent to eight dogs.

MAJOR LOCALES

For those intent on braving the many perils of Hrimthyr Island, this section details a handful of adventuring locales outside of the main settlements.

THE DRAGON GATE

Only one pass cuts through the formidable Jarls Range Mountains. Blocking access at the end furthest from Jarlshof is the Dragon Gate. A colossal structure, it is named the Dragon Gate because the black ice used in its construction is carved with the bas relief of two Hellfrost dragons. It takes four frost giants straining every muscle and sinew of their body to operate each of the windlasses that open the gates, such is the scale of the fortification. Even then, it takes 10 minutes of hard effort to open the gates wide enough to permit fellow giants to enter in single file. The gates are only opened further when the army marches to war—something it has not done in a century.

Although Jarlshof is well protected by dint of its location and immense garrison, and the odds of his enemies launching a major invasion almost zero, Nagal is not prepared to take chances with his security. Stationed at the gate are two dozen frost giants and 200 elite orc warriors, plus a stable of 50 dire wolves.

It would take an army to batter down the gates. That force would also need powerful spellcasters, for carved deep into the ice are powerful runes of protection and hardening that make the ice immensely strong, as well as lesser *glyphs* designed to shatter battering rams on impact.

Despite his awesome power, Nagal does not trust his subjects, especially his younger brother. The great gate serves as much to keep Haglar from rebelling as it does outsiders from threatening the capital.

THE GIANTS' BARROWS

The frost giant jarls and priests who serve the kings of Hrimthyr Isle are interred in vaults deep beneath the Black Palace on their deaths (at least so long as they have not died in ignominy). No grave goods are placed with them, for the giants do not believe in wasting resources on the dead.

Frost giant warriors and those out of favor with the king are accorded no such privilege. They are buried in barrows in the Icebear Hills. A typically barrow comprises a single chamber lined with ice blocks, an igloo for the dead. Snow quickly covers the structure, leaving only a mound in the landscape. The barrows of honored warriors, those who died in service to their master and with glory, are marked with a stone column, which tells of the giant's victories and eventual demise.

Aside from when performing burial duties, the giants and orcs avoid the Barrows. Superstitious creatures, they believe that the spirits of the dead remain in their barrows, patiently waiting until the Fimbulvintr, when they will rise and fight alongside the living. Until then, it is better not to antagonize them.

The giants are wise to avoid the Barrows, for hagbui lurk here. Though it is possible they are the creations of Hela's cultists, it is more likely Thrym played a role in their creation, sending souls from his frozen realm to inhabit the frozen corpses. If the latter is true, one might ask why they do not serve Nagal openly as additional guardians for his island fortress.

THE HEARTHS

Even combining their forces, the cult of Kenaz and the Hearth Knights lack the strength to make an assault against Nagal's island fortress with any hope of success. With their forces scattered across multiple fronts and engaged against many foes, the best they have managed is a small number of intelligence gathering operations to deduce the lay of the land. In order that future scouts have a greater chance of success, each visitor is required to ceate a secret stash of supplies in the Icebear Hills. These caches are collectively known as Hearths to those few who know of their existence.

Usually stored in deep caves to avoid detection by orc patrols, each cache contains alchemical devices (mainly potions of *environmental protection* and *healing* and offensive spells with fire and heat trappings), dried herbs, firewood, food, winter clothes, and various pieces of mundane equipment. The Gamemaster has the final say on what specific equipment is available in any Hearth should the heroes stumble across one. The value of all the goods in any one cache should not exceed 3,000 gs.

Scouts with official backing from either organization are expected to create their own Hearth as part of their visit. In addition to their personal equipment, they must carry at least 2,000 gs worth of alchemical devices and 1,000 gs worth of mundane gear. The cost for stocking the Hearth is met by their respective organization.

On returning from his mission, each scout is required to record the location of the Hearth he created. This is then noted on a master map kept under lock and key in Hellfrost Keep. Exploring the Isle is extremely dangerous and many scouts never return. The exact location of every Hearth is thus unknown.

The location of the Hearths is never revealed, even to official scouts. Indeed, agents are given the impression they are the first person to create a Hearth. The stockpiles are not resources to be freely plundered and a captured scout put to torture can reveal only the existence of his Hearth. Likely the giants would search for others, of course, which is why they are expected to be carefully concealed.

THE HOWLING VALLEY

Much of the island rises from the sea as cliffs of rock and ice towering hundreds of feet high. The only easy points of ingress are at Thrymsport and on the northern side of the island, where slushrock oozing from the ice volcano has cooled and hardened on hitting the water to form an icy plain.

A single valley cuts through the Jarls Range Mountains from this ever-growing landscape, leading into the Icebear Hills. Ten miles long, only insane Dargar-worshipping orcs and Hellfrost dragons populate the wide valley, for few others can survive here on a permanent basis. It is not the numbing cold that defeats both guardians

and intruders alike, but the Hellfrost wind, which roars constantly through the valley from north to south.

The intensity of the wind is variable. At the start of each day and night, the GM should draw a card from the action deck. A Club indicates the wind is as per the Hearthlands. A Diamond means it has the same intensity as the Low Winterlands, a Heart that of the High Winterlands, and a Spade the ferocity of the Outer Hellfrost. On a Joker it is at its peak, being as potent as in the Hellfrost core.

The orcs live in caves along the valley walls. Most are small networks containing only two or three chambers, but one, nearest the interior end of the valley, is a sprawling system of over thirty caverns spread across multiple levels. Within lies the only temple to Dargar on the island, and the lair of the orc's leader, a monstrous brute who is both chieftain and paladin of Dargar.

High Ice King Nagal tolerates the worshippers of Dargar solely because they provide security. So long as they remain loyal to him, he cares little for their barbarous religious practices, nor who they kill. As a result of this decree, the tribe frequently raids into the Icebear Hills, slaughtering frost giants and other orcs. Mad they may be, but they know not to extend their bloody activities too far, less they raise the ire of their lord.

JARLSHOF

Alchemical Chambers: Whereas frost giants and orcs prefer to rely on brute force to win battles, Nagal is well aware of the power of magic and miracles, a tool frequently employed by his enemies. Mages and clerics with a talent for alchemy are put to work creating a vast stockpile of offensive and defensive devices.

Distrustful of his minions, especially his fellow greater frost giants, Nagal has completed devices stored in a secure area within his palace. As well as mundane guards who have sworn sacred vows of utter loyalty to their king, there are many magical *glyphs* and mundane traps.

The Lesser Temple: Nagal is a devoted servant of Thrym, but he has little interest in the cults of his god's celestial allies. However, he knows it is never wise to offend the gods and that they are popular with some of his minions. Within the great courtyard of the capital is a temple devoted to Hrjóðr (god of avalanches), Langbarðr (god of glaciers), and Norðri (god of the north wind). In order that they remember their due place, clerics of these deities are never given important roles.

WATCHPOSTS & FORTS

Dotted throughout the Icebear Hills and Jarls Range Mountains are small watchposts and forts constructed from blocks of solid ice. Although the terms conjure up images of complex structures, they are little more than a thick wall surrounding an open courtyard. Positioned inside are well-insulated tents for the garrison.

Given their simple construction method, they are easy to build and repair. Should a foe ever dare invade, Nagal can order countless fortifications raised in a very short time, creating an outer ring of defenses that will make any assault extremely costly in terms of losses and time.

The island is divided into numerous regions, each of which boasts a single fort. For every fort, there are seven satellite watchposts.

Garrisoned within each fort are three reinforced battle squads. Two of these comprise a single lesser frost giant and 10 orc warriors. The command squad boasts a greater frost giant, an orc chieftain, four elite warriors, two priests, a drummer, and two apothecaries. While the greater frost giant is in overall command, he typically leaves day-to-day matters to the orc chieftain (whom he can then blame and punish if anything goes wrong).

Each watchpost houses a single battle squad of ten orcs whose leader is an elite warrior. Three out of the seven garrisons have dire wolf mounts. At any one time 1d6+2 orcs are patrolling the surrounding countryside, leaving only a token defensive force.

Although the structures might be out of sight of each other, contact is maintained through a basic signaling system. Through miracles, spells, or alchemical devices, the garrison launches explosive coldfire *bolt* or *blast* spells high into the air. A *blast* spell indicates the outpost is under attack and needs reinforcements urgently. A single *bolt* means possible intruders have been detected and the garrison is going to investigate. Two bolts indicate all is well—each garrison must launch a pair of *bolts* every day at a time dictated by the fort's commander. Three *bolts* launched simultaneously indicate the fort is under attack but can cope—reinforcements are to be sent only if they can be spared.

NEW ORC TRIBES

Hrimthyr Isle is home to thousands of orcs (exact estimates vary wildly) made up of dozens of tribes. Knowing that orcs are notoriously tribal and rarely serve well when mixed with others without constant "encouragement," Nagal prefers to let his orcs retain their unique tribal identities.

A few of the more powerful tribes residing on the island are presented below. Others tribes with sizeable contingents here include the Frostriders, Sons of Thrym, and Teeth of Thrym, all of which are detailed in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

* **The Bone Grinders:** Followers of Langbarðr, Thrym's bodyguard and the minor god of glaciers, the Bone Grinders are used to punch through enemy lines, especially shieldwalls. Bone Grinders gain a +2 bonus to perform Push attacks.

The tribe's priests know the following spells: *armor, knockdown, summon elemental* (glacier only), *weapon immunity.*

* **The Haters of Fire:** These Thrym worshippers have a sixth sense for detecting servants of Kenaz and Sigel, who they hate with a vengeance. They gain the benefits of the Favored Foe Edge against these opponents.
* **The Impalers:** These orcs favor throwing spears. All members of the tribe with at least Throwing d6 have the Spear Twist Edge.
* **The Raging Blizzard:** Fanatical followers of Thrym, this tribe answers only to Thrymgar, high priest of the island. The chieftain, priests, and warriors embody the fury of the blizzard through the Berserk Edge.
* **The Storm-Walkers:** This tribe follows Norðri, god of the north wind. They ignore Vigor rolls to avoid Fatigue caused by mundane blizzards, and suffer no penalties whatsoever for blizzards conjured through the *storm* power.

The tribe's priests know the following spells: *deflection, knockdown, storm* (summoning blizzards only), *summon elemental* (blizzard only).

* **Thrym's Hounds:** Known as "Thrym's Lackeys" by the other tribes, these orcs treat frost giants as near deities. When within 5" of a frost giant, they gain the benefits of the Fervor and Hold the Line Edges. No additional benefits are gained if the giant has these Edges.
* **Wolves of Dargar:** This tribe inhabits the Howling Valley. Devout followers of Dargar and largely insane, every member of the tribe has the Fearless special ability.

WHALING STATION

Population: 20 frost giants and 300 orcs (estimated)
Ruler: Thegn Ingvar Icebeard

Orcs and giants cannot survive on air and Hrimthyr Isle is hardly prime hunting ground. Utilizing his strange and fell powers, High Ice King Nagal secured a large ice floe in place, ensuring it would neither drift in the currents nor melt in summer.

While Nagal keeps his warships anchored in Thrymsport, where they are safe from attack and the crushing grip of sea ice, the ice floe is home to a fishing and whaling fleet consisting of 40 ships. Those devoted to whaling are commanded by a frost giant, who also serves as the harpooner. The fishing ships (which also hunt seals) are manned entirely by orcs. The fleet is rarely in the harbor—no sooner has a ship dropped off its catch and resupplied then it sets sail once more.

While the ships are at sea, the small population left on land (three giants and 40 orcs) works to prepare the catch. With food being so sparse, little is wasted—blubber and flesh comprise the main diet, organs are boiled down to make thin broth, and bones are prepared for turning into common objects. Ships from Thrymsport arrive each month during summer (when the surrounding sea

is free of ice) to collect the harvest and replace any losses—even for frost giants and orcs, whaling and fishing is fraught with peril.

Nagal sets high quotas (he has a lot of troops to feed) and he expects the incumbent thegn to deliver them without fail. Thegn Ingvar has held the post for only a month, his predecessor having been executed for displeasing his lord. He has no intentions of succumbing to the same fate.

As cunning as he is cruel, Ingvar has decided to increase the quotas, though without informing the king. The difference between Nagal's demands and the actual haul is being secretly stored for times when the fleet fails in its duties.

Fear of the frost giants keep mariners of other races away from the White Sea. So far, the existence of the whaling station has gone unnoticed by Nagal's enemies. Should its location be known, it is likely an attack would be arranged—destroying the fishing fleet and processing buildings, while it would not starve the inhabitants of Hrimthyr Isle, would certainly be a blow to morale and dent Nagal's formidable reputation.

Yurt of the Frost Giant Priest

The nearest thing Nagal has to a rival is Thrymgar, an elderly priest of the god of winter. The priest fought in the Blizzard War and, while possessed of no unique abilities, wields many potent miracles. Outside of the Hellfrost, he is the most powerful priest of Thrym.

Thrymgar has never liked Nagal, seeing him as an upstart usurper. Although publicly he acts the loyal servant, he is slowly undermining Nagal's authority. First, he abandoned the court, claiming Thrym had ordered him to live in the wastelands in order to be closer to this deity. Nagal suspected this was a ploy to escape his spies, but having no direct link to his god he could not argue otherwise. Second, he has managed to frustrate Nagal's plans for an invasion by "divining" poor omens should the king dare to launch his fleet. Frost giants, and especially orcs, are superstitious creatures, and while Nagal could order them to prepare for war, he knows morale would be low.

Nagal would dearly love to destroy the priest, but Thrymgar has many allies and is much respected for his unswerving piety. Openly killing Thrymgar would remove Nagal's last opponent, but in doing so he would lose the support of his minions, who see the priest as one of the king's most trusted advisors and closest allies.

To that end, Nagal has decided to play a dangerous game. His fanatically loyal agents have begun to spread rumors across Rassilon that Thrymgar is the true power behind the throne. With any luck, a band of adventurers will come to Hrimthyr Isle and murder the priest. Not only will Nagal rule supreme, but he can use the fury felt at the priest's untimely demise to spur his warriors into a full and bloody invasion of western Rassilon.

Thrymgar dwells in a colossal yurt (a circular tent supported on a wooden frame) in the Icebear Hills. The exterior is covered in the furs of hundreds of polar bears, while inside the yurt is divided into rooms by wooden partitions as strong as any Anari fort.

Herein dwells Thrymgar, along with a contingent of priests and greater frost giant warriors who share his views. A leader in his own right, Thrymgar also has the support of a tribe of snow orcs known as the Raging Blizzard.

Why Come Here?

In terms of adventuring opportunities, Hrimthyr Isle is divided into two distinct adventuring areas.

The two major settlements are strong fortifications, populated by thousands of evil beings, and are nigh on impregnable. In fantasy parlance, they are akin to *The Lord of the Ring's* Mordor—a heavily guarded den of evil set in a hostile landscape and ruled over by an extremely powerful being. They are places where Legendary characters go to prove themselves or to die.

Outside these fortifications the island is far less populated, though still dangerous due to its arctic temperatures and hostile denizens. Characters looking to slay orcs and giants will find plentiful opportunity.

Given the blood-freezing temperatures, constant patrols, Hellfrost beasts, and total lack of aid one can expect, what possible reasons do sane characters have for coming here?

* Orders. The lords of the Battlelands desire to know High King Nagal's invasion plans. Both the cult of Kenaz and the Hearth Knights would dearly love to bring the frost giant to his knees. The cult of Hoenir seeks general information on this rarely visited realm of evil. The Reliquary has no doubts that Nagal has access to true relics, but what form they might take is still a mystery.

While many individuals and other organizations have very good reason to send agents to Hrimthyr Isle, none purposefully send followers into the twin settlements. Such missions are suicidal for even the most experienced heroes, and for now there is little need to poke the sleeping giant. Intelligence gathering and minor disruption to the giant king's plans can be carried out without walking into the giant's den and raising his ire. Unless a hero has offended his superiors, any mission to Hrimthyr Isle is normally on a volunteer basis.

* Duty. While a GM might deliberately send heroes to Hrimthyr Isle, some characters may feel compelled to pay a visit. Likely they are members of the organizations mentioned above, but natives of the Battlelands, Alantaris Isle, or the Magocracy who have lost family and friends to raiders might desire revenge, as may members of the Order of Jotundauðr.

* Glory. Characters seeking fame through battle deeds will find plentiful opportunity here, assuming they live long enough to tell their stories. Although orcs will be the most common foe, all manner of Hellfrost beasts live on the island.

* Treasure. That the treasuries of Hrimthyr Isle are bursting with plunder is a common fireside tale, but before the characters pack their bags and set sail they should ask themselves what would a frost giant king need with gold and silver? Common treasure seekers will find more profitable, and safer, locales elsewhere.

Adventure Seeds

For GMs who want their group to explore this Thrym-blessed realm or interact with its fearsome inhabitants, a handful of adventure seeds are presented below.

* A powerful lord whose land is frequently subjected to raids by the denizens of Hrimthyr Isle needs to buy his people time to prepare better defenses. He offers a king's ransom to any heroes willing to sabotage Nagal's fleet of longships while they are still in harbor.

* The Hearth Knights have long believed Nagal has built multiple lines of defenses. They want to know the general layout of the defenses and whether the sentries use any form of communication system between outposts. Although they have no current interest in invading, such information may be invaluable to Lance Knights intent on visiting the island in the future.

* An Aspirian lord has learned through divinations and omens that his lands are to be raided very soon. Lacking skilled commanders, he hires the heroes to take control of his meager army and drive the giants back into the sea before they gain a foothold.

* A raiding party of giants and orcs is abroad in the Battlelands. Fearful they are spies scouting for a larger invasion force, the Tuomi tribes offer a reward to adventurers prepared to assist in their capture or death.

* The Hearth Knights guard a powerful wintry relic recovered from a frost giant priest's lair. The organization has recently learned that it can only be destroyed by dropping it into the ice volcano on Hrimthyr Isle. Qualified adventurers are sought to accompany a Lance Knight on this quest.

* The last scout to return from Hrimthyr Isle reported the orcs have started mining blue ice from deep inside the glaciers that carve through the Jarls Range Mountains. From what the scout could deduce, the ice has many of the properties of black ice but is far more resistant to warm temperatures once properly worked. Such an addition to Nagal's arsenal could spell disaster. Both the cult of Kenaz and the Hearth Knights desire samples. If the ice proves as potent as the scout claims, then the ice mine must be destroyed at any cost.

ICEDALE FREEHOLDS

Bound by the deadly Frozen Forest, the impassable Sunken Realm, and the treacherous Frozen Sea, the Freeholds are the most isolated and remote realm on the continent. Beset by undead and Hellfrost horrors, the rugged settlers and hardy nomads who call this realm home are slaves to no man, for here all are considered equal. Details on the Finnar culture can be found in The Unclaimed Lands section.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Freeholds.

* **Lack of Nobility:** Freeholders place little respect on noble titles. No noble character in the Freeholds, native or visitor, benefits from the +2 Charisma bonus gained from the Noble Edge. Characters who use the Edge to simulate other social positions, such as a rich merchant or important cleric, benefit as normal.

* **Trading:** Coins are only used in the towns, and even then bartering is considered equally acceptable. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will often need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in the Freeholds. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

City availability items in a town or town items in a village cost quadruple, when available. City items in a village cost ten times as much as normal, if available at all. The sole exception is in Hegmonan, the main trading season, when prices are only double and quadruple respectively—imports sell quickly, leading to shortages and increased prices for the rest of the year. The GM should determine if specific goods are available based on their use. Few citizens have need to buy plate armor, for instance, and merchants are thus unlikely to transport it to the frozen north on speculation.

The pricing works both ways—heroes trying to find buyers for plunder will receive higher prices, if a buyer can be found.

* **Weather:** Snow falls most often during summer, when warm, moist air drifts up from the south. In spring and fall, the chance of precipitation is halved. In winter, the chance is one-fifth that listed in the Hellfrost Player's Guide. The chance of heavy snow or a blizzard is unaffected—they can strike anywhere in Rassilon and at any time of year.

* **Where's the Food?:** Unless a hero is a native, a Sword or Lance Knight, or a cleric of Eostre or Ullr, all Survival rolls to find wild food in the Freeholds are made at –2. This is negated once the hero spends six months surviving in the bleak wilderness, whereupon he learns how to successfully hunt small mammals and recognize edible bark and lichen.

WHAT ARE THE FREEHOLDS?

While the land encompassed by Icedale has been the hunting ground of the Finnar for millennia, the arrival of the Saxa and Anari is a recent occurrence. The first outsiders settled here only 200 years ago, lured by the icewood of the Frozen Forest. While the nearby Sunken Realm was highly populated, no ancient ruins from that bygone age or lost culture have ever been found here.

Modern Icedale is not a unified realm like those of the Low Winterlands or Hearthlands. It boasts no overall ruler, and the council is little more than an advisory body and the final court of appeal in criminal and civil cases. When one discusses the Freeholds one should really talk about the settled lands and the nomadic lands as near separate entities, bound by agreements concerning mutual trade and defense, yet not by laws of man or gods.

The settled Freeholds extend from Icedale to Iceport along the 500-mile stretch of the Icedale River. At most they extend ten miles either side of the river. The river itself belongs to no one. The settlers choose to dwell on its banks because it is the trade route between the two towns, but they do not have jurisdiction over its resources. Any newcomer may settle here and claim a free hold over a parcel of land so long as he takes a sacred oath to provide assistance to his neighbors, respect his neighbor's boundaries, and respect the ancestral hunting grounds of the Finnar and displaced taiga elves.

The existence of the Finnar and taiga elves as permanent inhabitants dates back to the Blizzard War. Before the long winters came, the land marked the southern most extent of the Finnar's ancestral grounds, for here they would come in spring and summer, bringing with them hungry reindeer herds. The taiga elves dwelt in what is now the Frozen Forest. The latter migrated here during the exodus of their once vibrant realm, while the Finnar just happened to be here when the Icewall rose, cutting them off from their more northerly grounds. Both have opted to make the most of life, refusing to yield to new territory in the face of Thrym's adversity.

The terms "Icedale," "Icedale Freeholds," and "the Freeholds" can be used interchangeably when describing this realm.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

As the name implies, the Freeholds are not governed by nobles or other landowners. Any citizen who wishes to live here is his own master, though he is required to help his neighbors in times of need, live in peace with the nomads, work at an honest living, and abide by common laws of good behavior and decency. As such, the Freeholds are a patchwork of isolated settlements bonded by mutual adversity and oaths of friendship rather than written laws or noble authority.

Technically, a single council based in Icedale governs the realm. Elections are held every five years, and any citizen of the realm may stand for one of the 50 seats available. Separate elections are held in Icedale, Iceport, and in the remote communities. Icedalers fill 20 seats, Iceporters 15, other settlers 10, and the nomads the remaining ones. The council meets every month, but due to distance and the weather, few councilors outside of Icedale bother to attend more than once or twice during their tenure. Word of legislation passed by the governing body flows down the trade road between the towns, but the council is unable to truly enforce its will. Its primary power is in setting the price of icewood and acting as the final court in law cases. Most legal cases are heard by one of the many moots.

Every Freeholder is considered a free and equal citizen of the realm. While some families do hold noble titles of old, they hold no true power. Indeed, Freeholders place little respect on a title, and even visiting nobility find themselves treated with far less respect than they would find at home.

Similarly, Freeholders do not go much for social divides. Some are wealthier or better educated than others, but that does not make them any better than the lowly dung collectors whose labors keep the hearths glowing warm. Wealth allows for a few luxuries, but for the most part Freeholders neither look up to nor down

upon their neighbors. Thus, citizens are judged not by what they have, but what they give. The harder one works, the more likely one is to have the respect of neighbors.

EDUCATION

Education in the Freeholds is very much left to individual families and cults. Academic prowess is not considered an enviable trait, for survival here requires practical knowledge of the seasons and harsh conditions.

Children are taught the common laws of the land, basic geography and history, and a little about the cultures of their neighbors. Stories of deadly monsters are commonplace, serving both to make children aware of the dangers that lurk beyond the warmth of the hearth, but also to give them practical knowledge on combating them when running away isn't a viable option. In a land where winter is permanent, much training is given in basic survival techniques, such as how to build a shelter, what lichens are edible, not to eat snow or drink cold water, how to hunt, how to recognize spoor and tracks of predators and prey, and so on.

Many settlers, even toothless crones, know nothing of the outside world, nor do they see any need to learn. There is snow, ice, and cold, and that is all one needs to know to survive. Many misconceptions and much ignorance exist here because of the lack of outside contact. Some citizens refuse to believe that there is anything but ice and snow blanketing the world. Others have no concept of the feudal system and chain of authority. The sharing of goods means few have a true understanding of the concepts of ownership and theft.

Despite having four major cultures living in close harmony, if not close proximity, Trader is not widely spoken, even in the towns. Most children learn both Saxa and Anari, with Finnar third. The taiga elves mix far less with the settlers than the Finnar, their numbers are smaller, and their language is harder to grasp. As such, it remains the fifth most common tongue, falling behind Trader. After two centuries of almost total isolation, the settlers are evolving a new language, a blend of Saxa and Anari words and grammar.

RELIGION

The Freeholds boasts no great mineral wealth and has a native frost dwarf population of just one, yet Ertha is the most widely honored deity. Conversely, she has the fewest priests, and barely a handful claim her as patron. Those most dedicated to her are the smiths who keep the loggers supplied with axes and the soldiers equipped with spears and arrowheads. The vast majority honor her in passing (and often no more) because it is the frost dwarves who are, eventually, their biggest customers. As such, her faith is more one of placating the dwarves than heartfelt religious devotion. Quite how this belief first arose is unknown, but it is now ingrained. For their part, the frost dwarves don't care, and never have cared, where the icewood comes from, so long as it reaches their fortress homes—most don't even know Icedale exists, if truth be told.



The twin horrors of the Freeholds are undead and Hellfrost monsters. Often the two are one and the same. Sigel, Scaetha, and Kenaz are honored in roughly equal numbers. Pragmatists to the core, Freelanders don't like to waste time on any venture, even their faith. Sigel is most commonly taken as a patron, since his cult is dedicated to defeating all forms of darkness not just one aspect of evil, whereas those of Scaetha and Kenaz are more focused. Scaetha's cult only outnumbers that of Kenaz because of their evangelizing and scare tactics—undead are uncommon away from the Frozen Forest.

Many of Sigel's clerics are arrogant and pompous, accepting the general belief that Sigel is more important than Scaetha and Kenaz separately as proof of their god's superiority. Though clerics of three gods are often seen bickering in public, they rally together (not without complaint) when trouble comes calling.

With agriculture almost impossible, hunting and reindeer herding are the main source of food, even for the settled inhabitants. Thus, both Eostre Animalmother and Ullr are popular deities. A few species of hardy root vegetables are grown in walled enclosures to protect them from the harsh wind, but vast quantities of manure are required, and the growing season is exceptionally short. Crop yields are barely enough to supplement the protein rich diet.

Neorthe is worshipped in Iceport. Although the Freelanders are not true mariners, they pray to the god of the ocean to protect the trade ships vital to the Freeholds' continued survival. Freo has more followers elsewhere, for journeys through the Freeholds are fraught with the twin perils of cold and beast.

Thanks to the belief in communal property, Nauthiz has absolutely no followers here. Long-term borrowing is commonplace, but actual ownership of goods is a strange concept to the Freeholders. Hela's cult is small, for the clerics of Scaetha and Sigel are eternally vigilant for any threat concerning the undead.

MILITARY

The Hellfrost Gazetteer lists the Freeholds' military strength at 4,000 soldiers. It would be a mistake, though, to think of these as a standing army similar to those founds in the Hearthlands.

Just over one-quarter of the army, some 1,200 souls, is found among the settled communities. The remainder are members of the nomadic tribes and are hunters first and foremost.

Icedale has no marshal or general—the army is scattered too thinly and the permanent winter prevents men from gathering in large numbers. Instead, every settlement is responsible for its own safety, though it is honor and oath bound to help its neighbors when called upon (assuming sending help is a realistic possibility). Such assistance grows more common with each year.

Icedale boasts 400 soldiers, while Iceport maintains 300 warriors. While titled as soldiers, they are little more than a well-trained and almost permanently active militia. These military forces are broken down into companies of 100 men, each led by a captain supported by four sergeants.

During peacetime, companies are rotated on and off duty on a monthly basis. In Icedale, one company protects the town while an-



other watches over the icewood loggers. Iceport normally has just one company on watch over the town at any time. When not serving as soldiers, the men work at other jobs, earning their own living. When their time to serve comes, they draw wages from communal funds, since they are protecting more than just their homes.

Some 200 soldiers live in the scattered settlements between the towns. About a quarter of these are full-time warriors, for predators are a constant threat.

The White Rangers, who are answerable to the council and serve as the only true permanent military force of any strength, muster around 300 strong. Their role is one of aggression, not defense. They are constantly on the move, traveling the frozen wastes to check on isolated communities and the nomadic tribes, hunting down Hellfrost beasts whenever they are encountered, and otherwise ensuring the light of civilization burns brightly in the ice-clad realm. Although answerable to the council, the council has never seen fit to interfere in their affairs, and the command is largely regarded as a token gesture these days. Around half the number are Finnar, a quarter taiga elves, and a quarter Saxa.

While metal armor is more durable than hide and leather, the armies prefer armor, and weapons, that can be easily replaced and manufactured locally. Metal also becomes brittle at cold temperatures, and in winter, the longest season, this can be a very real problem. Short bows and spears, both long and short, are the favored weapons, though those with money might carry a long sword or battle axe as well. In many instances these weapons are family heirlooms, more for show than use.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Cut off from the rest of the continent by the Frozen Forest to the west, the Sunken Realm to the south (and beyond both the Liche Lands of Old), and the near-permanently ice-choked Frozen Sea to the east, the Freeholds is the remotest and most isolated civilized realm in Rassilon. Despite this, it remains an important trading center.

For much of the year the Freeholds are completely cut off. With no port north of Trondavoe, ships wishing to make the journey at other times must penetrate the icy slush at the edge of the frozen water until they strike solid ice. Then ships must be hauled out of the water and riggers fitted. The procedure is lengthy and tiring, for cargos must be unloaded before the ships can be pulled onto the pack ice. Only in Hegmonan has the ice melted enough to allow ships to reach Iceport without installing ice riggers or battling thick ice, and even then the voyage is a perilous one.

The most profitable export is icewood. Much of the precious wood is destined for Trondavoe and Sandvik, from where it is transported to the forges and hearths of the frost dwarf cities. Each year more and more icewood leaves Sandvik for Al-Shirkuh, where its cooling fire is both a wonder and a luxury. Despite the quantities shipped south, few citizens are rich. Most of the profit is made on the final leg of the journey, far from the source of the icewood.

Whale, walrus, and reindeer bone, seal and reindeer hide, and polar bear furs are all secondary exports. Only the reindeer are harvested by the Freeholders—much of the other goods come from trade with the hrossvalar who live on the pack ice.

To say the Freeholds are self-sufficient in meat is rather an overstatement. It is true most citizens keep reindeer, and pygmy mammoths to a lesser degree, but meals, while hot and nourishing, are rarely large. Grain is imported for the making of bread and porridge, both staples. Vegetables are rare, and fruits beyond the price of common citizens.

Ale is imported from the Hearthlands, though its cost prohibits widespread drinking. Most Freeholders drink reindeer and mammoth milk, using an ancient Finnar recipe to ferment it. Thick and lumpy, it is very much an acquired taste.

Great bales of wool are sold in the markets. Quality is not important, since few citizens wear woolen clothes—furs and hide are the norm. Rather, the wool is used to insulate houses. This need has proven a boon for shepherds further south, for not all sheep and goat wool is suitable for the clothing industry.

Iron is much needed for the manufacture of weapons and logging axes. As a heavy good, it carries a high price. Much of it is destined for the forges operated by the cult of Ertha, the Freeholders' primary smiths and armorers.

Taxes are paid only by citizens living in the two towns—Icedale and Iceport. It has proven impossible to tax the nomads, and few tax collectors have the desire to travel between the smaller steads to collect a handful of coins. Taxation is set at a flat 25% of income. The monies earned go toward paying for the vast army and purchasing great quantities of provisions in case the trade ships cannot breech the ice.

ARCHITECTURE

In the towns, where the ice has been melted down to the bedrock, icewood longhouses are the norm. Despite being renowned for burning cold, icewood is actually a very good insulator against the cold. Longhouses tend to be quite large, though the family lives in only a small, cramped portion. Much of the space is given over to housing reindeer, the common livestock and primary source of milk, meat, and hide. The Finnar, whose herds remain outdoors in all weathers, find this pratice very peculiar, even comical.

The settlers along the river have opted for small, square houses perched above the permanently frozen ground on four, thick icewood supports. The walls and roof are thick felt padded with wool erected around a wooden frame designed to flex in the wind. A stone slab acts as the hearth. Conditions are more cramped even than in the longhouses.

This unusual construction method saves having to excavate multiple postholes through the thick ice, avoids having to clear away fresh deposits of snow, and provides security against many predators.

Animals are penned inside corrals made of ice blocks. The wall facing the prevailing wind, the north, is always curved to prevent it collapsing in strong gusts. It is also raised considerably higher, thus allowing animals to shelter behind it.

With living space small and compact to preserve heat, the Freeholders maintain only small hearths fuelled by dried dung and small nuggets of valuable charcoal. Warm clothes are essential in Icedale even indoors during the short summer.

Icedale has no true fortifications. An icewood palisade protects every community, for there are many terrible beasts in this land. Ice blocks, cut from the deepest, thickest ice or harvested from the Icewall, are used to make low walls and redoubts. Typically a community has a watchtower, from where sentries can spy approaching dangers and alert family and neighbors with a horn. During winter, when most monsters are active, the deep booming of horns echoes up and down the river valley with alarming regularity. Many are false alarms, illusions caused by swirling snow or tired eyes, but the citizens rarely grow complacent—those who do tend to meet a terrible fate.

MAJOR LOCALES

A land of windswept hills and featureless plains, Icedale has only a few locales of interest to adventuring heroes. Some of these are described below.

BLACK MAN HILL

On a south-facing slope of the northern Whitemound Hills, clearly visible from the Icedale River, is the outline of a gigantic humanoid figure. Unlike the chalk figures found further south, this one is burnt into the rock. No snow settles within 20 feet of the figure, and thus it is visible all year round.

A legend has risen claiming the figure was once a fire giant. During the Blizzard War he fought a lone battle against impossible odds. Eventually fatigued from his exertions and still battling overwhelming odds, he uttered a prayer to Kenaz. A raging inferno burst from his body, consuming the Hellfrost army to the last. When

the fire died down, all that remaining of the giant was his outline, seared forever into the living earth.

The story is certainly great entertainment during the long, dark winter nights, but there is no way to prove it is based on actual events—the figure does not radiate any magic (or heat, come to that), despite its ability to resist being smothered by snow, nor is it a sacred place.

Still, it has given rise to two beliefs. First, the giant's fire must be strengthened periodically. The crew of ships passing by the figure never fail to utter a quick prayer to Kenaz and launch a fire arrow at the giant. Second, wearing an amulet carved from the surrounding exposed rock, shaped into the form of the giant, and stained black wards off the predations of ice trolls and other wintry creatures.

BRAYWYCH

Population: 419
Ruler: Counselor Ashen Blade Nidbjorg Deorwulfsdohtor

Located on the eastern bank of Icedale River, some fifty miles north of Icedale, Braywych is populated by fierce hunters and brave warriors. Within the thick ice block bank that encircles the village stand a dozen immensely long wooden houses of Saxa design. Each building is divided into six compartments, each of which is home to an extended family. This communal living provides not only additional warmth, but extra security. The only other building, which has a similar appearance to the houses, contains a temple of Kenaz, communal stores, and the villagers' workshops.

During summer, the women make their way onto the frozen river, hack holes through the thinning ice, and spend the long days fishing. Meanwhile, the warriors and hunters, accompanied by the clerics of Kenaz, head north toward the Icewall in search of the meat most prized by the locals—that of Hellfrost dragons. Throughout the summer months they lay ambushes, baiting the traps with reindeers. If Kenaz is with them, they will return home dragging a dragon carcass. What meat, bone, teeth, and scales are not consumed locally are shipped south and traded in Icedale's market.

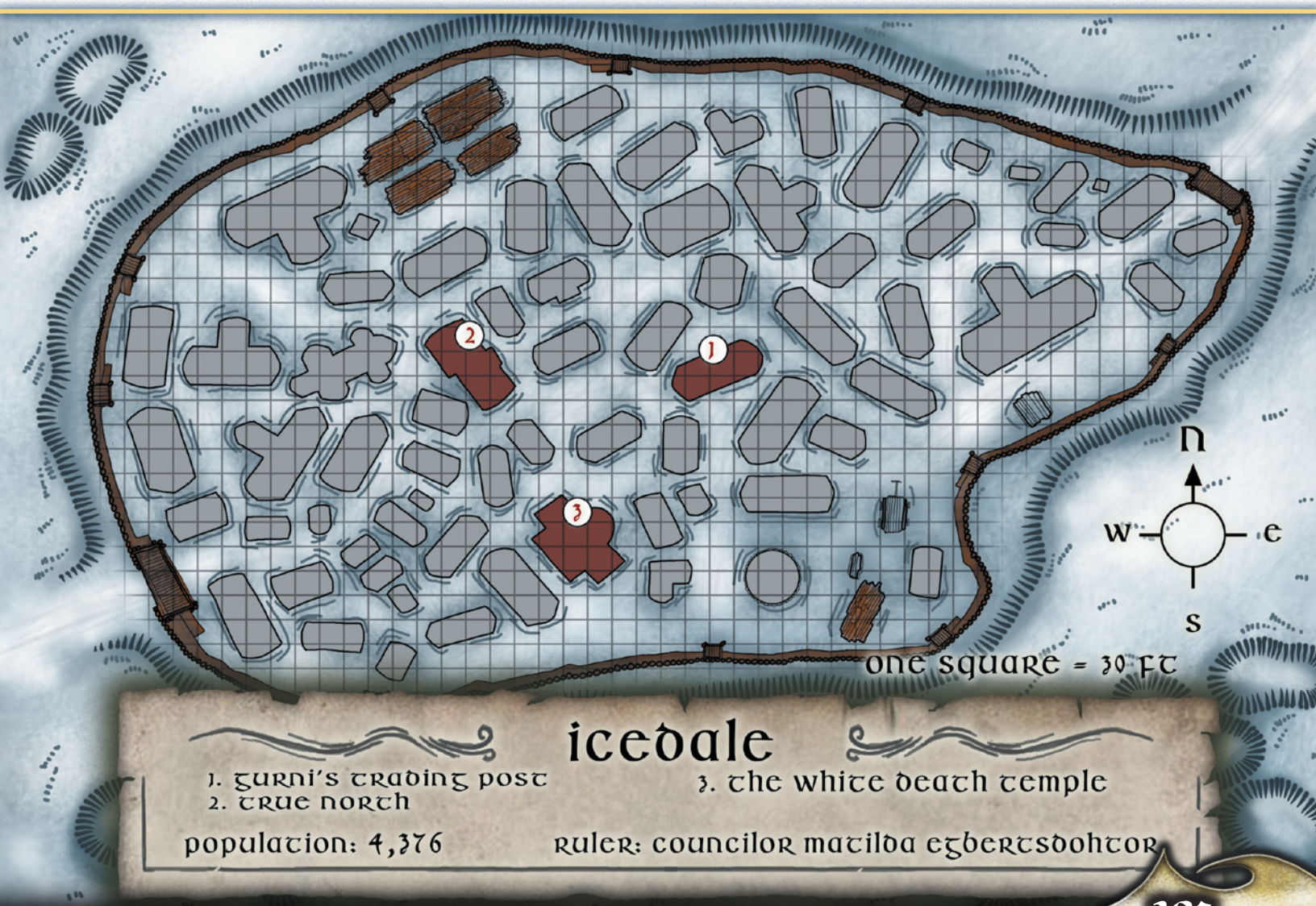
Wary of reprisals, the villagers stock an arsenal of alchemical devices manufactured by the cult of Kenaz. Arrows engraved with fiery *blast* and *smite* runes, cloaks with *energy immunity (coldfire)* charms sewn in, salves of *heat mask*, and sticks containing *summon elemental (fire and lava)* spells fill the temple's armory.

The village's ruler is always a member of Icedale's council. In the last 40 years, the ruler has always been a cleric of Kenaz, though no law prohibits others from standing for office.

ICEPORT

Any visitors' first port of call in the Freeholds is likely to be Iceport (unless they are mad enough to venture across land). Although technically a port, for much of the year it is only the sight of the small town, huddled behind its high palisade and illuminated by fierce fires that guide ships to safety, that reveals where the land begins and the sea ends.

Mammoth Stables: While reindeer are used to pull small sledges, heavier loads require pygmy mammoths. Icefoot, a frostborn cleric of Skaði, minor goddess of mammoths, raises, trains, and rents or sells the creatures to businesses and adventuring parties



heading inland. Conditions are that they do not eat or skin their mount, even if it dies of natural causes, and ensure its continuing health. He keeps a small number of combat trained mammoths, but only rents or sells these to proven warriors, such as clerics of Tiw or Hearth Knights. His brother, Snowmane, operates a similar business in Icedale. Rented mammoths may be returned to either business.

The Mariners' Hearth: This longhouse is divided into a number of small rooms, each just large enough to accommodate the crew of a typical trading ship. The rooms are unfurnished but have decent-sized hearths. Visiting ship crews may stay here for free, though they must bring their own bedding and provisions. A small side room serves as a shrine of Neorthe. The only cleric, Navigator Henrik Gunthorsunu, serves the spiritual needs of visitors and is also a collector of gossip.

LAIR OF THE ICE TROLL LORD

Trolls are widely regarded as cunning yet stupid creatures. Yet in both the Magocracy and Unclaimed Lands there are supposed troll kings inhabiting deadly lairs. In the Freeholds, a similar tale is told of an ice troll king.

By all accounts the monstrous fiend, whose size ranges from a mere eight feet to thrice that, depending on who is telling the story, lives in the central Troll Hills. It is said he commands all the ice trolls in the region, not to mention a large number of goblin tribes. According to some skalds' poems he is not only intelligent, being capable of speaking several languages, but is also a highly accomplished practitioner of hrimwisardry. He is also attributed with skin as hard as black ice, claws that can carve through stone, freezing breath, or some combination of the above. But such fanciful additions are plentiful in tales designed to scare audiences, and none can say what powers, if any, the fabled king may possess.

His lair is said to be a network of caves and tunnels running beneath the snow-covered hills. Frequent searches by the White Rangers and visiting Hearth Knights have uncovered plenty of caves inhabited by trolls, but none match the legendary ice troll king's lair.

THE RUNE STONE CIRCLE

Located atop an exposed peak in the Whitemound Hills stands a circle of weather granite menhirs. Faded runes of indeterminable age adorn the gray stones, though by whose hand they were carved none can say.

While the runes have been deciphered as warnings through speak language spells, the writing system has not been fully identified, nor has it appeared elsewhere. It has some similarities to Heligi, but appears cruder and uses different syntax. The few outside scholars who know of the stones deduce that the Heligi's primitive ancestors raised the stones in ages past, but the warnings are too vague to allow anything beyond speculation on why they carved them in so desolate a place. Perhaps, they muse, they are simply tribal boundary markers, or designate a former holy site, the warnings simply telling other tribes not to trespass. The Finnar, whose ancestors have been visiting the hills for millennia, know of the rune stones, but rarely come here. They claim the place is cursed, though they can give no reason for saying so except that the site has always been labeled such. As is typical of the Finnar, they do not engaged in idle speculation about things they do not fully understand.

No snow falls within the stone circle, nor does ice coat the exposed rock, though the air is no warmer than elsewhere in the frigid realm. That some strange magic is at work is undeniable, though the stones radiate no enchantment discernible by detect arcana spells.

By a mixture of chance and prudence, no explorer has ventured here during nights of the Deorcmonan. When the sun sets, the ground inside the circle melts away to reveal a spiral staircase descending down into utter darkness. When the sun rises, the portal silently seals, leaving those within trapped until the opening conditions are met again. Any who enter on the last night of the Deorcmonan will be trapped for 28 days.

WUDUSTOKE

Population: 312
Ruler: Councilor Cuthwyn Fragarsdohtor

The village of Wudustoke sits on the northern bank of the Icedale River at its most northerly point. Originally a small collection of steads whose inhabitants kept reindeer and traded a little with the Finnar tribes who hunted the nearby hills, it has grown prosperous thanks to the business acumen of Profiteer Cuthwyn Fragarsdohtor.

The young priestess of Var moved here ten years ago, seeing the frozen wastes as a business challenge. She believed that if a cleric of Var could turn a healthy profit here, she could turn one anywhere. She had intended to prove her point and move back to warmer climes (she hails from Nordmark), but she has fallen in love with the landscape and the people.

Wudustoke serves as the communal market for the middle portion of the river communities and the Finnar tribes. From late spring to early fall, the main trading season, the population of the small trading community trebles. Since neither the Finnar nor the riverside settlements have much need for coinage, most trade is handled by barter. This makes the cleric's ledgers a nightmare of guesstimates and stock levels rather than exact tallies.

Trade has been such that the village is now surrounded by a stout icewood palisade and deep ditch to protect it against bandits and marauding beasts—lying at the foot of the Whitemound Hills makes it a juicy target for intelligent creatures. A garrison of 20 full-time soldiers paid for out of the profits is stationed here, along with Cuthwyn's apprentice, a bemused and overly eager young paladin of Var who has yet to fully grasp the concept of communal property. Several times he has dragged thieves" before his mistress, only to be told to let them go unpunished.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following NPC may cross the heroes' path at some point during their exploration of the Freeholds.

ASHEN BLADE BRETWALDA FIRESTORM

A fanatic through and through, Ashen Blade Bretwalda holds that all taiga elves, frost dwarves, and frostborn are the spawn of Thrym, and all hrimwisards are servants of the god of winter. Unfortunately, the majority of citizens does not share his views. Being less susceptible to cold, frostborn use less fuel than other families and are better suited to outdoor work, making them ideal loggers.

Before he was outlawed (for ordering a small hard core number of Kenaz worshippers to attack frostborn), he began preaching against the harvesting of icewood, claiming that burning it fuelled the endless winter and gave power to Thrym. Naturally, he blamed the frost dwarves for this act, though he went to far as to label all those who relied on the icewood trade as pawns of a secret dwarven conspiracy to destroy the true civilized races.

Since his exile, Bretwalda and his small but loyal band have set about a campaign of terror and destruction against the loggers and the trade ships carrying the precious cargo to Iceport. Ironically, the madman, for such he is, destroys the icewood with fiery spells. He moralizes this by claiming that divine fire gifted him by Kenaz destroys the wood without empowering Thrym.

The council, backed by the Finnar and taiga elf councilors, recently issued a unanimous decree outlawing him from the whole of the Freeholds. This sentence makes it legal for him to be slain in Icedale without his shamed family or the cult of Kenaz being able to seek compensation. Just to make sure, the council recently found him guilty of distributing icewood supplies and attacks. A bounty of 3,000 gold scields has been put on his head, dead or alive, with a strong emphasis on the former. Despite these punishments (aiding an outlaw is itself punishable by outlawry), he has eluded capture. Many suspect he has accomplices, or at least supporters, in the communities along the frozen river, where the icewood industry is far less important to survival and frostborn are virtually nonexistent.

Isles of the Seareavers

Pirates have gone by many names over the centuries, but their goals and motives remain the same. The greatest threat to maritime trade in the modern age is the Seareavers, a motley brotherhood of sea-raiders bound by a loose code and common faith. They are greatly feared, and rightfully so, for they are true wolves of the sea.

Rules of the Realm

These setting rules apply in the Seareaver Isles.

* **All Are Equal:** The only titles the reavers acknowledge are those of their Reaver-Captains, clerics of Vegtam allied with them, and all clerics of Neorthe. The Charisma bonus from the Noble Edge does not apply when dealing with the seareavers on their own turf unless the hero fills one of the criteria above.

* **Two Gods, One Name:** The name Bolverk is applied both to the god of the seareavers and the god of cattle raiding. The former isn't a true god, at all—a Reaver-General created him to amalgamate the reavers' core faiths under one name to prevent inter-cult arguments. The Reaver-General had no clue about the real cult of Bolverk, picking the name purely because it sounded interesting. Nowhere else in Rassilon is the name Bolverk associated with the ocean. Followers of the true Bolverk find the reavers' use of the name highly offensive.

Social Hierarchy

Birthright means nothing in the Isles, and titles are not automatically passed from parent to child. The Reavers recognize only two "noble" titles, Reaver-General, and Reaver-Captain, and four other social strata—Reaver-Lieutenant, cleric, Seareaver, and everyone else.

The Reaver-General, the leader of the Seareavers, achieves his position based purely on his raiding profits over the course of a year. While a certain amount of luck plays its part, acquiring spoils relies more on good leadership, the ability to identify a ship carrying rich cargo, and tactical savvy. The Reaver-General can be removed from power only at the annual tally count or in the time-honored tradition of assassination.

Murdering the Reaver-General does not entitle his assassin to take his place, nor does the second richest Reaver-Captain in the previous year get elevated. Instead, an interim council made of the four high priests temporarily governs. Their first act is to declare a new election. All plunder gained in the next three months is tallied and a new Reaver-General enthroned.

The profits used to elect a new leader are pre-expenditure. Thus, those who garner great quantities of plunder can afford to hire better crews or build new ships, helping to ensure their income remains high and boosting their chances of promotion. Those who fare poorly are usually destined to remain impoverished. Plundered cargos are priced on their actual sale price, not their market value. Thus, many Reaver-Captains actually have good relations with unscrupulous merchants, the sort who ask no questions as to a cargo's origins. Typically, such goods are sold on for around 25% of their true value.

Becoming a Reaver-Captain requires more than just turning up in Bloodport with a ship of scurvy pirates and asking to join the brotherhood. Depending on the incumbent Reaver-General, the aspiring pirate may be required to hand over all his current wealth and that for the next year, thus ensuring he cannot rise to power too soon, undertake a mission set by the ruler, or fight the Reaver-General's champion in a battle to the death. Even then, he must swear oath of worship Bolverk in place of all other gods, though clerics may be excused this vow. Of course, a Reaver-Captain must actually be the captain of a ship.

Should a Reaver-Captain fall in battle or to the blade of one of his crew, or retire, the crew elects a new captain from among their number. As an existing member of the brotherhood, his position needs only token approval by the Reaver-General.

Reaver-Lieutenants captain a ship, but do so under the authority of a Reaver-Captain. In order to achieve full captaincy they must either be gifted a vessel, a rare occurrence, save enough from their share of the spoils to purchase a ship, or arrange the murder of their superior and be elected as his replacement.

Despite all this talk of mutiny and murder, it should be noted that it is an usual event. The Seareavers may be bloodthirsty, brutal curs, but piracy is not an easy life, and despite the rewards it offers it is not without risk of death from enemy action or the whims of Neorthe and Thunor. A crew will not elect a captain they judge to be a poor tactician and mariner, and unsuitable candidates who murder a respected captain can expect to die a most unpleasant death.

Clerics of "Bolverk" who are not Reaver-Captains or Lieutenants sit in the next social tier. They are accorded great respect by dint of their calling but have no special privileges. Ranking below them are priests and paladins of other faiths.

Next come the Seareavers, the vicious marauders who crew the pirate ships. While they may have titles relating to their role aboard a ship, such as steersman or master of oars, they are counted as being equal to their peers. That said, it takes a brave common pirate to call a steersman an equal to his face.

Lastly there are the others, those who aid the Seareavers but who do not fit into one of the higher strata. Everybody from master carpenters to lowly dung collectors is heaped together, though certain occupations earn greater rewards than others.

It is important to note that Seareavers care little for gender or race. Just under a tenth of the population is made up of orcs and goblins, though they very rarely mix with other Seareavers. While all Seareavers are capable of acts of barbarity, the orcs are the worst of the bunch, for they are devout followers of Dargar first and foremost.

Education

The Seareavers don't put much faith in formal education. Children are expected to help out almost as soon as they can walk. Most start simply by fetching and carrying, whether that be nails for a carpenter or food to hungry crews. As they age they work their way up to maintaining weapons and armor, scraping the hulls, and other onerous tasks. Maritime skills are hammered home from an early age, as is instruction in the faith of Bolverk.

Typically, those who wish to become Seareavers first take to the seas around the age of 12. By the age of adulthood (14, as in most other realms) they will either be competent pirates or dead from a lack of ability.

Religion

The religion of the Seareavers is unique to their islands. Although they claim to worship a single god, known as Bolverk, it is not a true deity. Rather, it combines the aspects of Neorthe, Nauthiz, Thunor, and Dargar under a single banner, thus removing inter-faith power struggles and machinations.

Since he is merely a name, Bolverk grants his priests no spells. While it appears to be a single, unified faith, the cult is divided into four sects, each honoring one of the four major gods as an aspect of Bolverk. Although the sects are not equal in terms of the number of priests or worshippers (Neorthe has the greatest number of each), they are treated equally in terms of responsibility and privileges. Each sect has a single high priest who serves as an advisor to the Reaver-General.

Although cult of Bolverk has an animosity toward followers of Vegtam, the god of marines and a staunch opponent of piracy, clerics of the faith do exist among the Seareavers. Many are renegades, sinners who not only condone piracy but actively participate. Others retain their faith by acting as land-based instructors or providing defensive capabilities. While they can avoid the sin of committing piracy, they cannot escape condoning it. Hence, they spend a great deal of time without access to their miracles. Needless to say, such traitors to the faith are harshly punished should they fall into the hands of the traditional cult.

MILITARY

Collectively, the Seareavers can muster around 2,500 pirates and 55 ships. Although the quantity of ships makes them the largest naval force currently in existence, most of the vessels are knarrs, small, but cheap to build and capable of carrying a decent amount of plunder. One reason they remain popular is their low draft, which enables them not only to sail up rivers in search of prey but also to be harbored in confined coves, where larger warships cannot reach them. The wealthier Reaver-Captains command drakkars as their flagships. The incumbent Reaver-Captain has the pirates' only snekke.

Fortunately for the citizens of Rassilon, there is little cooperation between the Reaver-Captains, and even the Reaver-General lacks the authority to muster the entire fleet for a single raid. The only time cooperation occurs is when the Isles are threatened—their houses may not be much, but the Isles are home.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The only trade the Seareavers regularly engage in is stealing what they need from vessels or coastal communities and selling stolen cargos to unscrupulous merchants. Every Reaver-Captain has developed a personal network of contacts, and names are jealously guarded. More than one dispute has broken out over accusations of poaching a contact. The great majority of these merchants are found on Alantaris Isle and in the Magocracy, though some Reavers have contacts as far away as Aspiria, Chalcis, and Freetown.

Isles of Seareavers



Population: 3,356 (50% Anari, 30% Saxa, 12% frostborn, 8% orcs and goblins)
Ruler: Reaver-General Odbert Foultongue
Religion: Neorthe, Nauthiz, Thunor, Dargar
Imports: None (they take what they want)
Exports: None



Being a Seareaver's contact does not grant one any immunity from being plundered, even by one's supposed ally. It does, at least, allow the merchant chance to buy back his cargo for resale rather than writing the entire consignment off as a loss.

The Seareavers frequently take captives. Some of these will be forced to fight to the death against pirates or wild animals for the amusement of their captors and some will end up sacrificed to Bolverk's Dargar aspect. Most though, are sold to slavers in Freetown.

Wealthier Reaver-Captains and their followers have a relatively high standard of living. They may not live in huge houses or enjoy many luxuries, but they do not want for the basics. What they cannot steal they can afford to buy through legitimate channels or from other captains. Those who cannot find rich pickings are a lowly bunch, half-starved, poorly dressed, and lacking even basic utensils a thrall could expect to use.

Unlike conventional navies, Seareavers do not have regular wages. Traditionally, after the tax has been paid the captain takes three shares of any plunder. Each crewman is gifted one or two shares, depending on experience and role. The ship is awarded ten shares, the money going toward vital supplies and repairs.

The only tax the Seareavers pay is the 10% cut that goes to the Reaver-General. Most voluntarily tithe to Bolverk's four sects, but they are under no obligation to do so.

ARCHITECTURE

Although the three major islands all boast forests, timber is carefully rationed. By law, each Reaver-Captain is assigned a quantity of timber each year based on the size of the community he governs. Additional timber may be purchased from the Reaver-General, but the costs are prohibitive. The law was brought in when a former Reaver-General had the foresight to realize that intensive lumbering would delete a finite and crucial resource.

Because of the rationing, most Seareavers live in large communal houses (similar to Saxa longhouses) built of driftwood, plundered cargos of timber, or salvaged ships. Fortunately, the profusion of skilled carpenters means these structures are sound, if not appealing to the eye or lavishly furnished. While there are no quarries, some Seareavers build low-ceilinged, drystone houses out of natural rocks.

Much of the timber ration is allocated to repairing ships. The mountainous islands are ideal for goats, and dried dung is the common fuel. Because timber allotments that are not used are subtracted from the next year's allocation, wood is only burned in the weeks before the new allotments are issued.

Few settlements bother erecting fortifications. The craggy cliffs are a natural barrier to invaders, and most settlements can be reached only by narrow paths or steps cut into the rock face. Bloodport, which actually stands behind a shingle beach, is the notable exception.

Not every community bothers to erect houses. The hills and mountains are dotted with caves, many of which are old mine workings. As well as shelter, they offer an added layer of protection from rivals. Living in a cave may not be comfortable, but it saves on wood.

MAJOR LOCALES

Bloodport is the largest settlement in the Isles and the nearest thing to a capital. Each Reaver-Captain rules his own community, made up of his crew, craftsmen, and hangers-on, and answers only to the Reaver-General. Although it is forbidden to draw weapons in the capital, one enters the domain of a Reaver-Captain at one's own risk. Not even the Reaver-General is accorded any special protection by law in another settlement.

The remaining settlements, which are spread over the three largest islands, each have between 40 and 150 inhabitants. Of these, around 75% are Seareavers. Around half the others are slaves, brought here in chains to serve the pirates.

BLOODPORT

The Isles' capital is a small village seated within a strong wooden palisade. A single watchtower rises high over the main gate, providing a commanding view of the sea-lanes leading to the beach.

The Arena: Violence and bloodshed is part of Seareaver culture. The arena, which is nothing more than a deep pit with iron spikes protruding from the walls, serves as the entertainment center for the pirates. Here, captives are forced to fight to the death against Seareavers who have broken the brotherhood's code, wild animals, or each other for the amusement of their captors. Captives who survive can earn a limited form of freedom. Reaver-Captains have the right to purchase pit fighters from the Reaver-General. Although they remain slaves, they are trained and well fed.

Every year, once the election of a new Reaver-General is over, a bloody contest is held in the arena. Each captain must supply one pit-fighter. Bouts to the death are held over a week until a single victor emerges. His captain is rewarded with an increased timber allotment and spoils from the Reaver-General's personal treasury.

Although the Reaver-General prefers to settle disputes between his captains through diplomacy (good captains are hard to come by), parties not happy with his ruling may call for settlement by combat. Such combats are always fought to the death—leaving defeated pirates alive can lead to feuding.

Artillery Tower: The approach to Bloodport requires a ship to navigate a narrow channel between submerged rocks. Situated on a small rocky outcropping just to the left of the channel is a drystone tower with a flat top. Positioned here are two ballistas and a small catapult. Rather than firing rocks, the catapult launches flaming barrels of oil and pitch.

Temple of Bolverk: Bolverk's only temple stands in Bloodport (smaller communities only have shrines). It takes the form of a circular main hall with four rectangular wings. The central hall is the main temple, a place of joint worship dedicated to the Seareavers' god. Each wing houses shrines to one of the god's aspects, as well as living quarters for the clergy.

TOMB OF THE SEA LORDS

Protruding from the western cliffs of the largest island is a small part of a colossal stone longship. Its sea dragon-headed prow looms high over the water, glaring menacingly across the open water, defying mariners to venture closer.

No reliable investigation has ever been conducted into the ship and its age remains unknown. Vague written records referring to an island inhabited by piratical giants have been unearthed in the Magocracy, but no one can guarantee they refer to this location.

The best records exist in the form of fragmentary poems and songs. While there are many variations, the common theme involves a sea-raiding giant whose magical ship could sail through living rock. This enabled him not only to sail far inland, but also to hide his vessel inside an island, thus obscuring it from his enemies. One fanciful notion tied to this tale is the rivers of the southern Hearthlands that flow into the sea are the remnants of the paths cut by the gigantic ship's keel.

Regardless of the details, the saga always ends with the giant being ambushed as he sailed his ship out of his island lair and the vessel turned to stone. Some stories attribute this feat to a powerful wizard, while others place the deed in the hands of a priest.

At first glimpse this story is not as foolish as it sounds, for the stonework of the ship blends so seamlessly with the living rock that it does indeed appear to be a moment captured in time, the instant the prow of a vast ship emerged from within the island.

Closer inspection reveals the ship is carved from stone blocks. No writings adorn the figure, and the rock has withstood the pounding of the sea with little weathering, making it impossible to accurately date the edifice.

Where the keep emerges from the waterline is a dark slit, an artificial opening cut through the ship into the interior of the island large enough to take a galley with masts raised. Beyond is a small tunnel, which opens out into a natural cavern. Artificial stone platforms line three sides of the cavern, rising out of the water on

stone arches carved to resemble the humps of a sea dragon. The platforms form a squared "U" that acts as a berth for ships. Beyond are stairs leading to tunnels that cut deeper into the interior.

The tunnels extend for hundreds of yards, branching off into burial chambers. On stone biers carved to resemble longships lie the skeletal and withered remains of ancient lords. Those nearest the harbor have been robbed of their finery, but in the deeper tombs the dead lie undisturbed, their gold jewelry untarnished by the passage of time. As with the colossal ship, there are no inscriptions to help identify from which culture these hoary remains hailed. *Insight* spells have revealed only vague images of marauding kings standing on the prow of warships. The remains are human-sized, which indicates whoever lies here postdates the dwarven occupation and the sundering of the former landmass.

No small expense was spared on the tombs, for the corridors are worked with expert craftsmanship, the walls painstakingly carved to resemble the scales of sea dragons. No doors exist, nor does it appear any were ever installed. All the entrances to side corridors and chambers are marked by archways carved in the form of two sea dragons, their heads intertwined at the top of the arch.

No one has explored more than a small fraction of the tomb complex. The Seareavers have attempted to plunder the deeper tombs more than once, but all their raiding parties failed to return. They believe the site is haunted by the shades of the dead sea lords. In that they are not wrong, for numerous ghosts and hagbuis lurk in the darkness.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Detailed below are several personalities the heroes may encounter both on and off the Isles.

REAVER-CAPTAIN HILDA RED-TOOTH

One of only a handful of female Reaver-Captains, Hilda is unusual in that she is a water elementalist and a former prisoner. Captured during a raid on the Magocracy a decade ago, she endured brutal torture at the hands of her captors for the best part of two years. Her mind finally shattered, and in a fit of fury worthy of a paladin of Dargar she butchered a dozen Seareavers before being subdued. Rather than put her to death, Odbert, in his first year as Reaver-General, offered her the position as one of his lieutenants. She served him for three years before earning the position of a Reaver-Captain after capturing an Alantaris Isle warship during an audacious raid into the main harbor. Many men have underestimated Hilda, for while she has the appearance of a beautiful woman, she has the heart and morals of an orc.

Her all female crew, known locally as Dargar's Valkyries, are among the most bloodthirsty pirates in the Isles. Her warship, a drakkar, is painted blood red.

REAVER-CAPTAIN OSRIC BLOODAXE

Widely regarded as the second best captain after the Reaver-General, Osric is a brutal thug. He drives his crew hard but rewards them well for success. Tradition on his ship demands that he be the first to board an enemy vessel, and any man who dares seek glory by defying his orders is offered to Dargar.

Osric is outspoken in his hatred of orcs. The war between Orcmark and Vestmark is killing maritime trade between the Crystalflow Confederacy and the western realms, and orc pirates are competing with the Seareavers. While he has no love to Vestmark, he believes that if the orcs are ever victorious they will dominate the southern ocean, threatening Seareaver activities.

To that end, he is trying to convince Reaver-General Odbert and his peers to unite the Seareavers and make a pact with Vestmark, effectively turning the pirates into a naval mercenary force.

Osric's most fierce critic is Reaver-Captain Chillfire. The frostborn pirate chief believes the Seareavers should side with the orcs, with whom they have more in common due to shared worship of Dargar. It is his opinion that together the Reavers and orcs can dominate the southern ocean, and perhaps carve out new kingdoms.

While Odbert is weighing up the options, many of Osric's fellow captains are set against either idea, seeing unification as a loss of personal power and a treaty with the orcs as a sign of weakness.

THE ANCIENT MARINER

Every Seareaver knows at least one story concerning the Ancient Mariner, and most recall their parents and grandparents speaking of him. Best estimates put his age at around 150, though he appears to be a century younger. By his appearance, he is of Anari stock, but this has never been confirmed, for the Mariner does not speak of his past.

Most believe he is either blessed or cursed by the gods. One story says that he stole treasure from Neorthe. His punishment was to walk the mortal world until he returns every last gold scield. Another says that he possesses a relic unearthed in the dwarven ruins that extends his life. Some claim he is a paladin of Neorthe, so devout a servant that he continues to watch over the oceans long after his life should have ended. A few believe he is the sole survivor of a shipwreck, unable to find peace until he finds the sunken remains of his vessel, whereupon he can join his crew mates in their watery graves. It is certainly true he wields great magical power, though he appears to be neither a cleric nor a water elementalist.

The Mariner lives in a crude hut on the bluffs overlooking Bloodport. He answers to no master, and no Reaver-General has dared try to impose authority over him since the rule of Hedwig Black-Sail, who mysteriously drowned during a feast after threatening the Mariner.

When the Mariner comes to town he is accorded a healthy mix of respect and fear. On rare occasions he hires a Reaver-Captain to transport him off the island. He pays in gold coins dating from before the Blizzard War. No captain who has ferried the Mariner will speak of the voyage, and most pale when the subject is raised.

WHY COME HERE?

The Seareavers are vicious pirates renowned for their relentless fury and bloodthirsty nature. The Isles themselves lie far from common trade routes, and there is nothing beyond them but empty ocean until, eventually, one reaches strange shores of which skalds and scholars know nothing. Given the islands' remote location and the locals' belligerent nature, what can entice the heroes to set sail to this dangerous realm?

* Orders. While almost any character beholden to an individual or organization *could* be ordered to the Isles, it is extremely unlikely any will on a regular bases. Clerics of Neorthe might be ordered to destroy the heretical branch of the cult, while those of Var maybe told to retrieve stolen cargos or mete out justice, but such orders are likely to be purely scenario driven, rather than being standing orders. The Seareavers have weathered attempts to destroy them for centuries, and a small band of heroes, no matter how proficient, is unlikely to cause much lasting damage.

* Glory. The reputation of the Seareavers is known across the coastal communities of the western continent as far north as Jotungraef. Deliberately taken violence to them is guaranteed to earn recognition and fame, if the characters can survive long enough to tell their story.

* Hired. The most likely reason the party will have for visiting is because someone has hired them. Merchants whose ships have fallen prey to the Seareavers might hire adventurers to steal back their cargo or punish the pirates, as might the cult of Var. A patron might wish a family member or close friend liberated from the slave pens before he is killed or vanishes into a life of slavery. The adventurers might be offered work escorting a Lorekeeper or cleric of Hoenir to the islands so he can explore the ruins and record them for posterity.

* Treasure. That a culture once inhabited the isles is clearly evident from the ruins that dot the landscape. Rumors that relic-creating dwarves might once have dwelt here is a powerful lure for treasure hunters. Audacious heroes may fancy their luck at relieving the Reaver-General of some of his vast fortune.

LAKELAND

Despite being held in the grip of winter all year round, Lakeland has a small but thriving population. Dour and taciturn, the hardy Lakelanders survive by hunting and fishing. Every day is a struggle for survival, yet the independently minded denizens would have it no other way. Here a man lives by his skills and dies by his ignorance.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Lakeland.

* **Equipment:** Lakelanders do not produce metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they sometimes trade for them. The price for metal items in Lakeland, when they can be found, is increased five fold. When trying to sell the spoils of their adventures, the heroes' roll to find a buyer suffers a –4 penalty unless the heroes are in one of the three towns, in which case the penalty is –2. The gathering of the Master Hunters, an annual event, has no penalty, but given the short duration of these meetings only one Streetwise roll is possible.

* **Noble Edge:** The only "nobles" in Lakeland are the Master Hunters. Thus, no native character can take the Noble Edge to represent a noble title. Characters who become a Master Hunter gain +2 Charisma so long as they hold the post, but no other benefits.

* **Trading:** Folk in Lakeland have no need for coins. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in Lakeland. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

* **Weather:** The northern half of Lakeland is in the High Winterlands, and the southern portion is in the Low Winterlands.

TWO LANDS IN ONE

Almost half the population is Finnar nomads. Although predominantly found in the north, they migrate to the milder (by their standards) southern stretches during winter, crossing the frozen lake with their reindeer herds. While they are counted in the land's total population, they are largely not part of mainstream society. They trade with the settled inhabitants regularly, sometimes intermarry, and have agreed to aid communities under attack, but they maintain their ancient lifestyle. As such, this work concentrates on the settled folk of the realm. Details regarding the Finnar can be found in The Unclaimed Lands entry.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Lakeland society places no trust in noble titles or wealth. Men and women are treated as equals and judged on what they provide for the community, not what they possess.

At the top of the social order are the Master Hunters. Each community, no matter whether it boasts thousands of inhabitants or just dozens, has a single Master Hunter. Their people elect them based on their hunting prowess, survival skills, knowledge of prey animals and their annual migrations, and general wisdom..

The title confers no political or legislative power. They govern by advising their kith and kin when and how many animals to hunt, what quantity of goods should be traded and what set aside, when to prepare for storms, and so on, and lead only those who wish to follow their advice. Good Master Hunters speak to their people only a handful of times a year. The bad ones interfere more regularly, but they rarely remain in office for long. As elected advisors, they can be removed from office by a simple popular vote.

Master Hunters are expected to lead the "army" in battle. Master Hunters are responsible for settling local disputes, finding a solution to disputes involving other communities, keep Ullr happy, ensure there is sufficient winter stores set aside, and so on. In return, they are accorded great respect and can expect many gifts when things go well. After each hunter, regardless of whether or not he was involved, the Master Hunter is offered the best cut of meat. Traditionally, he declines it in favor of the hunter who provided the meal. The hunter is then expected to offer the portion to Ullr as thanks.

Technically, society below the Master Hunters is one of equals. In truth, clerics of Ullr and hunters are accorded more respect than others. Unlike elsewhere, simply being a priest of a god other than Ullr or a wizard warrants no special treatment. A cleric may be closer to his god than the laity and wield miraculous powers, but that is a personal bond between the individual and his god. Unless he uses his powers to help his community, he has no innate worth.

Most elders, those too advanced in years to actively hunt or pursue a trade, act as advisors to the Master Hunter. They may be incapable of physically aiding their community, as they did in their youth, but their knowledge and wisdom is invaluable.

Males and females divide themselves not based on what they are better at, but what they are worst at. Most men, for instance, readily accept that they are poor homekeepers and healers in comparison to females. After all, Eira, mother of life, gifted women with the power to create new life, not men. By comparison, many women consider themselves poorer hunters because men are physically stronger and more aggressive. That said, no man would think twice of hunting alongside a female, nor electing one to the position of Master Hunter.

The same principal applies to race. Frostborn, so long as they do not worship Thrym and contribute, are not only accepted here, but welcomed. There remains some discrimination, for few Saxa or Anari wish to breed with them, but they are never second-class citizens.

EDUCATION

Education in Lakeland is centered on survival and is the responsibility of the entire community. In the unforgiving realm, play and instruction go hand in hand.

As soon as children can talk they are taught the ways of the aurochs, mammoths, and hares. As they grow older, they learn to recognize animal prints and spoor, how to detect coming storms and cold snaps, how to build shelters and traps, how to manufacture arrows, skin animals, and so on. Education is a mixture of practical and verbal, though the latter takes the form of tales passed down the generations, not formal lectures.

Cultural training, such as the old songs and prayers of one's ancestors, the history and laws of Lakeland (the latter is virtually identical to Ullr's sins), the relationship between families and communities, and the ways of the gods is hammered home just as much as how to hunt and survive. Children are taught to share, but never at the expense of leaving oneself short—charity is a virtuous trait, but not when it endangers your life.

Children are not mollycoddled or unduly protected—making mistakes is an essential part of learning. It is a rare child who has



lakeland

Population: 14,649 (45% Finnar, 30% Saxa, 20% frostborn, 5% Anari)
Ruler: Council
Religion: Ullr, Neorthe, Thunor
Imports: Ale, grain, vegetables
Exports: Furs, ivory, meat

not suffered frostbite or injury as a result of his learning experiences. From the age of ten they are expected to help defend the community with bow and arrow (though they may not hunt with the adults) or by leading the elderly and infirm to safety.

Adulthood comes around the age of 14. In order to be accepted as an adult, the child must prove his worth by demonstrating his skills. Whether hunter or dung collector, cleric or potter, the child must demonstrate that he can help provide for his community. Until he does, he remains a child.

Training in other topics, such as military strategy, languages, and the geography, lores, history, and customs of other lands is almost unheard of, for such topics serve little practical use.

While children learn the language of their parents first, the second most common tongue is Finnar. Trader was unspoken until recently, and is still only spoken in the larger communities that must deal with the outside world.

RELIGION

While many gods are worshipped in Lakeland, three are considered more important above all others.

Hunting is the main industry and means of food production in the frozen realm. It is little surprise then that Ullr is the chief deity. Every settlement, no matter how small, has a makeshift shrine devoted to the god. Ceremonies are honored with great reverence and solemnity. As with the Finnar, worship of Ullr and daily life are one and the same. Thus, it is a rare day that citizens do not offer up a prayer to Ullr. Lakelanders are not by nature aggressive, though they are determined defenders, and favor the bow above all other weapons. Ullr has replaced Tiw as god of war.

Fishing is another form of hunting, tthough Neorthe governs this. In the Lakelander's mythology, he is the son of Ullr by Eostre Animalmother, and the patron deity of Serpent Lake. While the settled inhabitants are skilled at ice fishing, they prefer to make use of boats and nets in the short summer, when the center of the lake is free of ice. Only in winter, when this is impossible, do they fish near the shore.

Lakelanders came to the shores of Serpent Lake partly to profit from the wildlife, and partly to escape persecution in their homelands and the feudal system. While they are guided by the Master Hunters, men and women wise in the ways of the great herds that sustain life, they dislike authority and oppressive rules. Thunor serves as focus for these beliefs, as well as being the god of the wind.

Kenaz and Sigel have adherents, but Lakelanders are pragmatic folk and see little point in wasting energy praying to gods who have no power this far north. As such, Thunor takes their role of adversary of Thrym—so long as the summer winds blow and warm the land, Thunor is seen to be answering their supplications.

With no local agriculture of any note, Eostre Plantmother has few worshippers. Lakelanders do import vegetables, and thus offer prayers of thanks when the trade caravans arrive loaded with stores of hardy root vegetables. Eira, a minor goddess more associated with folk medicine and herbalists than true magical healing, has a small community of worshippers on the southern shore. She is also the patron of healing herbs.

Since the hunters must travel great distance, as must the fishermen in summer, Freo receives a lot of praise. However, his cult has been rolled into those of Ullr and Neorthe, at least as far as the laity goes. Only when someone must travel for reasons other than providing food is his name invoked separately.

Metalworking, while practiced, is a cottage industry. Ertha and Kenaz tend to receive only limited devotion. Worship of Hoenir is unheard of, for Ullr and Neorthe teach the only skills a hunter needs to know, while Hothar's name is invoked only when oaths are being sworn.

Rigr is another deity who receives a lot of attention, but most often in conjunction with Ullr. Many settlements, even isolated steads, have a watchtower, on which Rigr's holy symbol is engraved.

Nauthiz and the Unknowable One have virtually no worshippers, even in passing. Lakelanders do not believe in luck, only in being prepared, and the hard life they lead leaves little time for humor or teaching through tricks. Unfortunately, the latter only makes clerics of the Unknowable One more determined to show the citizens the error of their ways.

Like many realms with a small and scattered population (Lakeland has just over 8,000 settled inhabitants), the cult of Var is weak here. There is good profit to be made for those willing to brave the harsh conditions, but little opportunity to make a fortune.

MILITARY

As noted in the Hellfrost Gazetteer, Lakeland lacks a standing army of any sort. All children are taught how to use a bow, javelin, and spear almost as soon as they can walk, and they are instilled with a community spirit that regards cowardice as a mortal sin. This is not to say they are suicidal. Far from it—a pointless death profits no one, especially not those left behind.

Hide or leather armor covered with winter clothing and fur is the standard protection for hunters. Short and long bows are the favored missile weapon for ranged work, with javelins for close up hunting. Most hunters carry both, along with a long spear and a dagger.

While a palisade protects most settlements, none rely solely on these. Hunters and younger boys are stationed at distances up to a mile from their community, nestled in snow-covered hides, ever alert for ice goblin or orc raiders, polar bears (which come here to hunt the same prey as the settlers), or worse creatures. Signal arrows, which emit birdcalls when fired, are commonly employed to alert the settlement without allowing the defenders to realize their approach has been detected.

As hunters, Lakelanders are masters of guerilla warfare and ambushes. No foe can expect a stand up battle should he be foolish enough to invade. Skilled at living off the land, entire communities would fade into the snowy wastes, small bands of hunters emerging to unleash volleys of arrows before melting away again like ghosts.

Despite the lack of a formal army, all hunters are trained to fight in small teams, typically of around ten members. In normal life, these form a hunting party. The men and women thus know how each other thinks, as well as their comrades' strengths and weaknesses.

Due to Ullr's popularity, many hunting parties contain at least one cleric of Ullr. Their spells allow them not only to survive for extended periods, but also to sneak up on enemies, target enemy commanders at great distances and in adverse weather conditions, and even turn the wilderness against intruders.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

With the pass through the Iceblade Mountains impassable, Lakeland has found itself part of a minor but important trade route. Two trade roads meet at Vimmar before heading out onto the icy lake to the distant Glittersands. Pragmatic as always, locals refer to these roads as the West Road (heading to the Battlelands), the South Road (which ends in Aspiria), and the Ice Road (which stops at the Glittersands).

Lakeland has merchants, but they rarely leave the realm. Instead, merchants come from other lands, stopping at each large community to trade wares in the market. Trade is conducted not with individual hunters and craftsmen, but with the community as a whole. Every citizen donates the goods he wishes to trade, and receives a due share of the goods purchased.

Typically, smaller communities visit the towns every few months to drop off furs, meat, and ivory, and collect much-needed wares.

The nomadic Finnar tend to visit settlements as they desire. Some clans stick to the same few communities, having built up a rapport with the locals over the generations, while others vary their visits depending on what goods they have to offer or need to survive.

While some settlers came here, and continue to arrive, in a desire to live as totally free men, most came for the aurochs and mammoth herds that haunt the region. Air-dried meat, mammoth tusk and aurochs horn, and arctic hare furs, mammoth skins, and aurochs hide are the land's major exports. Locally, bone is used

for many utensils and implements. Many large communities are self-sufficient thanks to having a greater number of hunters, while smaller ones are not.

Traditionally, hunters are away from their homes for about half the year. They follow the great herds as they migrate, picking off old and sick animals in order that the healthier ones might breed and keep the wheel of life turning.

The major imports are ale, grain, and vegetables. Although none of Lakeland's immediate neighbors shave these goods as major exports, the small population considers them supplementary goods, not essentials. As such, Lakeland has plentiful exports and only minor imports. Enough timber grows locally to feed the fires (along with dried dung) and allow for new constructions, pottery is an extravagant luxury, prone to breaking or becoming brittle in the cold, and jewelry tends to be made of wood, bone, or horn.

Citizens in Lakeland do not pay taxes or tithes. Rather, they are very community oriented, happily giving vital aid to less fortunate communities when there is spare, safe in the knowledge the favor will be returned in the future. Within a community, a certain portion of all meat and fish is stored in communal storage areas for winter. There are no wastrels in Lakeland—those who do not, or will not, work for the good of the community can expect no charity in return. When the hunters make their annual trips, those who will benefit from their labors give them arrows, furs, and food.

ARCHITECTURE

While they live in wooden houses, every family in Lakeland owns, and knows how to build, a lavvu, the traditional Finnar conical felt tent. Hunters use them when out in the wilds, and all families keep one in case they are forced from their homes.

Saxa style long houses are the norm. Lakeland is not extensively forested, but there are plenty of small copses. However, trying to drive a post into the thick ice or rock-hard soil is backbreaking work. In order to save time (wooden houses do rot eventually) and provide additional security, houses are thick, double skinned dry stone walls padded with felt and fur for extra insulation. Roofs are made of wood and covered in layer of felt.

As is common elsewhere, one part of the house is given over to animals and one part to the family. Horses are little use up here, and typical domestic livestock cannot hope to survive, so the settlers quickly learned to domesticate reindeer to pull their sledges or carry heavy loads. Many families keep dogs, though they are more akin to wolves. They are working animals, not pets, and most would bite your hand off if it was offered.

With wood not overly scarce (though collecting it may mean a hike of several days in each direction), hearths are big and kept burning day and night. Because the weather may hamper woodcutting, stores of dried animal dung are kept topped up. While air-drying meat is the usual way of preserving food, it is not unusual to see haunches of meat hanging high over the hearth to dry and cure in the constant plumes of smoke.

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are places of interest within Lakeland suitable for including in your adventures.

HUNDTON

Population: 357

Ruler: Master Hunter Edmund Heiskanensunu

Hundton ("the dog enclosure") stands on the southern shore of Serpent Lake, directly opposite Othicus. The village sits on a promontory, surrounded by frozen water on three sides. The thick stone walls of the houses and workshops extend to the edge of the lake, with steep steps and narrow alleys the only breeches. On the landward side, a high stone wall topped with a wooden catwalk fronts the village. Built into the wall is a sturdy gate.

The interior is more akin to a southern town, with buildings abutted against each other rather than spaced out as is more common in rural settlements. Although this helps with insulation, the main reason for the layout is the limited building land. The largest building is also the only two-story structure. The top floor is home to the Hunt Master and his family, as well as the resident clerics of the various faiths, while the ground floor is devoted to worship and the village' armory and granary.

While Ullr, Neorthe, and Thunor are widely honored, each cult having one cleric, the village's patron deity is Ellanhere, goddess of canines. For six generations, the inhabitants have bred the best sled and hunting dogs in the eastern Winterlands. Some dogs are kept for use locally, but many are sold to passing merchants or visiting Finnar. A Hundton dog costs twice as much as normal, but has Vigor d8 and Toughness 5.

When a child and pup are born on the same day, the human and canine are bonded in an elaborate ritual. For the rest of its life, the child becomes responsible for the upbringing of the dog, though typically his interest only begins when he is old enough to walk and talk. Locals believe the two share a common soul, the dog being more than a common beast due to having been soul-twinned with a human. These hounds are treated not as common work beasts or pets, but as kin.

A character born in Hundton who takes the Beast Master Edge and selects a sled or hunting dog (use war dog stats for both) may, if he so wishes, receive a Wild Card animal companion. However, if the beast dies its replacement is an Extra as normal. The owner also suffers a –20 Glory penalty if his hound dies by any means other than old age.

ISLE OF THE GREAT HEALER

Northwest of Vimmar, in the choppy waters of Serpent Lake, lies an island. A treacherous jumble of shattered rocks and great boulders, the island is roughly circular and is two miles across at its widest point.

In the center of the island is a single structure, a crumbling edifice of worked stone. Inhabiting the island, which is home to fell beasts, is a lone priestess of Eira. No one knows her name, and her title, the Great Healer, is one given her out of respect. She never leaves her island home, surviving on gifts brought her by those seeking her potent cures and prayers.

Some claim she has inhabited the island since before the Blizzard War, a mysterious force keeping her young and healthy. Others say she is a divine spirit sent to the mortal realm by Eira but held imprisoned on the desolate rock by a powerful, evil charm woven by Hela. Yet other stories tell she is a ghost, a cleric who refused to pass over while suffering still plagued the mortal realm; a mere mortal with a penchant for the dramatic; and a cursed soul ordered to heal the sick as penance.

TOMB OF THE ETERNAL ARMY

In the center of the lake west of Othicus is a small, rocky island. Surrounding it is an area of water which, regardless of the temperature, remains permanently frozen. From the middle of the frost-encased island rises a windowless, ice-encrusted stone tower. The only entrance lies halfway up its height, a dark, gaping arch. Icicles hang from the top of the entrance, giving it the appearance of a Hellfrost dragon's maw. Reaching the portal requires one to climb up a narrow, winding, icy path.

Local skalds claim the tower is home to the Frost King, a powerful Unseelie fey noble. According to their poems and songs, a freezing fog descended over the lake in the years after the Icewall rose. When it rose three days later, it revealed a tower where none had previously stood. No one has ever reached the tower, for death lurks beneath the ice.

The *Lay of Sigel*, a popular tale used to warn children of the dangers of trying to reach the tower, tells how a mighty army led by clerics of Sigel strode out onto the icy lake one winter. Intent on bringing the tower crashing down, the army fell through a thin crust of ice. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of men and horses froze to death in an instant. Their preserved corpses remain locked in the ice, rising to defend the tower only when mortals dare to cross their icy graves.

LICHE LANDS OF OLD

The Liche-Priest's reign of terror ended 527 years ago. Yet half a millennium on, the Liche Lands of Old remain, a forsaken wilderness, shunned by all save the doughty clerics of Scaetha. Even they, blessed as they are by their divine mistress, avoid crossing the borders into the forbidding heartland of the accursed realm unless absolutely necessary.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Liche Lands.

* **Fearful Realm:** Knowledge of what once dwelt here, too many ghost stories as a child, and the pervasive air of menace give a –1 penalty to Spirit rolls to resist Fear. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others.

* **No Food:** Due to the near total lack of wildlife, Survival rolls to catch game incur a –4 penalty.

* **Realm of Despair:** The near-constant drizzle and mist, the stark emptiness of the landscape, the strange noises, and the presence of many unearthly sights quickly lead to despair. Each morning a living creature is within the Liche Lands, they must make a Spirit or Faith roll or suffer a –1 penalty to Spirit and Spirit-linked skill rolls. Clerics of Scaetha receive +2 to this roll—death is part of their calling and they're a dour bunch at the best of times. The penalty from this malaise never increases above –1, no matter how many rolls are failed.

The penalty is removed after 6 hours sleep, a suitable distraction, such as a skald's rousing story of brave heroes or a bawdy love story (takes 1d4 hours to recite the tale), or upon leaving the Liche Lands.

* **Necromantic Energy:** The land is awash with vestiges of necromantic energy. All arcane skill rolls with a necromantic trapping are made at +1. Furthermore, the entirety of the Liche Lands counts as a graveyard for the purposes of characters with the Disciple of Hela Edge.

WHO WAS THE LICHE-PRIEST?

Before we delve deeper into the Liche Lands, let us reflect upon the creature who gave the unhallowed realm its name.

The first accounts of the Liche-Priest appear in –316. In this year his undead armies surged out from the Winding Peaks, ravaging the lands now encompassed by the Liche Lands, Seithrby, Heligioland, Heldalund, Cul, Trond, and the Cairn Lands. That the Liche-Priest must have existed before this date is unquestioned, for no army, alive or dead, amasses overnight.

What has puzzled scholars and clerics is the timing. Until Hela's madness, which is universally agreed to have occurred in –352, necromancy was an unknown art in Rassilon. Given a gap of just 36 years between these two events, the Liche-Priest must have been an exceptionally powerful evil soul released from the Abyss or one of Hela's first converts. Frustratingly, little documentary evidence regarding the person of the Liche-Priest survived the Blizzard War.

His title gives nothing of his past away, for it simply refers to his status as a powerful undead cleric. No clues to his identity can be found among the other races. To the dwarves he was known as the Death Walker, a fitting description, but one which speaks of his undead status. The taiga elves of Nerenel, who resisted his armies for centuries, speak of him as the Wraith King, perhaps implying an incorporeal form. Hearth elves called him the Endless One, and to the engro he was the Lord of Night.

Tantalizingly, one reference in the White Palace library in Rimeholm makes reference to him being a "king of the southern realms of old." This cryptic note invites more questions than it answers. Does this imply he was a Saxa nobleman, perhaps driven out of his homeland during the early stages of the Anari invasion of the southern continent? Those few who have visited the desert realm that lies below Rassilon tell of a great and powerful land that turned evil and was destroyed. "Southern realms of old" might well relate to such a land, but if so the Liche-Priest was undead long before he made his presence felt in the north—this strange land, known as Hekata, fell to ruin a millennium and a half ago, long before the Anari rose to prominence in the north.

The question of whether the Liche-Priest even existed has been asked down the ages. The title was certainly used by his commanders, but no living soul is known to have faced the Liche-Priest. A succession of undead rulers, rather than a single individual, could have used the name. Perhaps, as some argue, the Liche-Priest was a name adopted by Hela, who, in direct contravention of the Compact, personally commanded her armies to war. If this is true, then who or what is imprisoned behind the great wards?

That it might be Hela is both possible, for the wards set were extremely powerful and involved two deities, and unlikely, for the dark mistress still grants her earthly worshippers power. Although the Liche-Priest has always been referred to as being male, there is again no documentary evidence supporting this.

Should the wards sealing the crypt fail, perhaps stalwart adventurers and clerics of Scaetha will uncover evidence as to his true nature. For now, the origins of the Liche-Priest remain an enigma few care to dwell on.

ATMOSPHERE

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents a brief overview of the major geographic features, but it says little of the atmosphere within the haunted Liche Lands of Old.

By day the largely unspoiled wilderness is an inviting place, at least at first glance. Swathes of brightly colored flowers sway in the breeze, no sights or sounds of civilization assail the ears, giving one the impression of being the first being to ever tread the wilds. This illusion soon passes, revealing the naked truth of the Liche Lands.

The rain, which falls as depressing drizzle, seems too constant. Even when it is not raining everything feels damp; kindling refuses to catch without concerted effort and logs hiss and crackle, resisting the lick of Kenaz's fiery children. The sun never seems to shine as brightly as elsewhere, and shadows seem longer and darker. Mists are cloying and dank-smelling, leaving one feeling dirty. The wind carries a faint aroma of death and decay; and the near-total lack of wildlife rapidly grows disturbing, and the lack of settlements, caravans, or distant hearth smoke leaves one feeling as if they are the last living soul in the world.

Too often bones are seen protruding from the earth, seemingly clawing their way from earthy tomb toward sun lit heavens; too often a stone, absently kicked to relieve boredom, rolls over to reveal the wide grin of a skull, bleached white by centuries of exposure to the elements and stained with moss.

At night the sky is regularly swallowed by dark clouds or banks of dense mist, blanketing the land in deep darkness. Strange sounds float on the night wind, unrecognizable yet clearly laden with doom and menace. Shadows lurk at the edge of vision, moving in the periphery, becoming still, invisible when one turns to confront them. The ground never feels comfortable when one tries to sleep, making travelers feel unwelcome, unwanted; living trespassers in a land reserved only for the dead.

FLORA OF THE LICHE LANDS

For those with the courage to enter the dark realm and the knowledge of where to look, the Liche Lands of Old boasts many strange and wondrous plants.

Corpse Blossom: *Habitat:* Found only in the gloomy confines of Bone Wood, corpse blossom is a powerful soporific. *Usage:* Grants +2 to Knowledge (Alchemy) rolls when used to create a soporific herbal remedy.

Grave Weed: *Habitat:* Grows only in the haunted Barrowdales, close to the shadow-draped entrances of the many burial mounds and tumuli. *Usage:* If burned while casting *gravespeak*, a clump of grave weed grants +2 to the arcane skill roll. A similar bonus applies to Knowledge (Alchemy) rolls when the weed is used to create *gravespeak* alchemical devices.

Liche's Finger: *Habitat:* A woody herb which grows in Deadman's Marsh. *Usage:* Dried and ground, it grants a +1 bonus to rolls to create *enhanced undead*, *strength of the undead*, and *zombie* alchemical devices.

Witch Bane: *Habitat:* Found only in the foothills of the Winding Peaks. *Usage:* This herb can be brewed into a herbal remedy with a –2 difficulty. When ingested, it grants the effects of Arcane Resistance for an hour, but only against spells with a necromantic trapping.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in the Liche Lands, many others exist. This section delves into some of the other dark locales of the dread realm. These should be considered active adventuring sites, ones your heroes can explore right now, for though the Liche-Priest remains sealed behind the great wards, his hand is again stretching out across the land, casting a shadowy pall.

Note that while the temple and forts of Scaetha stand in Seithrby, they are included here for brevity—politically and militarily they are separate from Seithrby, their existence being due to the presence of the Liche Lands of Old.

ALLIANCE RIDGE

On the southern slopes of the Barrowdales, overlooking the narrow plain betwixt the mounds and Bonewood, is a chalk carving in the shape of a stylized raven with wings outstretched. Tall wooden poles surround the site. The Army of Light gathered here gathered here before the final push, the generals and nobles swearing pacts of friendship and support, and flying their battle standard beside each other in a defiant gesture of solidarity.

While some stories claim the chalk image appeared overnight by Scaetha's will, enough documentary evidence exists to prove the figure was cut on the orders of the generals. Not only did the image represent Scaetha, a deliberate insult to the Liche-Priest, but it served as the proverbial line in the sand. Beyond that point there could be no retreat, for all available manpower had been thrown into the cause. If the assault failed, it would be here the armies would make their final stand.

Every ten years clerics of Scaetha accompanied by mercenaries tend the site, removing the grass and whitewashing the chalk. Banners from all the nations who participated in the last campaign or who suffered at the hands of the Liche-Priest are raised, a reminder to any undead watchers the mortal races are ready and waiting should the unhallowed denizens deign to breach the borders again.

The site is a minor sacred place.

Spirit Name: Domhrafn ("Judgment Raven").

Ambience: The aura of despair so prevalent in the Liche Lands does not exist here. No Spirit roll is required when waking on the hill and penalties from the Realm of Despair rule are removed. Undead and mortal followers of Hela must make a Spirit roll when venturing onto the hill or become Fatigued. This remains for 24 hours after they leave the site.

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: None.

Sacrifice: The chalk figure must be tended and its outline restored once every decade for the power to continue working.

Powers: All mortals unaligned to Hela who rest here for the entirety of Sunnandaeg (from midnight to midnight) may make a natural Healing roll. Followers of Scaetha roll at +1.

THE BLACK MONOLITHS

While wailing watchers ring the Withered Lands, these ghastly sentinels are nothing compared to the defenses installed by the Liche-Priest to protect his domain. Placed every few hundred yards along the border were thin, rectangular, pyramidion-tipped monoliths made of a black stone found nowhere in Rassilon. (Some scholars believe the stone was quarried from the cliffs that border Nastrand, Hela's celestial domain.) Each side was deeply inscribed with potent runes and hideous glyphs.

Between neighboring stones was an invisible field of necromantic energy. Living creatures that passed through the barrier risked more than just their lives. The fortunate ones survived, though often with terrible physical and mental scars. The unfortunate ones could only watch in horror as their flesh withered in seconds. Their screams did not end when their spirits were torn from their flesh, for the soul was sucked into the nearest monolith, rendering it unreachable by the gods. Their lifeless corpse, meanwhile, was condemned to join the ranks of the undead.

As the Army of Light pushed into the Liche Lands and the fell nature of the monoliths became apparent, clerics of Sigel and Scaetha demolished each profane monolith they encountered. Immune to mundane weapons, the clerics resorted to unleashing volleys of destructive spells. The monoliths have Toughness 14 but can only be broken by damage-causing spells with a light trapping.

Not every stone was found. Few remain, and all bar a handful are spaced too far apart to generate a necromantic barrier between them. That is not to say they are harmless. To touch one, even if wearing gloves or using a stick, is to risk an agonizing death. Undead within 50" (100 yards) draw upon the stored necromantic energy, gaining +1 to all Spirit and Vigor rolls.

THE BLACK STABLE

The Liche-Priest has been imprisoned for over 500 years, but his minions have not been idle. In preparation for his return, and to ensure his death knights and paladins of Hela have suitable mounts, the undead have constructed a huge stable block. Helhests (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*) are the preferred mounts, though this necessitates creating them on the battlefield on which the mortal horse died and leading them to the stable.

The ability to strike fast was always part of the Liche-Priest's tactics and it is unlikely he will change his strategy. In order to prevent the cult of Scaetha from destroying the stables and crippling the army, there are 100 skeletons and 50 skeletal warriors stationed here, plus a number of living and undead necromancers. Were anyone to attempt as assault, the helhests could always be unleashed to aid in the defense.

THE BLACKGUARDS' CRYPT

For the most part, the cult of Scaetha carried out its duties with zeal and honor in combating the scourge of the Liche-Priest, but there were dark episodes the cult would rather ignore. One such event is known within the ranks of the dour cultists as the Accursed Thirteen.

How the thirteen paladins came to fall from grace is not remembered (or rather it has been deliberately forgotten), but fall they did. Once loyal servants of Scaetha, they defected to the cause of the Liche-Priest. The hand of death incarnate touched each as they knelt in front of their undead lord. Flesh withered and decayed, blood was replaced with unholy energy, and where once knelt thirteen humans now stood black knights.

Formidable in battle, they were responsible for the deaths of many mortals. Individually they were dangerous, gathered together they were nigh unstoppable. Although each eventually fell in battle, cut down by their former comrades, none of their corpses were ever recovered. Instead, they were spirited away by fell spirits. Their souls cast back to Hela's realm, their empty corpses were interred in a crypt to await the caress of the Liche-Priest. That touch never came, for the Liche-Priest was defeated soon after.

Distracted by the Blizzard War and the sudden appearance of the Withered Lands, the cult of Scaetha is yet to uncover the last resting place of the Accursed Thirteen. That it must lie in the Liche Lands is no in doubt, for the black knights were trusted commanders, and would be graced with a presence close to their master. But exactly where they rest is something yet to be revealed.

While many younger clerics give the thirteen little thought, older, wiser clerics are beginning to ponder as to whether the recent rise in undead sightings and weakening of the holy wards mean the Liche-Priest has already awakened. Has he, they wonder in silence, already cast forth his hand and summoned his generals back to his service? If so, finding the crypt and destroying the knights' physical bodies is now a priority.

The crypt comprises an outer region guarded by mindless skeleton warriors, an eternal honor guard befitting the status of the dead knights, and protected by magical traps that activate only when the living pass. Beyond a set of bone doors reinforced with fell runes of strengthening are thirteen crypts, each housing one of the fallen paladins.

Caverns of the Blood God

Deep beneath the foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains, on the border between the Liche Lands and Heligioland, lies a terrible place. Beyond labyrinthine passages which in places are so narrow they seem to press against the living, crushing their bones, across hollow, dank, uneven caverns, lies a hidden temple to Thunn, god of vampires.

In the centuries before the Blizzard War a powerful vampire and trusted lieutenant of the Liche-Priest ruled from the sunless caverns, his icy grip extending far across the land in the name of his unholy liege.

When the forces of light began to drive back the Liche-Priest's damned armies the great high priest of Hela sent word to his trusted minions—hide in the shadows, sleep away the passage of time, and await his return, for the Liche-Priest had witnessed a time when he would walk the lands again. And so the vampire did as ordered, gorging on his cult until bloated and sealing himself away in a granite sarcophagus emblazoned with protective runes designed to ward against intruders and ensure his survival through the ages.

The cult of Scaetha had intended to scour the Liche-Priest's lands after the fiend's defeat, for they knew that in the dark places of the world lurked many evils. The Blizzard War and the disaster that followed in its wake cut their good intentions short. By the time civilization had recovered, the quest was long forgotten, the cult of Scaetha desperately short of members, and the burgeoning threat from the Withered Lands and Darkwood too strong to ignore.

While the world tried to rebuild the vampire lord slept undisturbed, dreamless in his stone tomb.

Last year, as the seals reached a critical point a surge of necromantic energy rippled unseen across the dark lands, touching the creature's mind. The Liche-Priest's time of rebirth grew close and plans set down long ago were stirred into motion.

On answering the mental summons cultists of Hela were swiftly dispatched to the vampire's lair. Invoking ancient and potent magic, the cultists pulled the vampire lord from its centuries-long slumber, willing giving their blood and lives so it might live once more. With its strength renewed, the vampire has begun to rebuild its cult, creating new monstrosities and attracting followers to its bloodstained banner.

Doom Fleet Bay

The great northern bay of the Inlet, where the Deathrun meets the Narfel Sea, has been known as Doom Fleet Bay since the age of the Liche-Priest. On the surface there is nothing to sea save cresting waves and the occasional piece of debris or tree, ripped from the Slush Marsh by gales and left to float on Neorthe's roof.

Dive beneath the icy waters, though, and one spies long, wooden fingers rising through the murky water like the fingers of gigantic skeletons. Here, in days of old, the Liche-Priest assembled a grand fleet as part of his plans to attack Ostmark and Veermark.

In low whispers skalds and old women tell of how the great fleet unfurled sails of human skin and set oars of bone under the Deorcmonan. As the fleet approached the end of the Inlet Neorthe denied the ships right to travel his domain. A great storm rose, driving the armada back, smashing and sinking the heavily laden warships in the deep water of the central channel.

One legend claims the Liche-Priest cursed his failed mariners to fulfill their orders. Ghostly, phosphorescent longships rise from the dark water under the Deorcmonan, their skeletal, barnacle-covered crews futilely struggling to sail beyond the Inlet before sinking silently back into watery graves as dawn breaks over the eastern horizon.

Another story recounts that the Liche Priest's fleet was not an invasion force, but a treasure fleet. Concealed in the ships' holds were mountains of treasure destined for some unknown land across the stormy sea, payment for sending reinforcements to aid his faltering cause.

Though few mariners have reason to venture into these waters, tale of ship being boarded by skeletal warriors near the Inlet abound in seaside taverns across the continent.

The Ghost Stones

On the very fringes of eastern Nerenel, a mere 100 yards from the border of the elf realm, the landscape is adorned with hundreds of standing stones. Positioned in blocks of 20, 30, or 40, and ordered into neat columns and rows, the stones resemble petrified military formations.

According to the taiga elves of Nerenel the stones were indeed an undead army. Sent to ravage the elf kingdom, the undead were struck down by the combined might of elf earth elementalists and druids. Other tales claim the army was comprised of hellish beasts from within the bowels of the earth, petrified where they stood when Sigel's Hearth breached the horizon.

Since it is unclear which way the unadorned stones actually face, darker legends concerning an elf army struck down by the might of the Liche-Priest are just as plausible.

On each night of the Deorcmonan the stones move exactly one standard pace (the Rassilon equivalent to a yard) toward Nerenel. No one has ever observed their motion, for a single blink is enough time for the stones to move, and no power has been unable to stop them. Over the centuries the elves painstakingly excavated the stones and moved them further away, yet at the night Deorcmonan they returned to their previous position. Attempts to break the stones by might of arms and sorcery have met with equal failure.

Elf records dating back to the time of the Liche-Priest place the stones some 15 miles further east. That the first stones will breech the forest in just under two years is a certainty, for the stones creep relentlessly forward at the precise rate of 52 yards a year. What will happen at that point remains veiled, for divinations cast into the Liche Lands reveal nothing but darkness.

Those who have spent vigil near the stones on nights of the Deorcmonan have reported hearing ghostly voices, indistinct yet clearly present. If these spectral sounds could be understood, perhaps the nature and intent of the stone army could be discerned.

The Graveyard Without Shadows

Following the defeat of the Liche-Priest,'s armies and the imprisonment of the dread lore, many of the Army of Light who fell in the final battle were buried just inside the western border of the Liche Lands. While most of their spirits accepted their reward of a place in the Afterlife, others declined.

Willing to delay their ascension to the halls of the gods for as

liche lands of old



Population: Unknown numbers of undead
Ruler: None (rumors of vampire lords)
Religion: Hela
Imports: None
Exports: None

Mt. Highguard
The Roost
The Ghost Stones
The Profane Library
The Dead Grove
Crypt of the liche-Priest
Winding Peak
Path of Terror
Alfwodeton
liche lands of old
The Black Stable
last Stand hill
Deathrun River
blackguards
King's Barrow
Barrowdales
Alliance Ridge
Temple of the Watchful Blade
Castle of Blood
Workshop of the Damned
Wulfcestre
house of lamentation
bonewood
Seaton
Cynewynn's Stead
Muckletarn
black Monoliths
Icewatch Fort
Graveyard Without Shadows
R. Whitedrake
Vale of black Roses
Doom
Slush
the Blood God

0 10 25 50 100 200



long as was required of them, they asked to be returned to the mortal realm, for all knew in their hearts that the Liche-Priest's imprisonment was but temporary and that they could still aid those continuing the struggle against his fell minions. The gods agreed, but imposed strict conditions. The main two were that the spirits could only aid mortals inside the Liche Lands and that as soon as their mortal host left the accursed domain the spirit's duty would be deemed fulfilled and its soul sent to the Afterlife.

The cult of Scaetha keeps a close eye on the graveyard. They have no fear the earthly remains will rise, for precautions were taken against this occurrence. Rather, they are concerned that the number of spirits left in the area is greatly diminished. Should the Liche-Priest rise soon, the army of spirits may be all but spent. Though they do not forbid communication with the spirits, they attempt to dissuade adventurers from seeking their assistance.

Spirit Name: Ljosdrengar ("Warriors of Light").

Ambience: The graveyard is a tranquil spot in an otherwise cursed land. The Fearful Realm and Realm of Despair setting rules do not apply here. Any current effects of Realm of Despair are removed on entering the graveyard.

Undead and followers of Hela who dare cross its boundary are attacked by a swarm of ghostly warriors and quickly overpowered. Even at night, it is never truly dark in the graveyard. Even under the worst conditions, lighting is Dim (–1).

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: None. When due sacrifice is made, the shade of one of the fallen heroes rises from the ground. The ghostly warrior, which has the appearance of its mortal form before it died, then approaches the one who offered it sacrifice and merges with the supplicant. The possession is painless.

Sacrifice: In order to summon a spirit, the supplicant must pray for four hours for the souls of those who fell fighting the Liche-Priest and offer spiritual energy. In game terms, he must spend a benny. The benny is not replenished until the possession ends. Sacrifices can only be made while the sun is in the sky.

Powers: Anyone who performs the necessary sacrifice becomes host to one of the spirits. The character gains the Ancestral Guardian Edge (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*) for as long as he stays in the Liche Lands. As soon as he leaves, the spirit departs to the Afterlife, its ancient oath fulfilled, to claim its seat in the hall of its patron deity.

HOUSE OF LAMENTATION

When the Army of Light advanced into the Liche Lands it had two key strategic objectives in its sight—the Castle of Blood, a major military command post, and the Liche-Priest's subterranean lair (and now his crypt) in the Winding Peaks. Veiled from sight and divination at the heart of Bone Wood there stood a vile edifice unknown to the invading army—the House of Lamentation. If the Liche-Priest's lair was his empire's brain, this fell hall was its black heart.

Dedicated as a temple to Hela and Thunn, the House was constructed in a single night from the bones of the Liche-Priest's fallen enemies, their earthly remains bonded with copious quantities of congealed blood and imbued with necromantic energy to temper them as hard as stone.

At the heart of the complex is a temple of polished, fire-blackened bone. Near the back wall stands a colossal statue of Hela, skeletal and funeral shroud-clad,

THE LAWS OF LAMENTATION

The House of Lamentation is a hellish domain. To ensure it is a serious challenge for even Legendary heroes, the following rules should be used:

* The temple radiates a powerful necromantic aura, slowly draining the life energy of intruders. Living creatures must make a Vigor roll after each encounter or gain a Fatigue level. One Fatigue level is recovered for every 24 hours outside the temple.
* Living creatures slain in the temple rise 1d4 rounds later as a zombie subservient to the master. Reanimated Wild Card heroes retain their Wild Card status.
* The master of the temple begins with 2 tokens for each Wild Card and each four Extras in the party. One additional token is gained each time a hero suffers Fatigue due to the life draining effect detailed above. These can be expended in a variety of ways, with each use requiring the master to spend an action concentrating:
  * Know the exact location of all intruders. This enables him to accurately dispatch troops to deal with them. [1 token]
  * Create 1d4 skeleton warriors from the bone walls of the temple. [1 token]
  * Close and bar one door anywhere in the temple, preventing living creatures from opening it easily. The door can only be opened by bashing it down or has its lock picked.. [Costs 1 token]
  * Generate an aura of fear, as per the spell, throughout the entire temple. [Costs 1 token for the effects of a success, 2 tokens for a raise]
  * Summon mist. This reduces the lighting conditions to Dim (–1) in areas and corridors the master desires for the next hour. [1 token]
  * Reanimate one Wild Card undead or 1d4 Extra undead creatures slain in the temple. [1 token]

bedecked in skulls and grisly trophies from those whose flesh was offered to her, and inscribed with sickly-glowing runes of power and damnation. Iron braziers sculpted to resemble gigantic skulls cast flickering shadows from the four corners, the burning fat of sacrifices scarcely illuminating the cloying, Stygian gloom.

Elsewhere are a library, magnificent in its accumulated lore and terrible for the parchment-like skin on which runes are painted in blood; sacrificial chambers, where skin was flayed, flesh was ripped away in chunks, organs eviscerated, and bones pulled from living hosts; preparation chambers from which an army of skeletons and zombies once stumbled; charnel pits of putrefying remains and pools of congealed blood; necromantic laboratories where ghastly experiments were wrought on the living, partly in a bid to create new monstrosities and partly to amuse the temple's unholy keeper; and more mundane chambers such as armories, treasuries, and storerooms.

Placed in overall command of the temple complex was the Witch Queen, the Liche-Priest's most trusted lieutenant. Through her dark magic and indomitable will the House became ever more damnable, allowing its mistress to work her will on its very walls. As the hapless souls imprisoned here wailed in anguish and terror, the Witch Queen danced and dined.

Had the invading army of mortals ever discovered the House of Lamentation they would have found it empty, as they did with the Castle of Blood, its inhabitants faded from existence as if figures in a waking dream.

For centuries it has stood empty, an eternal monument to undying evil, an edifice even nature and the passage of time cannot bring low. But as with other areas of the Liche Lands the House is slowly awakening. A powerful undead, perhaps the Witch Queen herself, perhaps some other dark lieutenant, has reclaimed the temple in the name of Hela and the Liche-Priest.

THE KING'S BARROW

In the center of the vast necropolis that is Barrowdale stands the King's Barrow. One hundred yards across, the huge monument is said to house not only the mortal remains of a once mighty king of men, but a treasure so vast that it would shame the lord of any modern nation. Skalds and poets tell of the glittering prize, but also of the jealous nature of the unnamed king, whose spirit became corrupted and refused to leave behind the trappings of his mortal life. Now a royal hagbui, he silently stalks the chambers within his barrow, forever stroking the gold and silver that has damned him to eternal unlife.

The king was buried with treasure, but nowhere near as much as the stories proclaim. Burial chambers, in which rest the lord's former huscarls, form much of the barrow's interior. Death has transformed them into hagbui, but they are no less loyal to their master than when flesh clung heavily to their bones.

LAST STAND HILL

While much of the campaign to bring the Liche-Priest's empire of terror to end took place in the central and southern regions, the north was not spared its quota of bloodshed.

Atop a low, flat hill in the foothills of the Winding Peaks a company of clerics of Scaetha, mercenaries, and taiga elf warriors, ambushed by fell undead, stood back to back against a tide of skeletons and zombies. For three days and nights they wrought doom on their foes, their numbers slowly dwindling with each passing hour, an inexorable countdown to certain destruction. In the final hour but ten clerics and elves remained. Facing certain death they made peace with their gods and charged the enemy lines, penetrating 50 yards in bloody swath before the last fell, pierced by spears and arrows.

Although the allies were defeated, their heroic endeavors prevented the Liche-Priest from moving an entire army south to cut off the advancing main thrust. After the war the corpses were recovered and laid to rest atop the hill, each grave marked with a sword thrust into the thick, blood-drenched soil.

Last Stand Hill is a site of lamentation and pride for the cult of Scaetha and taiga elves of Nerenel. Many clerics who know their time on the mortal plane nears its end venture here, thrusting a sword into the ground to replace one of corroded grave markers and praying for the souls of the fallen before venturing into the Liche Lands for one final battle.

NOWHERE

Among the many settlements started and abandoned after the Blizzard War, none is perhaps as mysterious as Nowhere. Formerly named Colvar, after its founding father, the village thrived for nigh on two decades in the middle of the 2nd century IR before literally vanishing into thin air. It was not just the people and animals disappeared, but the houses, fields, and even the middens. The land where once stood a growing settlement was empty grassland.

Investigations found no trace of the village. Within a generation its name and disappearance were forgotten. Since then reports have filtered back of a village which appears seemingly at random on the nights of the Deorcmonan before fading into nothingness. Descriptions of the settlement match those of Colvar.

The inhabitants of the village also return on these nights, though time has not passed them by. No longer creatures of flesh, their skeletons continue as they did in life, plowing, sowing, and reaping the fields with rusted plows pulled by skeletal oxen, shoeing skeletal horses, making pots and weaving cloth with bony hands, and so on. Devoid of flesh, they also seem devoid of intellect, carrying out their tasks without thought or true purpose.

The cult of Scaetha is as yet undecided how best to handle Colvar. If the skeletal inhabitants retain their true souls, then the question arises as to whether or not they are technically undead. Should it be proven the souls are damned, escapees from the Abyss, then destruction shall be rained upon the settlement without mercy. First, though, the cult has to locate the blasted place, for locations at which it appears within the Liche Lands are seemingly at random.

THE PATH OF TERROR

In order to reach the Liche-Priest's tomb one must navigate a

desolate, grassless valley. Officially the cult of Scaetha calls the valley the Victor's Path, for it was along this route the armies of light marched as they sought to seal the Liche-Priest into his crypt. Unofficially, it is known as the *Pæð æf Fær*, the Path of Terror.

Day or night, rain or shine, summer or winter, low mist clings tenaciously to the valley floor, swirling and drifting with scant regard for the wind. At night the mist rises, blanketing out the moon and stars, plunging the landscape into inky darkness.

Few who have walked its trackless paths care to do so again. Animals cannot bear to step foot into the valley, growing evermore panicked if forced. No traveler has ever reported any discernible hostile presence in the valley, yet its very presence fills the heart with dread.

Perhaps if the valley existed elsewhere stern-faced clerics who have walked this gods-forsaken path before would mock those who quailed in fear for lack of faith and conviction to the endless cause, but here they grimace silently, remembering the irrational terror they felt on their first visit.

THE PROFANE LIBRARY

There is an old adage that knowledge is power. None who have read accounts of the Liche-Priest's war against the living or heard the tales of skalds doubt that he was among the most powerful beings ever to walk Rassilon.

Rumors of a vast collection of dark manuscripts gathered over the centuries of his reign, and some penned by his old withered hand, began to circulate soon after his imprisonment. Though the advent of the Blizzard War forced a decades long delay, the cults of Scaetha or Sigel have ever stopped searching for the fabled repository. The Lorekeepers and cult of Hoenir both hold that knowledge is neither good nor evil—the cults of Scaetha and Sigel disagree. Should it ever be discovered, the cults would undoubtedly put it to the torch, for the fell wisdom contained within its pages must never be passed on.

The Profane Library takes the form of a stone castle. Time has beaten ravaged its walls, but it has stayed its hand from the vile and blasphemous writings within the crumbling halls. Here, placed in niches, stacked in towering piles, and crammed onto rotting wooden shelves lies the assembled knowledge of the Liche-Priest, the unhallowed Profane Library.

One reason the Profane Library has eluded detection for so long is that the texts exist only between dusk and dawn. While Sigel's Hearth is in the sky, the ruin appears utterly derelict, just another former bastion of evil long since abandoned. Dozens of Scaetha's clergy have searched the castle, but never at night, for this is when the powers of darkness are at their strongest. Indeed, to search the library after sunset is perilous in the extreme, for ghostly librarians haunt the stacks and the ruin is home to a powerful and malevolent wraith (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*).

Reading anything in the library takes time. These are not modern works penned by noble scholars. They are the spidery scribbles of men and women who transcended not only death, but also sanity. They frequently use archaic and occult terms without explanation (the authors knew what the terms meant), they are concerned with matters beyond the ken of most mortals, and they lack any form of editing. *Speak language* is essential unless one speaks Black Tongue or one of a dozen tongues long forgotten by living scholars. Most of the texts date from before the Blizzard War, but not all—the most recent additions date from 317 IR. Clearly, there are some undead scholars still at large in the Liche Lands of Old and still adding to the accumulated twisted and depraved lore.

Among the works are tomes of lore detailing demons and the creation of undead, the cult of Hela in its earliest incarnation, and the darker side of the arcane. Some clerics of Scaetha believe the library holds the *Necrotic Manuscript*, a volume of utter evil penned by Hela herself. Alchemical scrolls written by clerics of Hela exist in the hundreds, their magic not weakened by the passage of time. Given enough time, one might be able to master necromantic magic, for among the priceless and blasphemous tomes are treatises on khem-hekau, a dark and unholy form of magic practiced only in Al-Shirkuh, and majin, the feared blood magic of the Jade Empire. Such knowledge would come at great cost, though, for one cannot master these arts without months of continual study.

Those of weak mind should not delve too deeply between the covers of the forbidden books, for the horrors they contain can scar a man's mind as easily as a sword scars flesh. For each 8 hours spent perusing the library, non-undead readers must make a Spirit roll at –2 or suffer the effects of Terror.

Anyone wishing to study the collection must do so in the building—texts carried beyond the castle walls automatically disappear, reappearing at random somewhere in the castle interior.

Specialties: Demons, undead, cult of Hela, evil arcane knowledge, foreign necromantic arts, Hekata (see *Land of Fire*).

Investigation Rolls: +1 general, +4 for specialties. The huge library is thoroughly disorganized, with related volumes spread across multiple halls. Investigation rolls to learn even a single fact take 3d6 hours, assuming the texts can even be read.

THE ROOST

A single cloud of bats circling over the Liche Lands is enough to raise eyebrows in certain circles. If recent reports are to be believed, great numbers have passed into the haunted realm. Extrapolation of the available information, which has yet to be proven reliable, suggests the bats are congregating somewhere in the Winding Peaks, though exactly where is anyone's guess.

The reports have some within the cult of Scaetha worried—the records of old clearly state that the Liche-Priest used bats as spies and, through fell magic, warped some into monstrous form. While the wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb remain intact, preventing him from directly influencing the outside world, he is not without allies. Perhaps the bats are a natural phenomenon, as some suggest. Most, though, are convinced the cult of Vakr has played its hand and its marshaling its forces.

Much as the cult would love to mount a fact-finding expedition, its resources are spread too thin to venture out on what may yet prove to be a wild goose chase. The cult is prepared to help finance trusted adventurers with a track record of battling undead. Should there exist a great roost, it is to be destroyed without hesitation. Naturally, such heroes would need to possess, or be suitably equipped with, area-effect magic to stand any hope of success.

TEMPLE OF SCAETHA

Population: 73
Ruler: Eulogist Lusiane ap-Bovert

The cult of Scaetha comprises tithed clerics, those bound to temple service, and itinerant clerics, those permitted to wander the land doing their god's work as they see fit. Every three years the tithed clergy draw lots to determine their next posting.

By flickering light in temples heavily laden with the trappings of death clerics of all ages have heard tales of the terrible dreams suffered nightly by those stationed along the frontier. Those yet to take the posting often pale at the thought, though bravado causes some to speak unwisely and claim to look forward to the posting. Clerics who have already served a tour there nod sagely as the story unfolds, glancing uneasily over their shoulders and shuddering when no one is watching.

Located five miles east of Wulfcestre, the Temple of the Watchful Blade sits on the very edge of the Barrowdales. Built to the same pattern as the Hearth Knight's forts, the motte-and-bailey has a permanent garrison of seven priests and six paladins of Scaetha, 50 mercenary light infantry, and 10 noncombatant laity.

Spread along the 250 mile border at roughly equal intervals are seven fortified towers. The two north and one immediately south of the temple are commanded by a priest and garrisoned by 50 mercenary light infantry. A paladin oversees the four further south, with 50 mercenary heavy infantry supporting him. This thin line of steel and faith is all that stands between the Low Winterlands and a possible invasion.

Eulogist Lusiane ap-Bovert has overall command of the border, though she defers to Divine Slayer Haakon Guthrunsunu, the highest-ranking paladin, with regard military matters.

THE BLACK SHIP

The name of the Black Captain's skeid refers not to its physical appearance, but to its reputation as a warship of the damned.
A mighty vessel, it is made not of wood but of gigantic bones. Its keel is the spine of an immense dragon, the neck rising up to end in a monstrous skull at the prow. The stems are the ribs of dragons, while the planks are sheets of bone wrought from the remains of dead mariners. Its tall mast is a colossal arm, a bony hand clutching the sail, a tattered tapestry of human skin, in its bony grasp. Holding the ship together are bone nails and ropes made of human sinew.
Despite being nigh on 800 years old (at best guess), the ship has weathered well—no barnacles or mold grow on its yellow-white frame.
Acc/Top Speed: 2/10 (2/12 under sail); **Toughness:** 20 (4); **Handling:** –1, **Crew:** 200+10
Notes: Heavy Armor
* **Death Ship:** Any mortal creature that dies on the deck returns to life as a zombie under the Black Captain's command at the start of its next turn.

THE BLACK CAPTAIN'S CREW

Of the 200 damned souls aboard the Black Ship, three-quarters are skeletal typical huscarls, while the remaining quarter are skeletal veteran huscarls. Treat these as their mortal equivalents, but add the Fearless and Undead special abilities.

Eulogist ap-Bovert has been troubled in recent months by prophetic dreams of undead marching on the temple, though she has yet to make her visions known to her comrade. Divine Slayer Guthrunsunu, a hardened veteran of three campaigns in the Withered Lands, carries an enchanted long sword, Mistilteinn ("Mistletoe"). Forged in ages past, Mistilteinn was once the property of Lord Thrainn, a renegade hearth elf and later a liche in servitude to the Death Walker. He fell in battle to Guthrunsunu's distant ancestor during the final days of the war against the Liche-Priest.

Each year, two paladins, two priests, and 50 mercenaries must venture into the Liche Lands, making the long and arduous journey to check on the great wards sealing the Liche-Priest's tomb. Volunteers are called for first, for there are those who desire to cast their eyes on the cyclopean gates. Should the number fall short, lots are drawn at random.

WORKSHOP OF THE DAMNED

The Liche-Priest rallied many fell creatures to his banner. Among their number was a corrupt soul known in tales today only as the Chirurgeon (after the Anari word for a surgeon). A mortal priest of Hela at first and a liche later in life, the Chirurgeon was among the greatest students of necromancy. While his peers raised armies of skeletons and zombies, he practiced a darker art, stitching together undead to make freaks and abominations, and fusing necrotic and living tissue. Very much a rear echelon lieutenant, he operated out of a secret workshop in the Liche Lands.

The Chirurgeon was apparently slain in battle, for his name appears in the Register (see page xxx), though no record of his demise exists in song or story. The location of his laboratory, named the Workshop of the Damned by the cult of Scaetha (and not to be confused with the Workshop of Damnation in the Withered Lands) has never been discovered.

It is believed to lie either on the Barrowdales, perhaps concealed inside one of the many tombs, or in the gloomy expanse of Bonewood. That it might lie further east is unlikely, for in recent months reports of multi-armed skeletons, grisly zombies with the arms and heads of bears, and abominations manufactured from different species of animals stitched together have been circulating along the trade road bordering the Liche Lands.

Perhaps, as some clerics of Scaetha openly discuss, the workshop is under new management, a new practitioner of necromancy having discovered and learned from the master's records. Perhaps, as some fear and speak only in hushed whispers, the Chirurgeon's soul has been summoned from Hela's domain to continue its work in preparation for the Liche-Priest's return.

NOTABLE PERSONS

While the Liche-Priest was the major player of his age, his time, at least for now, has been and gone. Others, weaker in comparison to their liege, yet fearful in their own right, served the lord of darkness during his long reign. While slightly more is known about these archfiends, their fate remains a mystery, for of the Liche-Priest's elite commanders just one fell in battle.

THE BLACK CAPTAIN

Though the Liche-Priest has many lieutenants, he had but one with knowledge of the sea. Known only as the Black Captain among his enemies and allies, none can say from whence he came or why he chose to serve Hela's champion. While the undead of the Liche-Priest legions marched steadily westward, the Black Admiral terrorized the eastern coast as far south as what is now Sutmark.

That he commanded no great fleet is evident, for while he raided he led no army in an invasion. Perhaps, as some skalds sing, the fleet his master intended him to command perished at Doom Fleet Bay. With no name, none can say whether or not he perished, for it is impossible to locate his name in the cult of Scaetha's Register. Many clerics believe he survived the war, perhaps fleeing eastward across the great ocean, or seeking refuge beneath the waves to await his master's return. Those who argued he fell in battle have now fallen silent, for a ghostly longship matching the description of the Black Captain's vessel has recently been spied sailing the waters off the coast of the Liche Lands.

Few records exist concerning the Black Captain's description. Most agree he is clad in taut, withered skin, more akin to a liche than a zombie in appearance. Some stories said he wore a chain hauberk of midnight-blue links, others that he wore only the common garb of a mariner. Even his gender is open to question, for in one tale he is actually a female havmand. However, critics argue this is a mistake, the stories of the Black Captain and the legendary Sea Witch of Angmark become confused.

He is credited with many strange powers, but these "facts" exist only in skalds' tales, not verifiable evidence. Some clerics of Scaetha claim he might once have been an elementalist, for he could allegedly command the wind and waves, for it is said he could raise a gale on a cloudless day or calm the most terrible of Thunor's rages with a single word. Other tales claim he could summon a dank sea fog to conceal his progress; awaken the bones of long-dead mariners to replenish lost crew, or cause them to swarm up from the fathomless ocean and clamber over the gunwales of an enemy ship; cause his ship to disappear into a fog bank and emerge from another one; and even sail beneath the waves.

BRUDE DEATHLESS

Although the Liche-Priest was eventually defeated by an alliance of races, Tuomi folklore holds it was Brude "Light-Walker" Cunnobarrican, a paladin of Scaetha, who dealt the crippling blow that allowed the fearsome necromancer to be imprisoned. Brude was already well known to the Liche-Priest, for such was his strength of his faith that no undead could stand before him.

Perhaps already sensing his demise was not to be final, the Liche-Priest inflicted Brude with immortality as he was struck down, vowing that the human would exist until struck down by the Liche-Priest's own hand.

Unable to die by the hand of lesser beings, Brude at first reveled in his new state of existence, using it to slay many undead who had until then escaped the alliance's wrath. Brude was hailed as a mighty champion, an eternal warrior who would serve Scaetha's cause until the end of days, for at that time none suspected the Liche-Priest could ever return.

The Blizzard War taught Brude the true genius of the necroman-

cer's curse. While he could not die from his injuries, he still suffered the debilitating effects of crippling wounds, leaving his flesh weakened. Brude was also forced to watch as those he loved succumbed to the ravages of foes, disease, and time. Each death gnawed at his soul, consuming him with grief. Even then the Liche-Priest's terrible curse was not yet complete. The final piece fell into place when Scaetha forsook her paladin, for as an immortal he went against the nature of the universe, for all creatures must die.

After living through the devastation of the War and the chaos that ensued, Brude turned his back on civilization. No longer seeking glory and battle, Brude the man was replaced by Brude the legend. Tuomi folklore says only that Brude walked "beyond the horizon," a term used to indicate a great journey, and was never seen again.

Brude still walks Rassilon, his body heavily scarred, his spirit despondent. A broken man now in his sixth century of existence, he craves only the final embrace of Death and an end to the curse. Recently returned from the Hellfrost, Brude has learned the seals on the Liche-Priest's tomb are weakening. No servant of Hela, he nonetheless looks forward to the day the fiend is released.

THE DARK MARSHAL

Standing eight feet tall and terrifying in his dark majesty, the black knight known as the Dark Marshal was a senior commander of the Liche-Priest's hosts. While the Liche-Priest plotted in the east, it was the Dark Marshal who led the conquest of Silverdale (now the Mistlands), and the invasion of the Borderlands and Aspiria.

According to the epic poem *Bron*, the Black Marshal met his fate in Silverdale. A joint Aspirian and Drachenlander counterattack had driven the undead back as far as Silverdale but with their supply line stretched to breaking and losses impossible to replace, the army faltered. Outnumbered, the Aspirians prepared to sell their lives dearly.

The story goes that Chalcis, untouched by the hand of death that stretched from the east, refused to assist its neighbors, its governor convinced that to raise a hand against the Dark Marshal was to invite destruction. Bron, a simple farm boy, spoke out against this injustice, claiming that in this darkest hour, when humanity's existence flickered like a candle, all men were brothers.

At dawn, as the Aspirian and Drachenlander armies prepared for the final conflict, scouts reported a sea of banners approaching from the southwest—the Chalcians were coming!

The two sides clashed in the Haunted Hills, mortal and unliving locked in a deadly struggle whose outcome would shape the future of the northern continent. One version of the poem claims Bron, fearless above all men, sought out the Dark Marshal and challenged him to single combat. Another variant claims the encounter was accidental. Regardless, Bron and the Dark Marshal fought, with the mortal emerging victorious.

The stories state only that the Dark Marshal was defeated, not that he was destroyed. When the Mistlands were formed three decades ago many feared the Dark Marshal had returned, for among his arsenal of powers was mastery over mist and fog.

THE DEATH SINGER

For all his inhuman nature, even the Liche-Priest enjoyed entertainment. While human skalds sang of mighty heroes and epic deeds, the fell warlord amused himself with tales of misery and damnation fir only for the ears of the unliving.

Serving as his chief skald was a creature known in stories only as the Death Singer. By all accounts she was a pale, human female of deathly beauty, though such accounts are speculative, since she never left her master's side and no mortal ever witnessed her. Similar stories based on naught but hearsay tell of her playing a harp of human bone, with strands of dried sinew for strings. One story speaks of the harp having a human skull in one corner. When the strings were plucked, the grinning skull would scream to match the note, an insane music loved only by those damned by the gods for their wicked deeds.

According to one skald, now long dead, the skull was actually that of the once-mortal Death Singer, for she was headless and could speak only through her harp. Her story began, so the tale goes, with her a mortal skald who offended the Liche-Priest in song. Seeking vengeance, the undead lord had her kidnapped and brought before him, whereupon he struck off her head, corrupted her spirit before Scaetha's heralds could claim it, and raised her as an undead.

Continuing the wild speculation, the cult of Scaetha believes she was the first dirge. According to one legend she taught the Liche-Priest how to summon the souls of evil skalds and imbue them with unholy powers.

Among her supposed personal powers was the ability to kill using only her voice, and to raise those who fell to her voice as undead. That the corpses of these unfortunate victims danced for the Liche-Priest's amusement in time to her music was widely reported at the time, but again not a shred of evidence exists. A variant says to hear her voice was to court madness. Her victims would then perform wicked deeds that would ensure the damnation of their soul.

Like many major undead in the service of the Liche-Priest her name is not in the Register. It is believed she was imprisoned alongside her master. Entombed, she relieves the boredom of his centuries-long imprisonment by recounting in song his many victories, and inventing tales of the fate that will befall mortals once her undead master is released.

THE MOUTH OF HELA

Perhaps the greatest of the Liche-Priest's vampiric minions, the bestial Mouth of Hela was so named for his gaping mouth, extendible jaw, and exceptionally long canines. So great was his thirst that he could suck a man dry with a single swallow, leaving naught but a withered husk.

That the Mouth may have survived his master's entombment is not questioned, for he was last seen fleeing the field of battle, his hands clutched to his bloody mouth, and his name is not in the Register kept by the cult of Scaetha. As told in the epic *Aethelthrith Fangripper,* Aethelthrith, a female Saxa hero blessed by Tiw with prestigious strength, grappled with the Mouth, tearing out each of his fangs in turn until the fiend was left toothless.

If, as many suspect, the Liche-Priest is stirring and his lieutenants are returning to his side, them the Mouth will surely be among them. Likely his first quest will be to find his teeth, which Aethelthrith donated to the cult of Scaetha on her deathbed. After half a millennium and the ravages of the Blizzard War, no one is quite sure where the teeth ended up.

THE THREE SISTERS

Champion and beloved of Hela he may have been, but the Liche-Priest was far from omnipotent. Similarly, Hela might well be a goddess, but she has never possessed the power to foresee the future. Despite the vast and terrible army at his command, and though he would never admit it, the undead general could never be truly certain of victory. At some point during the lengthy war, his actions were guided by three seers.

Although called the Three Sisters, there was never any evidence they were true siblings. If their names were ever known, they have long been forgotten. Even today, their nature is much debated by sages and theologians. Common candidates include hags, Unseelie fey, revealer demons, and even clerics of the Norns. Whether they were willing volunteers keen to share their insight or captives forced into cruel servitude, they were abominations.

One heard only faint whispers from the future. The second saw only dim shadows of the future. The third spoke only in cryptic riddles of the future. As with the Norns, the three were one. Only the third sister ever spoke, sharing some bond of silent communication that enabled her to utter what her dire sisters heard and saw.

In order that they were not distracted from their task, they were ritually mutilated. The first sister had her eyes and mouth sewn shut with sinews torn from a cleric of the Norns, the second her ears and mouth, and the third her ears and eyes. Runes of foretelling and secret knowledge were carved deep into their flesh to enhance their already formidable abilities.

Like their origin, their fate remains a mystery. There are no stories

of their deaths, yet the Three Sisters do not appear in the Register. That they are unnamed is irrelevant, for other dark minions are listed by their unholy titles. As if often the case, the lack of hard facts has spawned many tales.

Those who favor them as fey or demons simply state they returned to their natural abode when the Liche-Priest was imprisoned. One story says the sisters were taken by the Norns in the final days of the war, either to suffer an eternity of torment for abusing their power and allying with the Liche-Priest or to receive eternal comfort as recompense for their of enforced servitude.

Another says that their power over the future was so great that, sensing the downfall and eventual return of their dark master, they simply removed their threads from the Norns' loom, rendering themselves undetectable by the gods. The latter stories invariably place them in some hellish secret abode, where they patiently listen and watch for the time when the Liche-Priest will awaken and call them to his side once more.

Those scholars and clerics who believe they had an earthly origin, and who often lack the imagination to spin a good yarn, argue they simply died of old age long before the Liche-Priest and his armies were defeated.

THE WITCH QUEEN

Skalds who wish to dampen the mood of boisterous guests need do no more than speak the first stanza of the *Lay of Gedwynne* to bring melancholy and fear to their audience's hearts.

According to the poem, Gedwynne Erluksdohtor was a princess of Angmark. Beneath an appearance fair to men beat a dark heart, for she was vain and covetous. To achieve her dreams of immortality and power she turned to black magic and worship of Hela, sacrificing the last vestiges of her humanity. As a reward, Hela transformed her into the Witch Queen, a hag second in power only to the dread Liche-Priest.

Although the *Lay of Gedwynne* contains many facts, the existence of the corrupt Saxa princess is a myth. The Witch Queen's supposed name, Gedwynne Erluksdohtor, is a corruption of *gedwimerlic*, Auld Saxa for "corpse of sorcery," a fitting epitaph for the Liche-Priest's chief lieutenant.

Her first appearance was recorded in –209, an indication she was a later recruit. Given her eventual status and her physical description, it is very likely she was a willing and devoted servant of Hela, granted the boon of unlife as her mortal years faded.

Assuming the last recorded description of the Witch Queen still holds true, she is a tall, skeletal woman with a few patches of tight, withered skin across her torso and legs. Lang strands of gray hair cling to her fleshless head, while pits of balefire rage in her eye sockets. Her long, slender fingers end in wicked talons. Atop her head she wears a simple bone crown, while her body is clad in the rotting garments of once magnificent robes.

Several accounts of battles against her mark her as an implacable foe, more than capable of holding her own both in magical and mundane struggles. A touch from her talons was reputed to shred the flesh from her victim, leaving it a skeleton that rose to fight alongside her moments later. Her scream could induce sudden heart failure in the strongest warriors, and in the art of necromancy she had but one superior; her fell master.

WHY COME HERE?

The Liche Lands comprise approximately 160,000 square miles of uninhabited (by the living) wilderness. All manner of undead stalk the landscape, though rarely in large numbers outside of their major holds, and civilization is hundreds of miles away. What on earth would make adventurers of any Rank want to go to such a dread place?

* No Choice. Sometimes adventurers have little choice but to enter the Liche Lands. This doesn't involve being ordered to go there (that's covered below). Rather, fate decrees the party must venture into the gloomy wilderness.

For instance, the adventurers may be hired by a nobleman of Seithrby to hunt down orc raiders. Following the orcs' trail reveals they are moving in and out of the Liche Lands. In order to fulfill their mission, the heroes have little choice but to grit their teeth, and tread where sane men fear to walk.

* Orders. Characters with the Orders Hindrance are sworn to obey their superiors and undertake tasks as required. Forcing the heroes to go where you want them isn't a tool you should overuse, but the occasional tug on the reins reminds the characters the world does not revolve around them and that they hold allegiance to other people or organizations. Sooner or later a cleric of Scaetha is going to be dispatched here.

* Treasure. The Liche Lands are dotted with countless ruins. The oldest date back to before the rise of the Liche-Priest, a few are more recent failed farming settlements, and the great majority are remnants from the days of shadow. Relatively safe from the privations of tomb raiders, many of the ruins still boast the possibility of treasure hoards.

* Undead Slaying. Undead are an automatic lure for servants of Scaetha. North of the Icebarrier Mountains, the Liche Lands are *the* place to visit if you want to hunt undead.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

So what do the party do once they have been lured to the realm of horror that is the Liche Lands? Given the total lack of living settlers, their options are mostly limited to undead slaying and ruin raiding. This isn't to say you should just throw random monsters at the heroes and call that an adventure.

The Liche Lands have a rich history, albeit one saturated in evil. To avoid the problem of "stock dungeon of the week" every ruin should have a backstory and former purpose, like those detailed earlier in this entry. By engaging with the ruin and its place in history, the characters are forming a link to the past and helping to shape the future.

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* An elderly cleric of Scaetha, half-blind and lame in one leg, has sworn an oath to honor the fallen of Last Stand Hill before making his final journey. His infirmities make travel to the remote hilltop difficult, and he seeks companions to escort him. Once they reach the hill and he plants his sword, he considers his helpers' task complete and releases them from service.

* A player character cleric of Scaetha is ordered to form part of the party checking on the Liche-Priest's seals this year. Non-cultists are permitted to accompany him and the others, so long as they hold no allegiance to any evil deity.

* A sea captain claims to know of a vast treasure haul beneath the icy northern waters of the Narfel Sea. He is reluctant to say exactly where, claiming such knowledge could endanger his life if he hires less than trustworthy individuals. As the ship draws near to The Inlet the captain announces his goal, sparking a mutiny. Whether or not the mutiny succeeds, a freak storm shipwrecks the heroes in the Liche Lands.

* The heroes stumble across a burning stead in Seithrby. A lone survivor, a slave, mumbles a few words about his master's daughter and the Liche Lands before dying. *Gravespeak* reveals little of interest, save the girl was taken east by a host of undead. The slave can give very little detail—few common people can differentiate between the various types of undead.

While the characters likely mount a rescue mission, the girl doesn't actually need rescuing. Black-hearted and evil to the core, she is a secret cultist of Hela. When her father discovered her dark secret she ordered the skeletal minions she had been quietly raising from remains in the local graveyard to murder him and the servants. She then fled into the Liche Lands in a desperate bid to find a powerful undead master to serve.

* A character stumbles across a reference either in print or poetry that points to the existence of a great treasure cache. The downside is that the hoard lies deep inside the Liche Lands. At least it did when the story was first recorded, long before the rise of the Liche-Priest. Could the treasure still exist, or is the quest a fool's errand through one of the most dangerous realms in Rassilon?

MAGOCRACY, THE

The most heavily populated realm in the north, the Magocracy is simultaneously a byword for civil order and despotism. Though ruled by hereditary mage-nobles, the great realm has its fair share of problems, both internal and external. Political maneuvering is rife, the seeds of distrust are rooted deep in the culture, and power is the ultimate goal of every house.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Magocracy. Note that a hero's ancestral lands are those his family rules directly. A heahwisard whose family controls a small barony, for instance, treats just that barony as his ancestral lands.

* **Age Means Nothing:** Heahwisards are judged on aptitude, not age. Although a mage is not considered an adult until he reaches the age of 14, nothing prohibits a Young hero from being a heahwisard. Similarly, an apprentice heahwisard can still undergo the Staff Day ritual—any hero with Heahwisardry d4 and one spell qualifies as magically trained.

* **Fearful Master:** Heahwisards apply the +2 Charisma bonus from their Noble Edge to Intimidation rolls within their ancestral lands. This bonus only applies to the Magocracy's lower classes.

* **Obey Your Liege:** Any heahwisard within his ancestral lands is automatically subject to the Orders Hindrance from the domain's ruler.

* **Who Are You?:** While the Noble Edge can be used to represent more than just nobility, heahwisards treat all non-nobles as peasants. Heroes of the Magocracy who play non-noble characters with this Edge do not gain the +2 Charisma bonus when interacting with heahwisards.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Just three social classes are recognized within the borders of the Magocracy—true nobles (all of whom are heahwisards), honor nobles, and peasants.

While the heahwisard rulers of the Magocracy make up less than 0.5 percent of the total population, they are firmly in control of all aspects of society. As well as owning all the land and natural resources, they control the military (albeit through Knights Hrafn proxies in most cases) and trade, and have sizeable dominance within the cult of Maera, patron goddess of the Magocracy.

With the eldest child groomed for ascension to power, the second typically engaged in magic research or service to Maera, those born lower down the order must turn to the military, adventuring, or trade. In most other lands (Ostmark being a notable exception), merchants are a middle class necessity, looked down upon by all those who need their services. Within the Magocracy, being a noble and a merchant is seen as nothing unusual, so long as the merchant-mage serves to increase his House's profits.

Regardless of wealth or influence, anyone not born a noble or given temporary promotion to honor noble status is a peasant in the eyes of the Magocracy's haughty rulers. Access to education is limited, job prospects are few and far between, and social advancement is next to impossible (regardless of skalds' tales of love between noble and peasant).

NON-HUMAN HEAHWISARDS

While the overwhelming majority of the nobility is of human Anari stock, it is not a legal requirement. All the law requires is that a heahwisard be born in the Magocracy and be of noble birth. Since no engros currently hold a Magocratic noble title, the only other candidates are the scions of non-Anari settlers who were granted titles or married into noble families generations ago, and hearth elves. However, since not every House of the Magocracy is detailed, the GM is quite at liberty to allow frostborn or frost dwarf heahwisards in his campaign.

Non-humans may have been tutored because they were adopted into a human family, sent to learn the ways of the humans by his true noble family as part of some treaty, or raised among humans as a hostage to ensure peace between the races. In the latter instance, his human counterpart would then be raised learning the ways of the non-human's parent race. However, this doesn't mean a noble human child raised by elves could become a druid—that profession has strict racial requirements.

HONOR NOBLES

Honor noble titles are awarded to non-heahwisard military commanders serving a House and high-ranking clerics of Maera. Such titles are granted by a House's ruler and are purely symbolic, allowing heahwisards to converse with the recipient as near equals, rather than as mere peasants. Race, sex, and religious persuasion are largely unimportant when awarding honor titles.

Honor nobles use the regular Anari noble titles, but always include the name of the House who granted the title. Unlike hereditary nobles, the title does not pass to children, but instead reverts back to the bestower, who may hand it out as he sees fit on the death of the holder. The family loses its status, though there is no shame in this, and reverts back to its original peasant standing. Children and spouses of these leaders have no title, but receive an artificially elevated social standing while their parent commands a company or serves Maera. This does not entitle them to train as a heahwisard, however.

Honor nobles may not fly their own standard, sit on the Council Elect, speak for their lord without permission, collect taxes for their benefit, own land, award honor titles, pass laws, hold their own court, or dispense justice among their followers.

Important senior clerics or mages, envoys, and military commanders from other lands are automatically awarded an honor title, which expires when they leave the Magocracy. Visiting blood nobles are treated as honor nobles, not true nobles, meaning even a foreign king is seen as being below a Mage-Knight.

EDUCATION

Whereas peasants receive little to no scholastic training, young nobles receive mundane, yet comprehensive arcane schooling. Those with money and power send their offspring to one of the Magocracy's schools or academies, while those less fortunate must be content with home tutoring.

From the ages of 5 to 14, the student learns the Magocracy's history, folklore, law, and heraldry. He studies politics and etiquette, undergoes tuition in the religion of Maera, and undertakes extensive testing in academic arcana and practical spellcasting.

Students are encouraged to study extra curricular subjects such as alchemy, foreign culture, law, history, languages (especially Classical Anari), healing (assassination is still considered an acceptable method of social climbing), and religion.

Those who display the right aptitude are permitted to undergo the Staff Day ritual (see below), while those who need extra work

STAFF DAY

Held on the third Monandaeg of Eostremonan

Staff Day is celebrated only in the Magocracy. The children of nobles are trained in the principles of magic from an early age, learning the theory from the age of five. When a child who displays an aptitude for heahwisardry reaches 14, the age of adulthood in the Magocracy, she undergoes the Staff Day rite the next day it is held. A heahwisard to be born on Staff Day is said to be destined for greatness.

The ritual is always held in the Grand Temple of Maera in Kingshall. Among the crowd are the powerful nobles of the land, here not so much to watch the ritual, which they have witnessed countless times, but to size up the next generation of nobility and begin arranging marriages and watching for future allies and enemies.

When the moon first breaks the horizon, the adult-to-be is handed his heahwisard staff by the Mage-King. The high priest of Maera binds each child's hand to her staff with long lengths of multi-colored thread while reciting prayers to the goddess of magic. By tradition, the binding is done in descending social order. It is believed the longer the threads are bound the more powerful the mage will be in later life.

The children then swear an oath to protect the secrets and uphold the traditions of heahwisardry, to serve the Mage-King loyally, and to serve their families with honor, bravery, and decorum befitting their noble status. With the oath sworn, the threads are unraveled and handed to the now adult mage. Traditionally these are kept, to be used when her children undergo the rite.

Each family then holds a private feast in its townhouse (or those of a feudal superior for lesser families) to welcome the new adult into the family and any noble titles due the young adult are bestowed.

Characters who chose the Black Sheep Hindrance, or Magocratic nobles who did not take the Arcane Background (Magic: Heahwisardry) Edge have never undergone this rite, and thus are viewed as children under Magocratic law—another reason why they cannot inherit their parents' estate or titles.

are held back. Money, power, and influence mean nothing when it comes to schooling—centuries of tradition ensure that only those capable of wielding magical, and thus political power ever achieve their due station.

Whether or not he makes the grade, or indeed has any desire to actually become a heahwisard, a noble who wishes to take a role outside politics and domain ruling begins training only after his formal education ends. For second and lower children, this is pretty much what is expected of them. In general, most starting Magocratic player characters begin their adventuring careers anywhere between 14 and 20.

RELIGION

The cult of Maera is the state religion. While every heahwisard is expected to at least honor the goddess of magic, if not actually designate her as patron, few peasants bother to hold more than lip service to her faith.

As elsewhere, one's faith depends more on one's profession than any royal decree. Thus, farmers and herders worship Eostre, soldiers favor Tiw, sailors honor Neorthe, merchants pray to Var, and so on. Heahwisards serving as lay clerics in other faiths, soldiers, and merchants often pick a more appropriate deity as their true patron, though never forgetting Maera. Should they later rise to political power, allegiances are duly switched to the mistress of magic.

Temples to Maera stand in every major settlement, varying in size, decoration, and prestige based on their size and who worships there. In smaller villages and towns the only existence of the cult may be a shrine, and in many instances this is a private center of worship located in the ruler's manor or castle, and accessible to outsiders only by personal invitation.

For some, the existence of the Magocracy is a blight that must be cleansed. The misguided cult of Null, the goddess of entropy who seeks to unbind the threads of creation, has a growing presence. While they lack the strength to overthrow the mage nobles, they can end their lives one by one. The cult of Maera has a standing reward for information concerning the activities of Null's cultists.

MILITARY

Every realm within the Magocracy maintains an army of full-time soldiers. Much of the time they patrol the borders, protect trade caravans, and guard major settlements. Should war break out, each realm can muster between 20 and 40 percent of its total population, swelling the total strength by as much as 150,000 men.

ORGANIZATION

The armies of the Magocracy are arranged into companies (known as Hands) of 100 men of the same type and subdivided into Fingers, each of 20 men. Each Hand has a unique name, usually that of its current captain, and more often a nickname. For example, the Hand of Dragmund, one of Wyse's veteran heavy infantry companies is also known as the "Orc Hammers" for its skill at battling these vile beings.. At the GM's discretion, all members of a given company may share an appropriate Combat Edge. The Orc Hammers all have Favored Foe (Orcs).

Each company is led by a captain, who also commands the First Finger, with four sergeants in charge of the remaining Fingers. Sergeants are ranked from First Sergeant down to Fourth Sergeant. The nominal head of each army is the individual domain ruler, though in practice military matters are left to the Knights Hrafn hired by each House.

The Magocracy values power rather than numbers, employing heavy infantry and cavalry trained to fight in tight formation, with archers providing fire support. Heahwisard captains favor solid tactics, with volleys of arrows preceding a heavy cavalry charge and the infantry following up behind. Fortunately, the Knights Hrafn are not so staid, and vary tactics to suit the situation.

Any plans the Magocracy has for expansion northward have been stymied by the persistence of Angarion in defending its borders, the early rapid growth of Coglelund, and the raging waters of the Hearthrun. For now, Coglelund serves the Magocracy well. Situated almost exactly halfway between Hellfrost Keep and the Magocracy's southern domains, it allows the mages to procure valuable imports far more easily than if their merchants had to travel the entire trade road. Furthermore, should the orcs invade Veermark and then seek to expand west, Coglelund would act as a buffer state.

ARMY STRENGTH BY REALM

The military strength of each major House is detailed below. Houses are listed by their full title, thus retaining the order laid out in the *Gazetteer*. Use the *Bestiary* stats for mercenaries (except where noted), but replace leather armor with scale armor and medium shields with heavy shields. Entries marked "(V)" indicate veteran soldiers. Otherwise they are common troops.

Barony of Galmoor: Though the smallest realm in population terms, due to the threat of rebellion, Galmoor maintains a disproportionately large army.

Troops: One company heavy infantry, 1 company heavy cavalry (V), and 2 companies of archers.

Barony of Norwick: With Mage-Baron Arturix focused on retrieving his family's master heahwisard staff, his army has received little funding or training in recent years. Many of the soldiers have deserted.

Troops: One company heavy infantry, and 1 company of archers.

Barony of Zandor: Thanks to an (expensive) agreement with the Iron Guild enabling the Mage-Baroness to call on them in times of invasion, Zandor maintains only a small but well-trained army.

Troops: Two companies heavy cavalry (V).

County of Kerenil: Threatened by trolls from Blackglade Swamp and monsters from the Mage Mountains, and with many gold mines to protect, Kerenil is forced to field a sizeable standing army for its population.

Troops: 2 companies heavy infantry (V), 3 companies of heavy cavalry, and 2 companies of archers (V).

County of Ilan: Recent troop increases in Ilan have not gone unnoticed by the county's neighbors. Ostensibly the increase is to help thwart the marsh trolls, though in truth it is part of the Mage-Countess' plans to increase her realm through military might.

Troops: Three companies heavy infantry (1 V), 2 companies heavy cavalry, and 4 companies archers. Two of the archer companies are true mercenaries.

County of Morrow: Notoriously tight-fisted and more focused on retrieving his family's master staff, Count Daviff's troops are under-funded.

Troops: One company of heavy infantry, and 2 companies of heavy cavalry.

County of Wyse: Responsible for guarding the main trade road and having to deal with constant orc attacks, Wyse is forced to support an army larger than its population would normally warrant.

Troops: Three companies heavy infantry (2 V), 2 companies heavy cavalry (V), and 3 companies of archers.

Dukedom of Eastheath: Eastheath's position means its soldiers must patrol the lengthy border with Angarion, watch the border with expansionistic Coglelund, and oversee the border with troubled Veermark, not to mention man the many forts surrounding Foulwater Swamp and protect the steady stream of trade caravans. To that end, the Mage-Duke has been forced to recruit a massive army; a full 10% of the population is accounted for by the military.

Troops: Thirteen heavy infantry companies (8 V), 6 heavy cavalry companies (4 V), and 4 archer companies (2 V).

Dukedom of Haldir: Haldir's army is split between watching the monster- infested Hook and Mage Mountains and protecting the Mage-Duchess' gardens.

Troops: Two companies heavy infantry (V), and 4 companies heavy cavalry.

Kingshall: The Magocracy's private armies total 12,300 permanent troops, or around 3% of its total population. This does not include the navy (which is under the Mage-King's direct command), medics, crafters, and other personnel vital to maintaining the troops. By law, for every ten men a realm fields one must be sent to serve the Mage-King.

Of the 12 companies under the Mage-King's direct control, only four heavy infantry companies are stationed in Kingshall; the rest are scattered around the Magocracy, ensuring the Mage-King has some presence in every domain.

Troops: Seven heavy infantry (4 V) and five companies heavy cavalry (2 V).

Principality of Bremen: The despotic Mage-Prince rules his realm through fear and intimidation.

Troops: Four companies heavy infantry, 3 companies heavy cavalry (V), and 4 companies of archers.

Principality of Darovia: Mage-Prince Dartuk's paranoia has led to a crisis. To ensure his captains do not get too friendly with their troops, and thus sway their loyalty to them rather than Dartuk, his sizeable army has suffered constant changes of leadership, weakening their morale.

Troops: Three companies heavy infantry, two companies heavy cavalry, 3 companies of archers.

Principality of Dragomilov: Arguably the most powerful realm, Dragomilov maintains a small, elite army (for the realm's size), content to let its reputation for magical prowess defend its borders.

Troops: Two companies heavy infantry (V), 3 companies heavy cavalry (V), 1 company engro slingers, and 3 companies archers (V).

Principality of Hergenald: The richest realm in the Magocracy, Hergenald pays a good-sized and well-supported army to protect its assets and keep the orcs and giants of the Hook Mountains in their place.

Troops: Five companies heavy infantry (V), 4 companies heavy cavalry (V), and 5 companies archers (V).

Principality of Sethnor: The majority of the army is stationed along the trade road and at the main port, which contains the Magocracy's naval base and largest shipyards.

Troops: Four companies heavy infantry (3 V), five companies heavy cavalry (2 V), 3 companies archers.

Navy: The Magocracy's navy comprises ten drakkar (600 men), three snekkes (300 men), and one skeid (200 men). These sailors are recruited from across the Magocracy. While it regularly patrols the coast, the navy (and this applies to all navies in Rassilon) is not equipped for extended patrols in deep water.

Principality of Tharkness: Mage-Princess Nayla spends her vast fortune on extravagant parties, not protecting her borders.

Troops: Two companies heavy infantry, 1 company heavy cavalry, and 2 companies archers.

MILITARY MAGIC

The Magocracy actively encourages junior heahwisards to serve in the army. Under normal circumstances the Magocracy is incapable of fielding entire companies of spellcasters. Were a general muster to be called, it is likely the heahwisards would divide their numbers among multiple companies, so as to reduce the chances of an entire generation being wiped out in one blow. Spellcasters serving as soldiers do so as rank and file soldiers, not as specialist troops. Thus, any military heahwisards are warriors as much as workers of the arcane arts.

Heahwisards possess a wide range of spells, but due to the Siphoning and limits in Maintaining spells they must cast with care. While this document cannot cover every possible tactical spell use, basic details on how spells are employed are given below.

When seeking to disrupt enemy units, *prolonged blast* and *summon elementals* are favorites. The former can be targeted to break up charges, inflict mass casualties on heavily armored units, and channel the enemy down certain routes. In both instances, once the spell is no longer required, it can be dropped, allowing the caster to work a new charm.

Entangle, fear, knockdown, and *stun*, although they cannot be Maintained and have limited range, work well to thwart charges just before impact. *Prolonged blast* and *entangle* are especially useful in ambushes, as is *glyph*.

Heahwisards assigned to protect captains or heroes can unleash spells such as *arcane resistance, armor, boost/lower trait, deflection, quickness*, and *smite* to bolster their commander.

Should an enemy commander present himself as a target, the mage has the opportunity to launch withering volleys of *bolt* spells, wreak havoc with *burst* or *blast*, or create chaos through *puppet*.

Aura and *sphere of might*, both powerful spells, must be cast with care, for they are indiscriminate in whom they inflict harm upon.

Against enemy spellcasters, *dispel* and *negate arcana* are potent weapons, though the latter must be aimed carefully so as not to hamper one's spellcasting allies.

NOTABLE UNITS

Below are a few of the famous Hands of the Magocracy's armies. The "Company Edge" entry details an additional Edge known to all members of the unit.

HAND OF DRAGMUND

Also known as the Orc Hammers, this company of Wyse's soldiery has its barracks in Aranor. Although the captain, and thus the company's official name, has changed many times down the centuries, the Orc Hammers have retained their nickname and specialty, hunting down and destroying orcs, for the past 200 years. They have suffered many ignoble defeats and won many honors, but their fury has never diminished and each time the company reforms it is better prepared to wage war.

Captain: Dragmund Wartooth, Tuomi Knight Hrafn.
Type: Veteran heavy infantry.
Company Edge: Favored Foe (Orcs).

HAND OF ORLOF

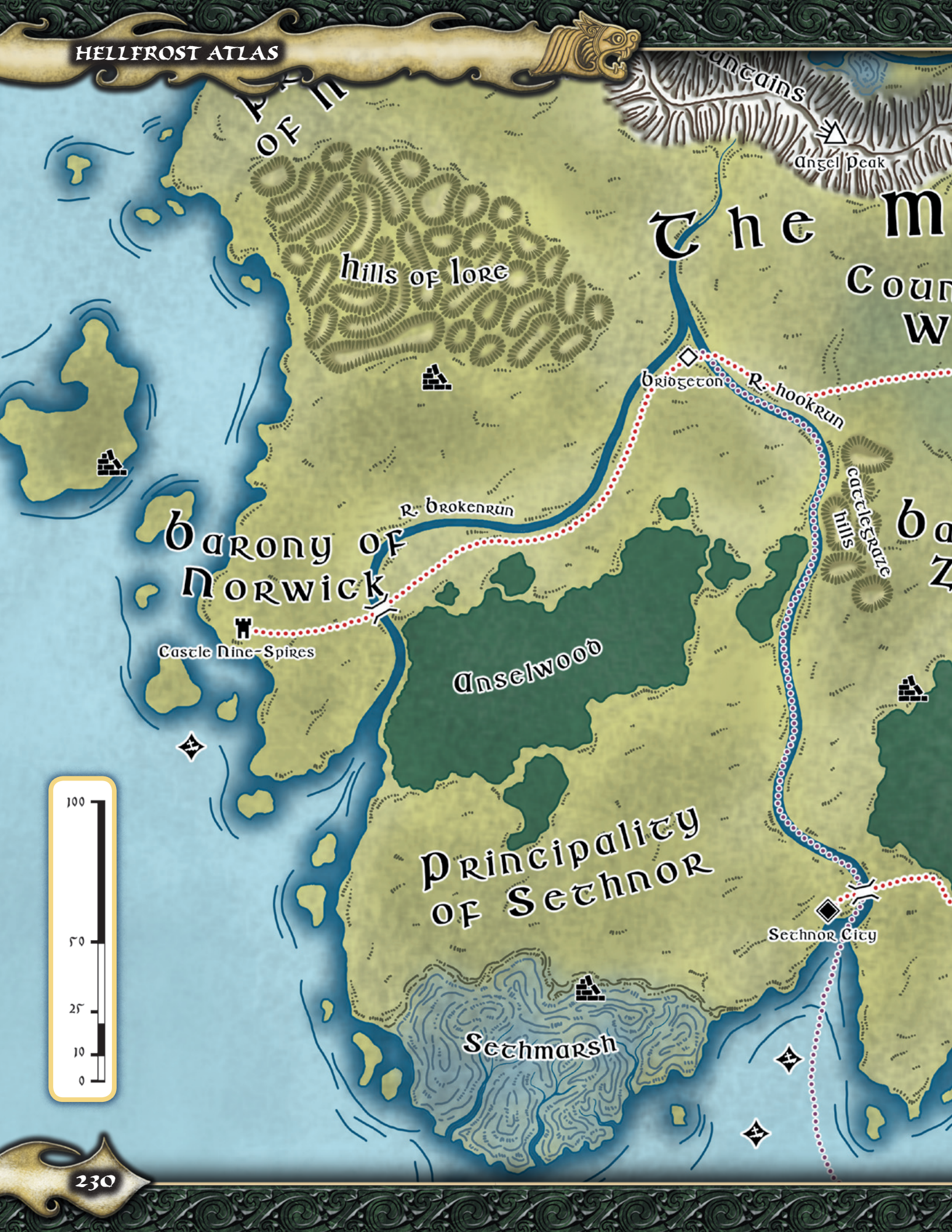
The Hand of Orlof, better known as the Troll Burners, are stationed along Foulwater Swamp at its closest point to the trade road. Equipped with crossbows from which they fire flaming quarrels,

the magocracy



Population: 377,000 (79% Anari, 12% Saxa, 4% hearth elves, 3% dwarves, 1% frostborn, 1% engro)
Ruler: Mage-King Adolphus VII
Religion: Maera
Imports: Art, glass, jewelry, pipeleaf, wine
Exports: Alchemical devices, gold


Shapryr/Icirvik
Narrows
Orc Nest
Orc Nest
The Fey Crossroad
White Death Forest
Principality of Darovia
Darton
Orc Nest
Forest of Angarion
Forest Giant's Hold
Tolem Hills
The Lodge
Tolem River
City of Angarion
Serlana
Principality of Bremen
Bremen Spike
Drumfosse
Haldness
Mage Mountains
Maera's Kennel
The Fortress of Broken Staves
R. Marshrun
The Fortress of Pleasure
Mage Hills
Halls of the Dead
The Founder's Keep
County of Kerenil
County of Ilan
Kyrk
R. Ilan
Ilan
Maximo's


Angel Peak
The M
Hills of Lore
Bridgeton
R. Hookrun
R. Brokenrun
Barony of Norwick
Castle Nine-Spires
Anselwood
Cattleraze Hills
Principality of Sethnor
Sethnor City
Sethmarsh
100
50
25
10
0


Kingshall
Aranor
agocracy
black hills
lake of darkness
Darkness
baro
Tal
nty of
yse
Staeftun
Principality
of Dragomilov
Dragomir
Weisdale
Dragomir/Skei
The Abondoned
Village
rony of
Candor
hyll Dales
Th
Auldwood
The Underwater Kingd
Woodkeep
County of
Morrow
Giant's Table Downs
N
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S


The Lodge
Sun-Bright Temple
Halfway
Border Crossing
City of Angarion
The Parliament of Tree Men
Green Stream
Web Wood
Heath
Troll Ford Bridge
The Forbidden Ruins
Dukedom of Eastheath
R. Hearthrun
Foulwater Swamp
R. Marshrun
The Troll King's lair
County of Ilan
Skei
Dragomir/Skei
R. Ilan
Ilan
Maximo's
Hvalton
Talmoor
Barony of Talmoor
Tharkness
hills
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100
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the Hand has a well-deserved reputation for fighting trolls. Unusually, the company actively recruits heahwisards and elementalists, though only those whose spells employ fire trappings. At present, mages make up a full 20% of their strength. Mage-Baron Captain Orlof is the second son of Count Adamas Orlof, a feudal subordinate of Duchess Eastheath.

Captain: Mage-Baron Vix Orlof of the Third Sphere.

Type: Veteran archers.

Company Edge: Favored Foe (Trolls); Orlof has Coordinated Firepower.

HAND OF PETRAYNA

Rather than use regular household troops to protect the Hyll Dales, House Dragomilov mustered a single company of engro Bludgeoners. Being posted here is generally a sign of the Mage-Prince's displeasure, and that is no exception with Mage-Knight Petrayna Dragomilov, a very distant cousin of the Mage-Prince (she dared to question his judgment in front of dinner guests).

Ironically, Petrayna has come to enjoy her posting, having taken a fancy to pipeleaf. Though often mocked for their stature, the engro warriors have shown more guts and loyalty than many other household companies. In a deliberate breech of the rules regarding "foreign" troops, Petrayna has appointed engros to the position of Third and Fourth Sergeant. She expects to be punished in the near future for flouting the law.

Captain: Mage-Knight Petrayna Eugenia Dragomilov of the Second Sphere.

Type: Engro Bludgeoners.

Company Edge: Double the Load (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*).

HAND OF VERSILAX

Officially designated the Shield of Kingshall and informally as the Peacocks for their bright blue tabards and feathered helms, the Hand of Versilax are the Mage-King's premier heavy cavalry company. They also serve as his personal guard. Founded a mere 28 years ago by Adolphus V, both Adolphus VI and VII broke with tradition by not disbanding the unit and forming a bodyguard of men they hand picked.

Their commander, who has been captain since the company's foundation and thus served under three Mage-Kings, is a scion of House Eastheath, though he forsook his birthright to become a Knight Hrafn. Although legally a child in the eyes of the Magocratic nobility, nothing in law prevents him from holding his post. All attempts to remove him from office through political means have failed, the Mage-King having vetoed all motions. His continued presence so close to the Mage-King is a constant thorn in his former family's side.

Captain: Versilax No-Staff, Anari Knight Hrafn.

Type: Veteran heavy cavalry.

Company Edge: Arcane Resistance.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Despite being located in the southwest corner of the continent, the Magocracy is a major trading power. With Drakeport under threat by orc pirates, the Magocracy's ports, especially Sethnor City, have enjoyed a boom in trade with the desert realm south of Rassilon. Unable to trade easily with the eastern Marklands and Winterlands, Aspiria exports all manner of goods and services through Port Helgen, while Dargon competes with Angmark for Chalcis' waterborne trade routes.

While the Magocracy is self-sufficient in basic wares, it imports large quantities of luxuries, the great majority of which is destined for the nobility. Heavily protected caravans loaded with alchemical devices and gold (the Magocracy's main exports) move between the heartland to the borders. Those going overland rarely venture further north than Coglelund.

While the Iron Guild has a presence in the Magocracy, they do not cover every route. When their services are not available, security can be provided to rulers whose territory it passes (at a price).

However, whereas the Iron Guild has permission to escort caravans across borders without constraint, local armies do not have such leeway. At each border, the current escort formerly hands over the responsibility to their neighbors. When House security is used, any missing or damaged goods are charged to the last House the caravan traveled through. Hence, the new escort carefully examines manifests and wares to ensure everything is above board, and then has the merchant sign to this effect. Such paranoia and mistrust can cause delays as long as an entire day, something merchants must factor into their schedules.

As a rule, heahwisards do not haggle over prices—such behavior shows a care for money over political power, an anathema to most Houses. If a noble does not like the price, he simply refuses to pay, usually feigning disinterest in the goods, not the price tag, and looks elsewhere for a better deal.

Taxation policies range from reasonable and affordable to tyrannical and debilitating, as the House desires. The only countrywide fixed taxation policy concerns the noble Houses. Each must pay 10% of its annual income, regardless of source, to the coffers of the Mage-King. The Mage-King's tax collectors are, if anything, more stringent in imposing the law than those of the Houses.

ARCHITECTURE

The Magocracy's peasants are primarily Anari, though with a sizeable Saxa population. Their houses reflect their different cultural origins.

For the Anari, most houses are built as a single-story timber frame with walls of woven withies covered in daub. Roofs are generally thatched, though those with money can afford wooden shingles. By comparison, Saxa build their houses out of planks, which are then daubed to cover any cracks. Thatch is the preferred roofing material. Most peasant houses are two or three room affairs, with a large communal room, a private bedroom for the head of house (attached to which is a strong room for the family's valuables), and perhaps a byre for livestock.

The nobility and those with money opt for stone-fortified manor houses or, more rarely, stone towers. Greater nobles dwell in castles. Interior furnishings range from extravagant opulence to absolute minimalism. Those who dwell in the former abodes like to show off their great wealth (even if they have furnished their home to the point of bankruptcy), while the latter are making a hollow gesture that wealth means little to them compared to political power.

Whatever structure a noble calls home, one can guarantee it is decorated with symbols of crescent moons (a sign sacred to Maera), and staves. Homespun tapestries, as much to help cut down on breezes as decorate a room, show scenes from the House's history. Those with money to spend can purchase rugs and tapestries embroidered with geometric designs (as well as other furnishings) from the mysterious desert realm of Al-Shirkuh.

Most settlements with a population over 100 boast an inn, with those on the trade roads being larger, grander, and affording better security. Settlements boasting more than a few hundred souls usually have a small temple, though only rarely does it honor one deity. More common is shared worship, with separate gods being allocated a single room.

Unless a settlement is within a day or two of known monster haunts, no expense is wasted protecting it—after all, there is little threat to the stability of the realm beyond a few marauding orcs, giants, and trolls.

MAJOR LOCALES

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes plentiful sites of interest within the Magocracy. This section explores a few other places likely to be of interest to adventurers.

THE ABANDONED VILLAGE

Until five years ago, the village of Garlsbad was an ordinary Magocratic settlement, one of many in the Principality of Dragomilov

with absolutely nothing to make it noteworthy. The inhabitants worked hard in the fields, paid their taxes on time, and worshipped their gods. While life was hard, they had few cares.

One late fall day a trade caravan pulled into Garlsbad to sell winter supplies, as it did every year. Two days later, a lone merchant was found staggering through the countryside, howling insanely, his eye gouged from their sockets, his ears ripped off, and his tongue cut out. It was quickly deduced his injuries were self-inflicted. Magical or mundane, all attempts to question the merchant failed—his conscious mind, or at least what little remained of it, had been driven deep into the furthest recesses of his mind.

On hearing the news, Mage-Count Henrik Drasilovich of the Third Sphere, the nobleman in whose territory Garlsbad lay, swiftly sent an inquisitor and a squad of soldiers to investigate. Save that Garlsbad was deserted—every living creature, great and small, had vanished—what they discovered during their three day visit has never been revealed to anyone outside Mage-Prince Viktor Dragomilov's closest circle (some say not even the Mage-King knows). It is said the inquisitor, a man who had battled demons, was shaken to his core and that several of the soldiers later went mad, but rumors fly like the wind and are just as groundless.

A week after their return, Mage-Prince Viktor issued a proclamation—anyone, regardless of title, sphere, age, race, gender, religion, nationality, or affiliation spied coming out of Garlsbad would be executed on sight without being offered parley. The village was promptly placed under quarantine to enforce the law. Squads of heavily armed soldiers led by a heahwisard and backed up by a paladin of Maera took up permanent garrison on the roads, while mounted patrols were set to watch over the field approaches.

The guards are changed without fail on the first Monandaeg of each month. Black-clad agents of the mage-prince wearing Maerathril charms on their robes question them on what everything they have heard or seen during their short tour before sending them to other duties. No soldier performs more than a single one-month tour at Garlsbad per year.

What has become of the merchant is unknown. Rumors abound he still lives, sealed away in the mage-prince's dungeon, where he spends his days screaming in terror, his hands permanently shackled to prevent him ripping apart his flesh. Some claim his cell is lined with tar metal impregnated with Maerathril runes.

ALSTENWAL

Population: 290 (+300 workers)
Ruler: Mage-Knight Arctura Haldir of the Second Sphere

While Mage-Duchess Gwynion frets over her missing plants and spends a fortune replacing them, a cabal of younger nobles are no longer content to see their house slide into relative obscurity. Haldir may no longer have a master staff, but that does not mean it cannot increase its fortunes in other ways.

Using their own money, coin misappropriated from the central treasury, and investments from the cult of Var (and from secret sponsors in the Gray League), they are slowly turning the sleepy fishing village of Alstenwal into a commercial trading port.

The project is as grand as it is expensive. New wharves capable of accommodating the largest merchant vessels, rows of stone warehouses, new houses and shops, a temple to Var, and a new network of streets wide enough for carts are slowly rising from the ground. Once completed, a task likely to take another year or two, the mages hope it will attract merchants from Chalcis (who currently use Dargon) and Aspiria (who make call at Port Helgen). They intend to rename the expanded settlement Port Haldir and connect it to the capital by a trade road.

All is not going to plan, though. Darovia and Hergenald have heard of the construction work. Having no desire to see their strangleholds on trade with the western Hearthlands loosened, both realms are paying saboteurs to disrupt the work. Worse, agents of the Mage-Duchess have noticed the reduced treasury. At present they do not know for sure where the monies have gone, but they are not stupid—construction projects are not cheap, and claims the work is being financed entirely from personal funds and donations from the cult of Var leave a sizable shortfall.

AULDWOOD

Population: 3,670 (100% hearth elves)
Ruler: Greenlady Erendriel Oakbough
Religion: Maera, Sigel, Eostre, Ullr
Imports/ Exports: None

Although the northern tip of Auldwood now lies some 400 miles from the southern end of Angarion, the two were once part of the same great forest. As the forest is divided from its ancient roots, so the elves have become a divided people.

For centuries Auldwood has ignored its Magocratic neighbors. Loggers have proved no problem, for Anselwood was given to the Magocracy as a source of timber in return for Auldwood remaining unmolested. To give the mage-nobles their due, they have observed both the letter and spirit of the agreement.

The new generations of elves that have grown up since those ancient pacts were made are not so happy with the situation. While the elves had hoped the humans would manage the forest sensibly, replacing what they took, this has not been the case—the once mighty Anselwood has been greatly reduced in size, forcing the native animals and fey into an ever-decreasing space.

While all the inhabitants of Auldwood honor Eostre and Ullr, worship of Sigel and Maera has come to dominate the land and define the factions. Those who worship Sigel have become known as "sun elves." They spend their free time feasting and singing by sunlight. Those who honor Maera have come to be called "moon elves." They favor the night, their haunting dirges and mournful tunes a testament to the bitterness in their hearts.

The rift began shortly after Anselwood was ceded to the Magocracy. The sun elves saw this as a prudent move to guarantee their long-term security. The moon elves saw it as a betrayal of their ancient oath to protect the forests of Rassilon.

Against the orders of Greenlady Erendriel, a "sun elf," who has declared Anselwood off-limits to her people as did her father and his father before him, the less tolerant "moon elves," many of whom share the views of the Guardians of the Wild, are journeying to the forest to harass the loggers with arrows and spells. So far word has not reached the mistress of Auldwood, for survivors blame the incidents on troublesome fey. The mages have responded to the "fey menace" in the only way they know how—with force. Casualties on both sides are slowly mounting. It will only be a matter of time, though, before the fey nobles in Alfheim learn of the elves' involvement and make contact with Erendriel directly to demand reparations. If not handled with tact, the repercussions could turn into civil war.

The division in the mortal realm is echoed in, or perhaps driven by, Alfheim. Just two mighty fey nobles hold power over the whole of Auldwood. The Lord of Merriment rules the Seelie Court. His sister, the Lady of Mourning, governs the Unseelie Court.

CATTLEGRAZE HILLS

This range of low hills rises along the northern shore of the Hookrun where the borders with the Barony of Zandor and the Principality of Sethnor meet. The grass is particularly lush, and the longhorn cattle that graze here are renowned for their rich milk and succulent flesh. Herds are moved onto the hills from the surrounding settlements in late spring and returned to the farms only in early fall. The cattle are never left unguarded—orc raiders are a constant menace. Orcs are not the only cattle thieves, though—Wyse's neighbors are jealous of its prized cattle. The landscape is dotted with crude stone huts, the homes of the herders who watch over the herds.

DRUMFOSSE

Population: 384
Ruler: Mage-Knight Vikrotis Tanovar of the First Sphere

The small village of Drumfosse lies near the northern foothills of the Mage Mountains. An agricultural settlement, it boasts a small mill, powered by the River Drum, whose cold waters cascade down from the mountains. Although it has a shrine to Maera, few citizens worship here except on high holy days, and even then lip service

is the norm. The shrine, a stone column engraved with runes, was raised by the current ruler's great-grandfather, paid for by a special tax incurred on the peasants. Most inhabitants are followers of Eostre Plantmother. In one of the outer fields is a ring of standing stones, an ancient site that serves as a shrine.

Aside from a large granary that stores the grain and flour for neighboring communities, the only other structure of note is a five-story tower that stands on a hill at the edge of the settlement. Opulently decorated, it is home to the village's absentee ruler.

Drumfosse is the feudal property of Mage-Knight Vikrotis, a scion of House Tanovar, a minor house beholden to House Bremen. Keen to curry favor with his prince in the hope of marrying one of his young daughters, the nobleman spends most of his time at court, engaging in debauchery.

Daily governance is left to his steward, a corpulent, lazy official by the name of Ambrose ap-Gwain. He grows fat on the peasants' labors and is skimming money from his lord's treasury to fund his own lavish lifestyle. So long as Vikrotis receives enough money to keep him in fine clothes and good wine when he calls for it, he doesn't bother to keep track of his income.

Drumfosse has a problem that might ruin the nobleman and bring the steward's crimes to light. Since last summer the villagers have been suffering strange effects. Some have woken to find their muscles hugely swollen and their strength boosted to twice that of normal, or suddenly gained immense intelligence. Others have become simpletons or cowards. One documented case involved a peasant growing wings. The effects are short-lived, but the peasants are scared witless. Productivity is steadily dropping, and with it the village's income.

The problem lies with the water. Long ago, House Bremen erected a heahwisardry school devoted to alchemy in the Mage Mountains, far away from prying eyes of jealous rivals. Over the course of centuries, trainee alchemists poured failed potions into a disused cistern. The school was abandoned after the Golem Uprising, but the cisterns were never drained.

Over the decades, the tiny amounts of residual magic in the potions have concentrated into a more potent form. With no maintenance performed on the stonework in two hundred years, the magical residue has leeched into the local water supply—the head of the River Drum. When drunk, the waters can produce strange effects mimicking spells (typically *boost/lower trait*, but others as well).

Curing the village's problem simply requires the cistern to be repaired. Alas, that is not as easy as it sounds, for the magic-rich water at the river's head has been consumed by wild beasts too, mutating them into strange forms and imbuing them with arcane resistance.

THE FORTRESS OF BROKEN STAVES

According to Magocratic folklore the fortress is a prison where enemies of the state are sent. Once inside, there is no hope for pardon. All that remains is misery and pain, and the long, agonizing wait for death.

Although the fortress is universally known of and feared among the Magocracy's elite its name appears in no official records, no one can definitely prove anyone has ever been sent there, and it has never been accorded a specific location. Some heahwisards say it stands on (sometimes inside) a desolate peak high in the Mage Mountains or Hills of Lore. Others claim it lies on an island off the coast, its existence veiled by a powerful relic and only visible to those attuned to the device.

The punishments that await prisoners vary wildly. That one's staff is broken is accepted as common fact, for that is the most serious punishment. Prisoners are said to have their heads encased in Maerathril masks, concealing their identities from the warders and hampering what little remains of their magical power. More horrific stories involve having Maerathril nails hammered into their bones to disrupt attempts at magic, or removal of the eyes and tongue to prevent any spells the weakened prisoners happen to cast finding a target.

Just to be sure the inmates attempt no magic, the wardens are said to be Arcane Hands trained in charms that render them resistant to magic. Darker stories involve the presence of the dreaded arcanophages (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*).

Despite the total lack of evidence that the fortress exists, it continues to terrify heahwisards. Most were raised on threats of behaving or being sent there. Whenever a heahwisard disappears, as occasionally happens, his peers whisper he has been sent to the fortress.

GIANTS' TABLES DOWNS

Running east to west across southern Morrow, the rolling hills and valleys of the Giants' Tables Downs are a major landmark and a barrier to travel. The southern faces are very steep, the reverse side much shallower. The shallow soil and treacherous slopes make the Downs suitable only for grazing sturdy goats and hardy sheep.

The Downs takes their name for the many dolmens that stand on the hilltops. Local legend says these were the dining tables of giants. Those at the top of the Downs were the preserve of the nobility, and those lower down used by the peasants. Aside from the occasional cliff giant poaching livestock, there are few giants to be found these days. Rumors abound there is treasure buried beneath the largest dolmen, known locally as the Chieftain's Table.

HALLS OF THE DEAD

While a heahwisard can use another mage's staff, this is only possible if the other mage is still alive. The ritual that binds a heahwisard to his staff and imbues it with magical potency ends the instant his heart stops beating. When a mage dies, his staff is buried alongside him, for it is widely held that the bond will be rekindled in the Afterlife. The only exceptions to this rule are the master staves, which have a power all their own.

When the first heahwisards died, they were buried not in Kingshall, but on the southern foothills of the Mage Hills, where their first council was held. Their tombs were no humble barrows, but cathedral-like mausoleums crafted from marble and decorated with precious metals. Generations of heahwisards have since been laid to rest near the great masters, though in much smaller tombs. Recent generations, however, especially those native to the southern domains, have chosen to bury their dead closer to home.

The necropolis is divided into large familial plots. When their allocated space runs out, a House is forced to extend downward. Thus, while the surface is covered in thousands of thousands, there are many levels of catacombs beneath. Instead of statues and edifices proclaiming their might, these unfortunates receive only an inscription on the side of an existing structure. Naturally, the great Houses have much larger plots than their less important peers.

Although located in the County of Kerenil, the vast necropolis is governed by the cult of Maera. They are tasked with maintaining the tombs, a service for which they charge the appropriate House, though it is the cult of Scaetha who sings dirges for the dead and protects the crypts from tomb robbers (again, for a fee). While heahwisards are rarely buried with magical devices (no House is prepared to waste perfectly good magic on the dead), they are interred with grave goods befitting their station. It is these mundane riches that attract thieves.

HEATH

Kingshall may be the capital, but Heath is the most frequently visited city in the Magocracy. Passed through by almost every visitor arriving by land, it has developed into a lively market town catering both for heahwisards about to depart their homeland and outsiders just arriving.

Arcane Assortment: Olennix Tanicus was destined to be a Mage-Baron. Much to his parents' eternal shame, he grew more interested in the theory of magic than its practice. Rejecting heahwisardry, Olennix opted instead to become a cleric of Maera. Now in his late fifties, the black sheep runs a small shop in a quiet corner of Heath. Olennix buys and sells alchemical ingredients, alchemical devices, and tomes of learning. Business is slow but steady, and he makes a modest profit.

Recent matters have aroused his curiosity. In the past two months, three separate people have come into his shop asking whether he had a copper jar stoppered with a wax plug inscribed with mystic runes for sale. He recognized two of the customers by their House sigils—one hailed from House Dragomilov and the other from House Wyse. The cleric is prepared to offer adventurers a reward in stock items if they can discover more about the mysterious jar and why so many people have an interest in it. He'll pay considerably more to gain possession of the object.

Mammoth Meals: People laughed when Loxer ap-Blaen declared he was going to raise mammoths and use their meat in his tavern. No one is laughing now, for Loxer has grown rich from his venture.

The tavern is no place for vegetarians. Generous portions of mammoth stew, steak, patties, and ribs are the staples. Taking pride of place on the menu is the Mammoth Meal—96 ounces (2700 grams) of prime rump steak. The steak costs 40 gs but can feed as many as ten. An individual who can eat the entire steak, without use of magic or miracles, in the time it takes for a small candle to burn down (about an hour) eats for free and has his name added to the Roll of Honor. The only beverages are mammoth milk and fermented mammoth milk. The latter has the texture of curdled milk and is not recommended for those of weak constitution.

While the tavern attracts plenty of patrons, not every citizen of Heath is happy—some argue that the gluttony it encourages aids the cause of Vali.

Loxer's extended family prospers from his mammoths. His sister, Sibille, sells winter clothing made from mammoth hair, while her husband, Gwain ap-Riton, uses mammoth horn to manufacture various goods.

KINGSHALL: GENERAL

See the map on page xxx for the layout of Kingshall.

The Arena: Mage duels are held in the 1000-seat amphitheater every Monandaeg. Seats vary in price from 2 ss to 20 gs. The price, and quality, of the refreshments is similarly varied. Most of the duels are between students still learning their art. What the audience hopes to witness is a true duel—a battle of honor between rivals. The winner of such a bout not only satisfies his honor, but a good show can earn him public adulation.

On other days, the amphitheater hosts plays, storytellers, and musicians. Tickets are half the price above, but even this does little to draw a crowd. Many stories exist of storytellers who traveled here in the hope of making their name and attracting a noble sponsor, only for them to play to an audience of one (and he was deaf, according to the most common punchline).

City Gates: The city gates are open only between an hour before dawn and an hour after dusk. On Monandaeg, the King's Gate remains open for one hour after the dueling finishes to allow those living in Low Hall time to get home. Heahwisards and those under their authority are permitted passage through a postern gate set beside each of the city gates when the main gates are closed.

Embassy of Alantaris Isle: While its merchants sell their wares at Port Helgen, Alantaris Isle has no trade agreements with the Magocracy—Port Helgen is simply the closest mainland port with routes to the central Hearthlands. As a result, the Council of Citizens has little interest in operating an embassy. The Convocation, however, is keen to study the inner workings of the Magocracy and gain access to the Royal Library. To that end, it has agreed to assign an ambassador on behalf of the Council. Every member of the embassy staff is an elementalist.

Embassy of Angarion: Despite asking that an embassy be constructed, the Shining King has never sent an ambassador to Kingshall. The grand wooden structure is utterly deserted. Thieves have never bothered looting it, for it is unfurnished. On occasion, hearth elves journeying to the enclave in Auldwood have arrived at Kingshall bearing official letters allowing them to use the embassy building as a refuge.

The current tensions between the two realms has led to rumors the elves have created a sanctuary inside, through which agents and assassins can enter Kingshall undetected should war break out. Several heahwisards have petitioned the Council Elect to have the embassy torn down, but they have never garnered enough support.

Embassy of Coglelund: As with all titles in Coglelund, that of ambassador can be bought. The price is astronomical (50,000 gs for a five-year term), but a shrewd ambassador can quickly recoup his outlay and make a profit. The embassy is responsible for awarding trade contracts with Coglelund, and a bribe goes a long way to ensuring a noble house receives a lucrative contract. Equally, merchants in Coglelund who want the Magocracy's trade to flow through their warehouses must bribe the ambassador.

The current ambassador is Merchant Baron Huidemar ap-Eustache. A dandy of the highest order (it said he never wears the same garment twice), he sold everything he owned to secure the position of ambassador. Two years into his term and he is already seeing a healthy return on his investment—Huidemar may appear a fop, but his head for business shames many clerics of Var.

Embassy of Vestmark: Vestmark has maintained an embassy in Kingshall since the end of the Saxa uprising, primarily to oversee trade. Since the rise of Orcmark trade has all but died. The previous ambassador was recalled to fight on the frontline. In his place the king sent Hauld Horsa Edgertsunu, a man well past his prime. Horsa spends his time trying to drum up military support for the war against the orcs. Alas, the heahwisards see the conflict as an internal problem and, so far, have declined the invitation to embroil themselves in the bloody struggle.

The Five Spheres: The various Houses, great and small, are political and economic rivals, but they are not sworn enemies. When heahwisards in Kingshall wish to socialize and discuss matters of magic, rather than scheme and plot, they invariably end up in the Five Spheres.

Filling a six storey stone tower, the tavern takes its name because of its admittance rule. Rather than placing any relevance on social rank (which older heahwisards prefer), patrons are categorized by their sphere. Those of the First Sphere may use the ground floor facilities only, Second Sphere mages the second floor, and so on. There is no exception to the rule—heahwisards may always drink on a lower floor, but never on a higher floor than their sphere permits.

Since many high-ranking nobles have either a low sphere or little desire to socialize with lower ranks, they tend to avoid the establishment. Much of the clientele is thus made up of younger mages, those with little hope of achieving high total and who focus on becoming powerful practitioners of magic rather than politicians.

Non-heahwisards, even other spellcasters, may drink and dine in the newly built annex, but only if they are in the employ of or vouched for by a heahwisard patron. This rule can be waived for two types of person. Clerics of Maera, with whom heahwisards often confer, and scholars specializing in Knowledge (Alchemy and/or Arcana) may be guests of a heahwisard patron. In this case, they are permitted to drink on his floor.

The annex serves only cheap meals and drinks. In the tower, one may purchase average or expensive refreshments.

No spellcasting is permitted inside in tower, nor are Maintained spells cast outside allowed, though heahwisards are not required to give up their staves—everyone knows the rules, and there are plenty of retired Arcane Hands working as bouncers to help enforce the rule.

The Garrison: Kingshall doesn't have a city watch. Policing and manning the walls falls to four heavy infantry companies—two veteran and two regular—garrisoned in High Hall. Unless the city is on alert, two companies are on duty at any one time—one mans the walls and gates, while the other patrols the streets.

The Garrison comprises four long halls, each enough to sleep 100 men, officers' houses, the city armory, the city jail, training areas, and a parade ground.

The Gilded Sword: Kingshall was never intended to be a center of mercantile activity, but its location and status has made it a popular stop for merchants. While it may sound like an inn or tavern, the Gilded Sword is actually a temple of Var and hiring hall for the Iron Guild.

The combination of faith and protection did not come about by accident. The resident high priest, Profiteer Donicus ap-Evrard,



kingshall

1. academy of heahwisardry
2. the arena
3. city gates
4. embassy of alantaris isle
5. embassy of antarion
6. embassy of coglelund
7. embassy of vestmark
8. the five spheres
9. the garrison
10. the gilded sword
11. the grand temple
12. half moon kennels
13. house estates
14. the magic market
15. royal library
16. the sigil
17. vitaliana's parchmenters
18. the weary wizard

population: 1,603 ruler: mage-king adolphus vii of the fifth sphere

bought an Iron Guild franchise as a means of expanding his business empire and increasing his profits. As Kingshall is the capital, and because plentiful caravans pass through the gates, the cleric was granted the rank of Gauntlet-General.

The Grand Temple: Dedicated to Maera, the temple is built on a monumental scale. Like many of her temples, it is circular in shape, representing the moon.

The temple is broadly divided into three rings. The outer ring is the largest and is as far as most laity may proceed. The laity enters through the huge doors into the public worship area, known as the Outer Temple. Its curved walls are adorned with tiered seating. By tradition, the lower one's title, the lower tier one must occupy. Also in the outer ring are workshops, storehouses, kitchens, servants quarters, meeting rooms, and the public library.

The middle ring is reserved for the clergy, though laity may enter, under escort, with permission. As well as their living quarters, there are private prayer rooms, meditation rooms, alchemical laboratories, a vault containing relics and forbidden books.

The inner ring, more correctly known as the Inner Temple, is the main focus of worship. Here, beneath a glass roof magically enchanted to show the night sky during the day but becoming crystal clear once the moon rises, clerics conduct the secret rituals that honor Maera.

The temple supports 300 laity (around a third of whom live here), 100 priests, and 30 paladins. The high priest traditionally holds the honor title Prince of Kingshall, being bestowed the rank by the incumbent Mage-King on the cleric's elevation to the post. The current titleholder is Pertacus ap-Belletor.

Pertacus has served in the role for 19 years. He never liked Mage-King Adolphus VI, and he doesn't like his successor, though he has always taken great pains to hide his feelings—the Mage-King may have no direct authority over the cult, but he can make life very difficult for a wayward high priest. Pertacus isn't exactly sure what it is about the current monarch he finds repulsive—all he knows is there is something "odd" about him, as there was about Adolphus VI, and that being in the Mage-King's presence makes his skin crawl.

Half Moon Kennels: Suitably trained, moon dogs make ideal guardians and pets for heahwisards with a healthy sense of paranoia and full coffers. Given their supposed origin, it is no surprise clerics of Maera prefer them as companions over normal canines.

The Kennels, as it is more popularly known, is owned by Mainet ap-Varocher. He breeds, rears, and trains moon dogs for wealthy clients. The cult of Maera has long given up trying to outlaw the trade—the heahwisards are strongly in favor of its continuance and Mainet has never mistreated his animals.

A typical specimen sells for 5,000 gs, an extraordinary sum for an average citizen of Kingshall, but easily affordable by mage-nobles with a steady source of income. As well as common moon dogs, he has several pedigree lines for sale. Prices below are in addition to the basic cost of a moon dog. These options can be combined.

Keen Senses: the dog has Notice d12 and Tracking d10 (+1500 gs); *Savage:* the dog has the Frenzy Edge (+2000 gs); *True Pedigree:* the dog is a Wild Card (multiply the total cost by three); *Vicious:* the dog has Fighting d8 and its bite does Str+d8 (+2500 gs).

House Estates: Each of the great houses maintains property in the capital, their current status reflected in how close the building is located to the Mage-King's palace. The estates exist only at the Mage-King's pleasure. They are not sanctuaries in which criminals can avoid arrest, nor are they treated with the same rights as foreign embassies—they are simply places where visiting officials and permanent appointees to the royal court stay when in town.

No House is permitted to station soldiers in Kingshall, but Arcane Hands are allowed as estate guardians. Many of the servants who maintain the estates are more than capable combatants.

The Magic Market: Heahwisards are as capable of creating alchemical devices as any type of mage, but few with high rank bother—such work is seen as a distraction from more important things, such as politics, and work suitable only for lesser practitioners of the arcane. While some nobles have an alchemist on their staff, those in Kingshall who require only the occasional device visit the Magic Market.

While the mage nobles refer to it as a separate entity, it is in reality one row of stalls in the Low Hall marketplace. It only operates on Monandaeg, though—the rest of the week the stalls are used by other traders. Each stall is rented by a licensed mage or cleric.

Arcane traders wishing to operate a stall must pay 2500 gs to the Mage-King. This grants them the same space in the market for life. In the event they go out of business, retire, die, or otherwise cease trading, ownership of the stall reverts back to the Mage-King. The buying or selling of alchemical devices through any other channel is a serious crime. Even the cult of Maera must trade here, though its stall belongs to the temple rather than any individual cleric. Unless the cult ceases to be, its presence in the Magic Market is guaranteed until the end of time.

The local temple of Var does good trade hiring out Thieftakers on Monandaeg—alchemical devices are high value, low bulk items, and a common target for professional thieves and opportunists.

Royal Library: The Royal Library is an impressive collection of books and scrolls dating back to the founding of the Magocracy. It is second only to the fabled library of the Citadel in terms of works on arcane matters, a fact that grates with the Convocation of Elementalists.

As well as the public library, to which anyone can in theory be granted permission, there is a restricted section. Only the Mage-King, Mage-Princes, and guests invited by these individuals may access the hidden lore.

The chief librarian, who holds the title Master of Lore, is always a heahwisard. He is appointed by the Mage-King and serves as long as he retains the king's favor. Assisting him are a dozen clerics of Maera and Hoenir and 20 junior heahwisards. Ten paladins of Maera, five paladins of Hoenir, and ten members of the Mage-King's personal guard provide security.

Admission: Heahwisards and clerics of Maera. Others may apply in writing to the chief librarian for access. A reply is received within 1d4 months if living outside the Magocracy or 1d4+1 weeks if the would-be patron is residing within the realm.

Rules: No weapons or spellcasting are permitted within the Royal Library. Patrons wishing a *speak language* spell may pay one of the clerics of Hoenir (costs 10 gs per casting).

Specialties: Alchemy, arcane matters, heahwisardry, the Magocracy.

Investigation Rolls: +2 general, +4 for specialties.

The Sigil: A shabby tavern in a rough neighborhood of Low Hall, the Sigil is the headquarters of Kingshall's sole thieves' guild, the Rainbow Knives. Although they operate from Low Wall, the thieves ply most of their trade in High Hall, with a specific focus on the noble's estates. Access after dark is no problem—while the heahwisards are safely ensconced behind the King's Gate, the sewers pass unobstructed under both parts of the city.

Stealing from any wizard brings with it certain inherent risks, but heahwisards are a paranoid bunch and spend small fortunes on magical and mundane protective measures. Only the most skilled thieves are awarded the opportunity to plunder High Hall, and even they must rely on alchemical devices to give them a sporting chance.

Vitaliana's Parchmenters: Heahwisards are notoriously fussy and exacting. In their vernacular, parchment is made from the skin of cows, goats, or sheep, while vellum refers solely to calfskin. Vellum may be better quality, and thus more desirable, but few heahwisards turn down the chance to buy parchment from Vitaliana ap-Dagwald, official supplier to the Mage-King.

The inheritor of a secret technique, her parchment is the superior of any vellum. The finest grade parchment costs 10 gs a sheet, but is greatly desired by alchemists—using a sheet in the creation of a scroll gives +1 to the Knowledge (Alchemy) roll. Using the parchment is an additional cost to the usual 50 gs per spell Rank.

Jealousy is an ugly thing, but the opportunity to become the primary supplier of any type of good to the Mage-King and his court leads many to adopt underhand tactics. Other parchmenters in Kingshall are spreading rumors that Vitaliana's source is not calfskin, but something far more unwholesome. Such rumors rarely find fertile ground, but whenever Vitaliana is questioned about the source of the skin she becomes very defensive and agitated.

The Weary Wizard: While heahwisards look down their noses at other types of mage, peasants are inclined to treat anyone wield-

ing supernatural powers with respect, if only out of fear of being turned into something unnatural.

Magical visitors (includes clerics) are welcomed at the Weary Wizard, an inn in Low Hall. Its sign depicts a red-faced wizard leaning heavily on a staff, while a large sign on the door proclaims "Wizards and Clerics Only." The proprietor, Mabile Three-Trays, owns a domesticated moon dog, Garm (Saxa for "Rag"). Always found lying just inside the door, the toothless old hound sniffs everyone who enters. If it barks, it means the patron has an Arcane Background and is thus due a warm welcome. If it growls, the customer is turned away. Mabile doesn't hand out exceptions, and those who think to argue are quickly reminded that every patron present knows the arcane arts.

KINGSHALL: THE MASTER OAK

In a courtyard in the palace grows an old, gnarled oak. Folklore states that the seed was planted by Maera and that the master staves were carved from its branches. This is a myth—the founders of the Magocracy already had their staves—but belief is a powerful tool. Over the centuries, the tree has become a focus for heahwisard rituals, transforming it into a sacred place. While even the Mage-Princes come here on occasion to see if they are worthy of a blessing, none of the last three Mage-Kings have even stepped into the courtyard.

Some heahwisards come here to meditate in the hope the spirit of the tree, or that of one of the founders, will confer some secret knowledge or help solve a problem. Many stories exist concerning mages who gained wisdom in this manner, but critics (typically those who never benefitted) argue that any meditation can produce similar results.

Each House possessing a master staff is required to send four Arcane Hands to act as the tree's guardians. They have standing orders to use lethal force against anyone who tries to harm the tree.

The clerics of Maera who tend the tree are worried, for the Master Oak appears to be dying. Blight affects the leaves and fungus is eating at the bark. Ministrations by the cult of Eostre Plantmother have failed to cure either affliction.

Spirit Name: Staff-Blesser.

Ambience: The courtyard is a tranquil place. Heroes with Berserk cannot enter a rage here, and Bloodthirsty curs find they have no wish to take lives unnecessarily.

Deity: Maera.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: The spirit does not communicate to anyone. Heahwisards know whether they have been blessed or cursed because the tip of their staff turns silver (minor blessing), rainbow hued (major blessing), or black (curse) for the duration of the boon or bane. Any covering placed over the tip burns away, making it impossible to conceal the marking.

Sacrifice: A heahwisard may offer sacrifice only on the anniversary of his Staff Day ritual. First, he must pour an alchemical potion (any type will do) on the roots of the tree. Second, he must loudly announce his title, full name, and sphere. Third, he must touch the tip of his staff to the trunk.

Powers: Staff-Blesser cares nothing for titles or spheres. When judging supplicants, she looks in their souls. Thus, any heahwisard who offers sacrifice has the same chance of being receiving a blessing. When proper sacrifice has been made, the GM should draw a card from the action deck.

A deuce means the mage has been found wanting. He receives –1 penalty to Heahwisardry rolls for the next three months (96 days). If it is a Jack through Ace, he is found worthy and receives a minor blessing. He gains +1 to his Heahwisardry roll for the same period. On a Joker, the blessing is a major one. The heahwisard increases his Wild Die by one die type (or gains a d6 if an Extra), but only for Heahwisardry rolls. Other cards mean the spirit confers no blessing or curse on the mage.

MAXIMO'S

The trade road between Kingshall and Heath, while not without its dangers, sees frequent and heavy traffic between the months of winter. Located halfway between Troll Ford Bridge and the border with the County of Llan stands Maximo's, a large roadside inn. The establishment is actually called the Burnt Troll, but everyone calls it after its owner.

Close enough to Foulwater Swamp for trolls to make the occasional foray, the inn is protected by a strong wooden wall. Inside the compound are the main inn, which has three guest wings, a stable block, a farrier's workshop, a wheelwright's workshop, a small general store (Village items only), and staff accommodation.

Maximo, a spry gentleman of 76 summers (and counting, he often adds), is a retired Arcane Hand of House Eastheath. He talks often and fondly of his days serving the house's heahwisards and remains friends with many serving Hands. Any Arcane Hand of House Eastheath in good standing (Maximo knows such things through his contacts) receives free room and board for one night, then half price for up to three additional nights. His master, if present, is not accorded this generosity.

Hands sent into the wider world to learn their craft often call in at the inn before leaving the Magocracy. Maximo's does good business and has become a hiring hall for mages and clerics seeking a bodyguard. Many a young Hand's adventuring career has started in this inn.

MAERA'S KENNEL

This wide, snaking valley in the eastern Mage Mountains is home to many packs of moon dogs. While heahwisards often keep domesticated moon dogs as pets, those that live here are totally feral. The cult of Maera has a small outpost at the valley mouth manned by three priests and ten paladins. Their primary purpose is to prevent poachers from capturing the dogs, which the cult considers sacred animals.

Rumors abound the moon dogs are protecting some special site. The valley is largely unexplored. Those who trespass here dread the setting of the sun, for the moon dogs that patiently stalked them by day are prone to attack once the moon rises. Magic and miracles are of little use against the dogs, and cold steel can do little against overwhelming numbers of vicious hounds.

When the moon is full, the sound of baying dogs travels for many miles. Local farmers and shepherds believe the moon dogs are the souls of heahwisards who offended Maera, but not to such a degree they were condemned to the Abyss. Reincarnated as a moon dog, they have one last chance to show their loyalty before final judgment is decreed.

THE SALMON RUN RIVER

The Salmon Run River originates in the Mage Mountains and flows through the Dukedom of Haldir. Locals claim there is a golden salmon in the river, a fish capable of not only talking but granting luck to anyone who catches and then releases it. Whether they are earnest or having a laugh at outsiders' expense is yet to be seen—no one has ever caught a golden salmon.

STAEFTUN

Population: 1,675

Ruler: Mage-Countess Lucretia Dragomilov of the Third Sphere

A modest sized town, Staeftun ("Staff Town") takes its name from its major export—heahwisard staves. The production of staves that has made the town famous over the past six generations is not a mass industry, but the work of one family, and then only one member at any given time.

Young heahwisards keen to have a staff made by the undisputed master are often disappointed by what they find. Stehman Garrick, the current master craftsman, is not a figure to inspire awe, nor is he even a heahwisard. Stehman was born a commoner and he is proud of his heritage.

Not that the craftsman needs any magical talent to undertake his work—a staff is just a sturdy length of wood until it is bound to its owner. What Stehman produces are works of art, each staff loving and exquisitely carved to its future owner's exact requirements.

Each staff takes many weeks to complete and Stehman charges high prices. Still, heahwisards put a great deal of emphasis on looking suitably important, and he has a long waiting list. Attempts to bully the craftsman into moving a customer up the list never succeed—he may be a peasant under Magocratic law, but he is feted by Mage-Prince Dragomilov, who has declared Stehman and his family under his personal protection. Sensible families approach the craftsman as soon as their offspring show the requisite talent to become a heahwisard.

At the GMs discretion, wielding a Garrick staff (they are named after the family, not the current craftsman) grants the heahwisard a variable Charisma bonus among his peers, regardless of their social level or sphere. However, prestige comes at a cost—1250 gold scields per +1 bonus to Charisma (to a maximum of +2). Player character heahwisards must pay this out of their starting funds.

TROLL FORD BRIDGE

Before the stone bridge was erected over the Greenstream, the trade road crossed a ford. In 199 IR, a great troll army staggered from the western depths of Foulwater Swamp, smashed through the defenders, and turned north, intent on raiding Hearth.

Hearth's garrison hurried south, but fled in terror at the site of the hulking host rallied against them. A lone heahwisard, his name recorded now only as Troll-Slayer, waded into the ford, set his staff, and warned the troll army that to advance further was to ensure their doom. Needless to say, they ignored his warning. For ten hours the lone mage weathered their assaults, driving each wave back through his potent magic. At last, wearied by the strain and bleeding heavily from dozens of wounds, the mage succumbed and died. His sacrifice was not in vain, however. The delay and his prowess gave the garrison time to steel their nerve.

The troll army was defeated and Troll-Slayer given a state funeral. His body lies in the temple of Maera in Hearth, but his spirit remains tethered to the site of his greatest feat. The site is now a sacred place.

Spirit Name: Troll-Slayer.

Ambience: Despite being a sacred place, it radiates no particular atmosphere.

Deity: Maera.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: None.

Sacrifice: A hero who wishes to receive the spirit's blessing must dump the lifeless corpse of a troll (any species) over the north side of the bridge.

Powers: Once supplication is given, the petitioner gains the benefits of the Favored Foe (Trolls) Edge for the next week.

Should trolls step onto the bridge from either direction, Troll-Slayer automatically lends his magical power to any heahwisards standing on the structure at the time. Their Wild Die increases one die type. Extras gain a d6 Wild Die.

TWO FORT BRIDGE

The busy trade road between the bustling docks of Port Helgen and the prosperous town of Kyrk crosses a narrow but deep river valley that runs from the Hook Mountains to the coast. The sole crossing point is a wide stone bridge. The bridge's strategic value did not go unnoticed for long. Both Hergenald and Kerenil constructed wooden forts on their side of the river to protect the vital crossing. The distance between the forts is a mere 30 yards. Under a centuries old agreement, bridge tolls are always paid on the far side. The money raised from tolls is used to maintain the vital structure.

While there is little tension between the defenders (beside occasionally launching garbage at each other from trebuchets to relieve the border), the competition between the trading posts attached to the forts is fierce. Both offer a safe refuge within their walled compound, essential services (each has a farrier and a wheelwright), basic provisions, and a small inn. Discounts on stabling and services, special meals, and unusual beverages are their weapons of choice. Wily merchants play one off against the other for the best deal.

VALLEY OF A THOUSAND CAVES

Located in the Hook Mountains, the valley's name is poetic license, for it contains far less than a thousand caves. Visitors are rare, for orcs and ice goblins, cliff giants and ogres inhabit the caves. The majority of the caves are simple affairs, with two to five linked chambers. Others wind deep into the mountains, linking up with other cave systems in the valley to create a subterranean maze. Some have been explored down the ages, but none have been mapped.

Largely unexplored, the valley has become the focus of numerous rumors and stories. Skalds sing of heahwisards of old who hid their great treasures and secrets in the caves to prevent them falling into unworthy hands, or of strange, dwarflike creatures who live in the deepest caves. A few xenophobes claim that frost dwarves live in the region, secretly exploiting the Magocracy's mineral wealth and ferrying it out of the land via a vast network of secret tunnels. More fanciful tale speak of huge worms that burrowed out of the mountain in bygone eras, golems digging out the caves during the short-lived Golem Uprising, and even of lost gold mines dating back to the Anari Empire.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The Magocracy's rulers are briefly outlined in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Enough detail is given to allow the GM to flesh them out to fit his campaign. This section introduces a few other individuals heroes might encounter in their journeys through the realm.

CHAIN-BREAKER

While the peasants of Galmoor avoid open rebellion for fear of reprisal, not everyone shares their passive resistance. A mysterious figure has begun a crusade against the ruling heahwisards. Galmoor has responded by executing peasants, which has led to further retaliation. So far, no heahwisards have been killed, but many suspect it is only a matter of time.

Each time a heahwisard has been assaulted, a broken set of manacles has been left by the battered body. As a result, the peasantry have taken to calling the ring leader Chain-Breaker.

Many rumors point toward Chain-Breaker being a cleric of Haptsönir, a son of Thunor and god of liberation from tyranny. That said, talk is cheap and evidence non-existent. Other rumors hint at foreign influence behind the attacks, with the elves being a popular target. Although far from any elven lands, relations with the few hearth elf merchants who visit Galmoor are strained.

Heroes might be hired to hunt down Chain-Breaker and bring him (or her) to justice. Alternately, those who stand opposed to tyranny may be secretly contacted and offered a chance to strike against the Magocracy.

CHANCELLOR PRAETRIS

Chancellor Praetris Saronax, Mage-Baron of the Third Sphere and scion of House Darovia, is head of the Mage-King's household and his most trusted servant. Without his personal approval, no heahwisard, regardless of title, sphere, or influence, can see the Mage-King, no matter the business in wishes to discuss.

The Chancellor has spent the last decade serving the Mage-King. Although his youthful days are long past, he is a skilled combatant, having chose to spend many years fighting in the Liche Lands and Withered Lands with clerics of Scaetha instead of playing politics at court. Despite his lack of courtly influence, he was personally selected by the Mage-King to serve as his chancellor.

A skilled practitioner of magic specializing in protective and manipulative spells, tactful ambassador, and shrewd judge of character, he is a near-perfect servant.

Should heroes of high Glory or important noble title enter Kingshall, the Chancellor is likely to visit them at some point to bid them welcome. He plays the officious, harmless servant, slightly bumbling and forgetful, but discretely pumps the visitors for information.

MIDMARK

Fierce and proud, Midmark is a land beset by internal troubles. The queen rules uneasily, for the nobles supposedly loyal to her baulk at answering to a women, and the stench of rebellion is beginning to fill the air. Vile denizens from Spiderfell Wood make constant forays, while orcs and goblins plague the east. Trouble is brewing.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Midmark.

* **Illiterate:** Native heroes without the Noble, Arcane Background, or Rich Edges must take the Illiterate Edge unless they devote one skill point to buying it off in character generation.

* **Poor Trade Network:** Midmark's lack of decent trade routes affects prices. City items in a town or town items in a village cost 75% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost three times as much as normal, if available.

* **Racism:** Although Midmark never suffered harshly under the Anari yoke, its citizens have never forgiven the Anari for the pain inflicted on the Saxa. All Anari heroes suffer the effects of the Outsider Hindrance while in Midmark.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Midmark is the only country currently ruled by a woman. Although she has the title queen, Cwene Saereid is technically only a regent, keeping the throne warm until her son either returns home or is declared dead. No one is entirely sure what will happen if King Orr, as he is rightfully known, is found to be dead, for Midmark has never had a regent and the legality of her reign would become questionable. After all, she may hold the title of queen, but that is only by dint of her marrying Orr's father, the late King Gust.

Many of the nobles are keen to woo her, believing that if Orr is dead having a king sitting on the throne, one accepted by the clerics of Hothar as legitimate inheritor, would end any succession claims. Unfortunately, everyone knows that if Orr returns he is entitled to claim his crown. Some nobles talk of civil war should that occur, but mention of the destruction wrought upon Nordmark quells rebellious tongues for now. The other option being discussed in some circles is to remove Saereid and have the nobility vote on a new king. Such talk is seditious, but it is gathering pace.

Midmark has ten jarls, all cousins or distant kin to the late King Gust. In Midmark the title is hereditary, with the king interfering only if no legitimate direct heir exists, and then only if the claimants cannot settle the matter peacefully.

Thegns, while accepted as nobles, do not hold hereditary lands. Rather, they are senior officials of the king, holding office and land by royal commission rather than ancestry. This practice dates back to before the Anari invasion of the Saxa lands, though only Midmark retains this ancient tradition—even Royalmark, which considers itself the most conservative Markland, has abolished this in favor of true nobility. Haulds fill a similar role, but they are appointed by the jarls, and thus rank below thegns on the social scale.

Ridder is, however, a hereditary title. Many thegns and haulds also hold the title, being masters of their own lands as well as servants of greater powers. The vast majority of huscarls are ridders, though military service is not a requirement.

Below the nobility are the *geneatas*, rich peasants who own their own land and still owe loyalty to the nobility. Nobles often gift land to favored courtiers and warriors as a reward for loyal service. The geneatas are entitled to tax the peasants who live on their land, but are forbidden from holding court or making laws.

Next are the merchants, priests, master crafters, and mages, freemen by law, possibly wealthy and influential, but most definitely of the middle class. These are known in Midmark as *ceorls*. The bulk of the population is serfs, peasant farmers who work the land of their lord as well as their own plots. While still free citizens, they owe a strict allegiance to a nobleman or member of the geneatas.

Despite several centuries of peace, and the Anari army never setting foot inside Midmark, Saxa Midmarkers treat the Anari as second-class citizens, placing them below even non-humans. No Anari has ever risen to hold status above ceorl, save by the occasional marriage, despite there being no law preventing it.

Note that while slavery is outlawed, the practice of indentured servitude is not. Those without sufficient means to feed and clothe themselves may throw themselves on the mercy of any individual of ceorl status and above, joining the household as a thrall. Criminals may be sentenced to serve their victims as a thrall, either for a fixed term or for life. Anari are forbidden from owning thralls thanks to their ancient love of slavery. However, an Anari may become a thrall. Midmark's civilized non-human inhabitants find the thought of owning another sentient being abhorrent and have never adopted the practice.

Thralls are the lowest social class, though they rank only just below the Anari. However, they are members of the community and are free to marry other thralls or free men and women. In the latter case, they are not automatically released from thralldom—their master must officially release them from service. This harbors back to olden times, but the tradition remains. Since most thralls freed in this manner are female, the process is akin to the custom of the father of the bride giving away his daughter. Thralls never come with dowries, though.

Only a thrall's master may free him or her from service. Traditionally, a thrall is freed on a special day, such as the birth of a child in the master's family, on the ascension of a new noble, to mark a truly auspicious event, and so on. Freed thralls are known as *leysingi* (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*), and are still beholden to their former master in certain matters.

Unlike elsewhere where the practice remains, thralls may be killed and buried with their master on his death in Midmark. While freemen consider this fate an honor for the thrall, it is one most thralls would rather avoid.

EDUCATION

While Midmark has adopted some new ideas, such as inns and taverns, in other areas it remains stuck in the past. One such area is literacy. Of all the realms, Midmark has the poorest literacy rates, with 90% of the population being unable to read or write.

Those with money hire private tutors to educate their children. These are often clerics, who provide a broad but general education. Some nobles insist their offspring learn military tactics and leadership from Knights Hrafn in order that they might live up to the warrior ideals of their ancestors.

As elsewhere, everyone learns the basic facts about their homeland—how to recognize the various noble banners, the law, customs and mythology, where the neighboring villages and major towns are, and so forth. Beyond this, one either needs to be wealthy, living on a trade to have access to foreigners and their stories of wondrous but distant places, or be fortunate enough to be raised near a major temple with a cleric willing to teach you more.

RELIGION

Thunor, the god of storms and freedom, is the major god of Midmark. In the days of the Anari Empire, Midmark was a frontier protectorate, its people conquered for their own good, for the Anari saw them as barbarians who needed civilizing.

The main reason it was only given frontier status was not its distance from Alantaris Isle, but the natives' constant rebellions. Few Anari bothered to settle here, and the soldiers posted to Midmark were troublemakers and thugs, free to treat the locals as they saw fit. It is perhaps not surprising that the Anari abandoned the province after the Blizzard War, nor that Midmark played a pivotal role in the later Saxa rebellion.

Although times have changed, Thunor remains the patron of the entire country. Regardless of what other deities are worshipped, the citizens of Midmark always take time to honor the storm god by flying prayer kites. Because Thunor has no temple structures, the whole of Midmark is often cited as one huge, outdoor temple.

Much of the inhabited land is turned over to agriculture and raising cattle. Small numbers of sheep are kept, but only for their meat and milk—the native breeds have coarse, wiry wool ill suited for clothing. Eostre is worshipped across much of the country in both her guises. Few communities are wealthy enough to have separate temples to both aspects, and thus single temples divided into two sections are the norm.

Although Midmarkers value freedom and liberty, they are also quite conservative and traditional. Laws are obeyed not out of fear of punishment, but because they are just and uphold a civilized society. This strong sense of justice permeates all social levels, and few nobles are brave enough to upset their peasants by making rash or biased judgments. Whereas most Marklands dispense justice through the cult of Hothar or the nobility, Midmark maintains the traditional moot (see below), thus allowing the nobility to wash its hands of judging civil crimes.

Midmarkers do not deny their kingdom was founded in blood. Its warriors and peasants died in the Blizzard War and Saxa rebellion to ensure future generations could live as freemen, free of the yoke of tyranny. The cult of Tiw suffered a drop in membership once peace was established, though events in Orcmark, trouble with Spiderfell Wood, and orc raids in the east have seen a dramatic resurgence in recent years.

Var, once popular in much of the realm, has now been reduced to the northern lands along the border with the Crystalflow Confederacy, the major towns, and a few settlements with specialist exports. The cult is keen to boost worship, but with the trade road to Veermark little used thanks to orc and goblin raids, and overland trade stymied by Spiderfell Wood, it is a struggle to expand its influence to any great degree.

THE MIDMARK MOOT

Minor civil disputes (the moot has no power to oversee criminal cases) between commoners, such as issues over land boundaries, grazing rights, or slander can be settled at the local moot, an annual gathering of the adult men of the region. Every jarldom or equivalent has its own moot.

Each year, ten men are elected by their peers as doomsmen ("judgment men"). These men are judge and jury, listening to cases before passing judgment according to the ancient laws. Doomsmen always gather to hear cases in the largest temple to Hothar in the region, or, if no temple exists, at a major shrine.

Nobles are not permitted to be doomsmen or interfere with the moot, nor may they take cases before it. If they have an issue with a commoner or another noble, they must take the matter to their feudal superior or a temple of Hothar.

Citizens are not bound by law to ask the moot to settle cases—they can demand their local nobleman or cleric of Hothar hears their case. Although the moot has no power to overturn a cleric of Hothar or noble's judgment, few clerics and nobles will interfere in a decision made by the moot. Thus, citizens must pick justice by the moot, cleric of Hothar, or noble court.

Those who break religious law are always judged by the appropriate temple—the courts and nobility have no power to try citizens for crimes which are neither civil nor criminal breaches of the law.

MILITARY

Like all Marklands, Midmark has armies answerable to the monarch and to the nobility.

Cwene Saereid's personal army comprises 200 huscarls and 3,500 axemen. However, this number is misleading, for of these 100 huscarls and 2,000 axemen are recent recruits. They are currently garrisoned and undergoing training at Aith, while awaiting transportation to Ostersund to help end the decades long siege.

While their presence keeps the southern nobles in line, it does mean they are nearly 400 miles from the northern and eastern provinces. They are also being paid to sit around, which is a serious drain on the royal coffers. Unless the fleet is launched soon, Saereid may be forced to disband large portions of the army. With the treasury bled dry, it could be years before she can gather sufficient strength to launch another relief effort.

Three-quarters of the remaining army is housed in and around Hamna. Cwene Saereid knows the jarls are not happy with answering to a woman, and do so only until evidence of her son's fate is learned. Fearful of rebellion should he be found dead, she has no intention of leaving her capital undefended.

Unfortunately, that means there are just 25 huscarls and 375 soldiers to represent her authority elsewhere. Rather than placing them in forts, these troops are kept mobile. Mounted on horses for speed, they travel the realm to fly the queen's banner and remind the citizens who holds power in Midmark. Each huscarl commands 15 axemen.

By law a ridder may keep just two huscarls, a hauld 10 huscarls, a thegn 50 huscarls, and a jarl 100 huscarls. Regular soldiers, less well equipped and lacking training, may be no more than five men per huscarl. They typically serve as elite town and village watch, acting alongside the peasant militia. In practice few nobles can afford the upkeep when there are no wars to fight on Midmark's soil, and numbers are more akin to half these levels.

Cwene Saereid recently ruled that every nobleman must send huscarls and soldiers to Aith in preparation for helping retake southern Vestmark. This astute move keeps the nobles from gathering strength while her army is weakened and ensures a steady drain on their coffers. Of the 3,000 troops at Aith, the nobles have supplied a total of just 900 between them. She further demands that her mobile troops be given hospitality as if she was accompanying them. Hence, the mobile patrols dine well at the nobles' expense, placing a further financial burden on them.

Some nobles have decided to hit back at the queen, suggesting she use part of her remaining army to march into Veermark and along the High Road to relieve the siege at Ostvik. While the monarch would dearly love to ensure her southern cousins do not fall to the lizardmen, such a move would leave her defenseless, exactly as her enemies intend.

For now she stalls, but Midmarkers are intensely patriotic when it comes to their fellow Saxa, and the tide of public opinion may turn against her if she is not careful. Her best option right now is to help Ostersund, winning a public relations coup and distracting her people, at least for a short while.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Midmark lacks a trading infrastructure. The trade road from Scathmoor to Ostmark barely enters the country, and the southern route is closed due to orcs and goblins. Although rafts and barges sail the Lesser Crystalflow, much of central, southern, and eastern Midmark is cut off from the steady flow of trade, resulting in long delays and increased prices.

Aith is well stocked, for coast-hugging merchant ships are less at risk from orc pirates than those who must sail in deeper waters, but again, the lack of decent roads hampers movement of trade goods inland.

Although small quantities of most goods are exported, Midmark is most famed for its beer and mead. Ironically, much of its mead is destined for Royalmark, Midmark's biggest rival when it comes to ale exports. While Royalmark has only recently begun exporting alcohol, its central position means it is better positioned to serve its buyers. Midmark maintains a strong output of dried herbs, for medicinal and for cooking. Many of these find their way to the Low Winterlands, where many herbs no longer grow. Unfortunately, Midmark receives a small fraction of the final sale price.

With the road to Sutmark closed, Midmark must import wool from the Crystalflow Confederacy. This pleases the northern settlements, but has meant higher prices in the south and east. Rebuilding work in Nordmark has led to an increased demand for timber. Merchants who once supplied wood to Midmark are now heading north, for the young king has money to spend, and his rebuilt nation could prove a fertile ground for mercantile ventures. Although Midmark has Spiderfell Wood, only limited felling occurs due to the dangers of giant spiders and hearth elves.

Midmarkers pay the usual customs, hearth, income, poll, sales, and tithe taxes as do other citizens. Income tax levels are set at 20%, though the need to keep the army at Aith fed may see this increase shortly. The queen is torn between further taxing the nobles and sharing the burden with all her subjects.

Either way, taxation is never popular, especially since a one off tax was introduced to equip the army in the first place and pay for the transport ships.

ARCHITECTURE

Midmark boasts several major towns and villages, but much of its population lives in steads, traditional Saxa farms. As a result, outside of the larger settlements the population is widely scattered. Most steads, and indeed many villages, are surrounded by a low stone wall or wooden fence, erected to keep livestock in rather than intruders out. In the vicinity of Spiderfell Wood, the Dragonspine, and the Great Marsh, steads are more fortified, with higher walls or even earth ramparts.

Midmarkers shun the use of stone, preferring traditional wood and wattle-and-daub construction. This extends even to their palaces, great halls, and temples. Except for their size and ornamentation, the houses of the rich are indistinguishable from those of the poor.

Midmark has a few motte-and-bailey forts, but most of its fortifications are military camps built to traditional designs. Protected by one or more rings of deep ditches and wood-faced earth ramparts topped with fighting platforms, the interior space contain halls for the warriors, a kitchen, a granary, and perhaps a shrine, but little else. In larger forts, when the ramparts may be a dozen yards thick, spaces are built into the inner rampart for stables or additional storage.

MAJOR LOCALES

While Midmark's largest settlements and several places of interest are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, this section provides the GM with more places for the adventurers to visit.

BATTLE STANDARD HILL

In the Tower Hills, overlooking the mighty Crystalflow, stands a large, flat-topped hill. Growing from the summit are eight trees. Skalds claim that at the start of the Saxa rebellion eight great warlords met here in conclave to discuss the war. Here, so it is said, was agreed the future formation of the Marklands and the acceptance of a high king. To cement their bond, the war lords each planted a battle standard on the hill. Over time, these grew into living trees. Some believe that the health of the trees reflects the health of the individual Marklands. One tree has been sundered by a recent lightning strike, signifying the division of Vestmark. Another, supposedly representing Nordmark, was seen to be fading, but has since began to sprout new shoots.

In truth, there was no conclave of warlords. The Saxa tribes became united only in the latter days of the struggle, and Sutmark, Ostmark, and Veermark played little active role in the rebellion (having never been conquered). However, belief is a powerful force, and centuries of faith in the origins of the Marklands have transformed a mundane hill into a sacred place.

Traditionally, Midmark's monarch has been crowned on the hill, and several high kings came here to receive a blessing before taking the throne. Unfortunately, the hill also attracts right wind fanatics, Saxa who desire the complete eradication of all Anari from the Marklands.

Spirit Name: Sjalfvili ("Free-will")

Ambience: Saxa standing atop the hill feel energized and revitalized. Anari find the atmosphere oppressive. Other races and cultures have noticed nothing noteworthy about the place.

Deity: Thunor.

Senses: Notice d10.

Communication: Like most spirits of Thunor, Sjalfvili's voice ranges from soft tones to a thunderous roar. He only speaks to Saxa, and then only in Auld Saxa.

Sacrifice: Blood is freedom's price, and Sjalfvili demands that price be paid up front. The spirit demands a Saxa be slain atop the hill. It neither condemns nor condones murder, but those seeking its assistance typically execute prisoners condemned to death. By their sacrifice, the Marklands may prosper. Although the victim's soul is not pardoned for any crimes, earthly records of his sins are expunged, restoring honor to his family.

The supplicant must then inform the spirit, in Auld Saxa, of the reasons for the offering. Backed by a god, Sjalfvili automatically sees through any lies, rendering the blood sacrifice for null and void.

Only Saxa can perform the sacrifice and receive a blessing. To meet this requirement, a supplicant's father, paternal grandfather, and paternal great-grandfather must have been Saxa.

Powers: Saxa recover Fatigue levels at twice the normal rate while atop the hill. This power functions without any sacrifice.

The spirit's main power is to bless Saxa generals. It grants bennies that can only be used on Knowledge (Battle) rolls. A general seeking to wage an aggressive war receives one benny, while one seeking to defend his homeland receives two. Defense of any of the Marklands warrants three bennies. If the bulk of the enemy force is Anari, an extra benny is granted. These bennies remain until used or a year passes, whichever comes first. A general cannot sacrifice for more bennies until any current one have been spent or lost.

BERANSGARTH

Population: 840

Ruler: Haulda Beornlaed Anwaldsdohtor

In the high foothills of the lower Dragonspine Mountains, at the end of a steep switchback track, lies the remote town of Beransgarth. Nestled behind a sturdy wooden wall, Beransgarth is on the edge of civilization. It has only basic facilities—a small tavern, a blacksmith, a carpenter, and a herbalist—but it does boast a temple. The latter is shared by the cults of Eostre (both aspects) and Ullr, the only ones with any real influence in the village.

Despite being a town, Beransgarth is treated as a village for the purposes of buying goods—merchant caravans visit only a handful of times each year and they rarely carry anything but essential goods.

While there is a healthy lumber industry, much of the town's income is derived from the sale of bear pelts. Keen not to spoil the pelts, the locals trap the bears in deep pits, letting them slowly weaken from thirst before killing them with a well aimed blow or arrow. The forested hills surrounding the town are littered with such pits, making exploration treacherous. Bylaws permit the haulda to impose a 50 gs fine on anyone who "slays a bear in a manner that ruins its pelt."

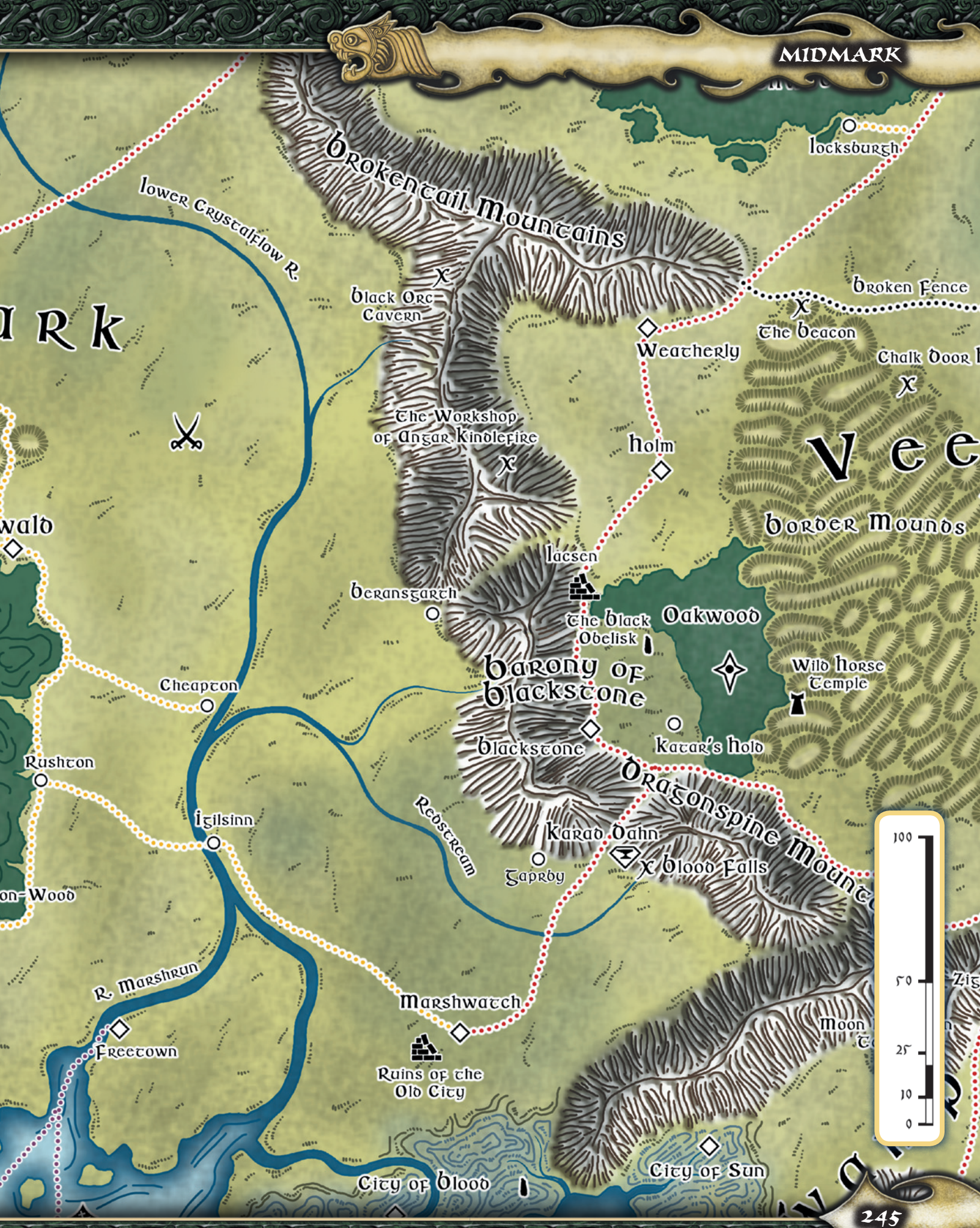
The townsfolk are a hardy people out of necessity. There are few luxuries in the mountains, food must be hunted and gathered, the climate is harsh, there is little hope of outside assistance in times of trouble, and there are many natural dangers. Orcs prowl among the trees, as do giant spiders and vicious wolves. Cliff giants hunt bears

midmark



Population: 75,274 (80% Saxa, 10% hearth elves, 5% Anari, 3% engro, 2% frostborn)
Ruler: Cwene Saereid Hundingsdohtor
Religion: Thunor, Eostre, Hothar, Tiw
Imports: Glass, wool
Exports: Ale, herbs, mead

Scathmoor
The Moor Up and Come Inn
Goldsheaf
The Black Keep
Tower Hills
Battle Standard Hill
Kite Hill
Torton
Hamna
Crystalflow Confederacy
Midmo
The Tower of Mirrors
Viewing Hills
Rushton
Illiligby
Barge Court
Wihtlaflinglaw
The Vale
Vale of Smoke
Weem
Six Stone Hill
Catnip Vale
Hill Giants Stead
Fey lake
Easton
Drakeport
Drakeport Delta
Spiderfell Wood
Crystal Sound
Moon Fog Vale
Dorvik
Kingswood Elven Realm
Watchers Island
Drakeport/Aith
Ost bay
R. Woodrush
Medeton
River Ost
Ostersund
Ost Port
The Black Bog
Aith
Rcmark
ce Mountain Range
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Brokentail Mountains
lower Crystalflow R.
Black Orc Cavern
The Workshop of Angar Kindlefire
Weatherly
Broken Fence
The Beacon
Chalk Door
holm
Border Mounds
lacsen
Beranstarth
The Black Obelisk
Oakwood
Barony of Blackstone
Wild Horse Temple
Cheapton
Blackstone
Katar's Hold
Rushton
Igilsinn
Dragonspine Mountains
Karad Dahn
Blood Falls
Reostream
Taprby
R. Marshrun
Marshwatch
Freetown
Ruins of the Old City
City of Blood
City of Sun
100
50
25
10
0

for sport, but a trapper makes for a welcome tasty snack. Higher up in the mountains there are storm dragons, though they rarely bother the settlement.

The locals have a reputation for being gruff and dour, but this is largely myth. They receive few visitors, and those prepared to impart the latest news or entertain them with new songs and poems receive a warm welcome.

CHEAPTON

Population: 158
Ruler: Profiteer Thegna Heregyth Heremundsdohtor

Cheapton ("the market enclosure") is a large stead located near a ford over the lower Lesser Crystalflow. Founded by royal charter, it is part of joint venture between the cult of Var and the queen to boost trade in the south of the country.

The stead's main purpose is to serve as a communal market, enabling stead owners to buy and sell at a single location. Regular markets are held every Marketdaeg, with great markets every Raestdaeg. Some success has been achieved, for merchants from Marshwatch attend the larger markets.

If the scheme catches on, the queen hopes to create a string of similar trading posts across Midmark. With trade routes established, the shipping of goods from cities to towns to rural communities will be greatly sped up and costs should drop, since merchants need only sell their goods to the next trading post rather than undertaking a lengthy and costly journey.

New warehouses have been constructed in preparation for deliveries of hard to come by goods from Hamna, but trade caravans have been suffering increased attacks and a large number have failed to arrive. While others talk of orcs and bandits, Heregyth suspects the local nobility may have a hand in the attacks. With Cheapton a royal stead, all the taxes go straight to the queen, whereas before local trading saw the coin go to the treasuries of the nobility.

Sturdy defenses, three paladins of Var, five huscarls, and twenty axemen protect Cheapton. The charter allows them to defend Cheapton but it gives them no authority outside the stead.

GAPRBY

Population: 235
Ruler: Thegn Eggeat Godgarsunu

Gaprby ("the village by the gap in the hills") sits in the southern foothills of the Dragonspine, not far from the border with Karad Dahn and the Blackstone Barony. The settlement began as a farmstead, but grew into a trading center after the Blizzard War thanks to the new route through the mountains. Lacking a strong military force and with the king more interested in protecting the northern trade road, the villagers could do little as orcs and goblins multiplied in the hills. Today, few caravans make the dangerous journey, and Gaprby has suffered economic hardship. With the low ground too wet for crops and the high ground having very weak soil, the villagers have turned to rearing goats and Midmark's hardy sheep to make ends meet.

For much of the year the shepherds live in huts in the alpine pastures, returning home when the snows begin. However, increasing numbers are failing to come home. Their huts are deserted, but not abandoned, and their flocks found roaming wild.

Some blame orcs, though typically they would burn the hut and steal the sheep as well. Others whisper that all is not well in Blackstone Barony and the shepherds have been kidnapped by a demonic cult. Tales of ghostly dwarves emerging from the ruins Karad Dahn circulate the taverns as well, though the frost dwarf garrison stationed nearby refutes these claims.

IGILSINN

Population: 80
Ruler: Igil Igilsunu

Originally named Igil's Inn, the hamlet's name has since been condensed into a single word. Located on the eastern shore of the Lesser Crystalflow some 30 miles south of where the Redstream joins it, the small settlement marks the location of the only ford wide enough for wagons. Passing through the settlement is a minor trade road linking Marshwatch with Aith and Wald.

The largest structure is the inn, after which the hamlet takes its name. For ten generations it has been run by the same family. Out of tradition, every firstborn child is given the name Igil after their ancestor who founded the establishment. Although he has no noble title, the current Igil is the *de facto* ruler of Igilsinn. No one remembers the tale of how it happened, but the first Igil was granted the land in perpetuity by the then king.

MEDETON-ON-WOOD

Population: 375
Ruler: Ale-Lord Brude Golden-Lips

The village of Medeton-on-Wood, usually referred to simply as Medeton, stands on the southern fringes of Spiderfell Wood. Like many Midmark settlements, it was founded after the Blizzard War, when the Anari all but gave up control of Midmark. At first it was a fairly traditional agricultural village, growing cereal crops and vegetables, and raising livestock. Small quantities of ale and mead were brewed, enough to sate the locals' thirst, but not enough to export. Medeton would likely have remained yet another Midmark village, were it not for the visit of a merchant with a nose for fine drink.

Upon sampling the mead, he immediately placed an order for a dozen casks, promising to return the next year for more. The merchant duly kept his word. Word of the excellent quality began to spread far and wide, reaching even to the noble courts of the central Marklands. Soon great caravans of merchants arrived seeking not just Medeton's mead, but also its ale, for the name of Medeton had become synonymous with quality brewing. Within a generation half the industry in Medeton involved brewing mead and ale, and the fields of vegetables were replaced by acre after acre of hops, barley, and wheat.

Each year, on the anniversary of that merchant's visit, the village hosts All Drinks Day, a dual celebration to Gullveig, god of brewing and the most worshipped deity in Medeton, and the art of brewing. Brewers from far and wide attend, setting up stalls and supplying free drinks from dawn until dusk. So many brewers in one place attracts rich merchants, who get a chance to taste the latest brews and place bulk orders directly with the manufacturer.

Secret judges are appointed by the village council to mark each beverage and award it points based on several criteria. At noon, the best ales are awarded colored garlands of dried flowers. Competition is fierce, for the awarding of a garland attracts merchants, which leads to increased sales. With so much extra income at stake, many brewers invest sizeable sums in industrial espionage against their rivals. On the surface, they are friendly to each other, but the thin veneer of polite respect hides a seething sea of professional hostility.

Due to the steady drinks trade, Medeton is a wealthy village. Faced with the constant threat of orcs and bandits, the villagers invested in a deep ditch and sturdy stone wall to protect their thriving businesses. A permanent militia of 30 warriors, trained by paladins of Tiw at no small expense, watches over the settlement with steely eyes and grim determination. The wages are better than any neighboring community can offer, and the guards never want for alcohol. As a result, they are fanatically loyal to Medeton.

Although the villagers answer to Jarl Coenric (see page xxx), the village is governed by a council of ten citizens. Of these, eight are elected citizens, their seats put up for re-election every five years. By tradition, five seats are always held by master brewers, two by farmers, and one by a citizen who is neither a brewer nor a farmer (though odds are he is related to one or the other). The remaining two seats are permanent positions, reserved for the resident priests of Gullveig and Var. The chairman is elected by the council members from among their number each time a new council is appointed. The current chair is Ale-Lord Brude Golden-Lips.

RUSHTON

Population: 315
Ruler: Ridder Theinwald Haksunu

Situated only a few miles from Spiderfell Wood, Rushton is a self-sufficient farming community of little renown. With no river trade along the Woodrush, few folk ever have seen need to visit. Once known as Woodrushton (meaning "the enclosure on the Woodrush"), the name has slowly been shortened to its current form.

For the best part of two hundred years nothing of interest has occurred in Rushton. It has avoided raiders and bandits by dint of having nothing of value, the lack of livestock has not attracted wolves, and expansion has been minimal due to it being located off the beaten track. Even the giant spiders of nearby Spiderfell Wood have been nothing more than a sporadic nuisance. Most families can trace their ancestry back to the village's founding, though there are "newcomers" (families who have been there less than three generations). The most the farmers had to worry about in living memory was the nuances of Rassilon's weather.

But now a strange shadow has fallen over the village. Villagers have begun acting strangely, with neighbors seeming distant to their friends. Families began disappearing without notice for days at a time, only to reappear just as suddenly, though that has stopped of late. However, a small few families have literally vanished, leaving meals uneaten and their belongings and valuables abandoned in their deserted homes. Word of a sinister cult operating in the village is spreading, but with other problems besetting the land, few have time to investigate.

Rushton has a temple to Eostre's dual aspects. Standing around the market square are carved wooden pillars, each dedicated to one of Eira, Hothar, Kenaz, the Norns, Rigr, Sigel, Thunor, and Ullr. A large pillar standing in the center of the square honors Var, god of merchants. The inn, the Golden Bough, is run by an Anari couple.

Rushton and its problem are detailed in *V3 Web of Deceit*.

TORTON

Population: 358
Ruler: Ridder Coenmund Ragnarsunu

The village of Torton ("Thunor's Enclosure") sits on the road between Hamna and the Crystalflow Confederacy town of Scathmoor. Before the Anari stamped their dominance on what is now Midmark, Torton was known as Aithton ("Aith's Enclosure"), after the local jarl who founded the site. It began as a small farming stead of little importance.

Although the citizens were farmers, they honored Thunor over Eostre, praying to him for ample rain and warm winds during the summer months, and beseeched him to hold off the winter storms until after harvest. To show their dedication, they carved a huge stylized storm dragon into the chalk hill overlooking their village. Worship at the dragon, which also served as Thunor's temple, attracted a powerful air spirit, which took up residence within the carving. Offerings were made to appease it, but the citizens did not treat it as a god. In their eyes, it was simply a messenger of Thunor.

After Midmark was conquered, the Anari developed Scathmoor as a trading center. Under the rule of Anari overlords, Aithton (the name was retained) grew in prosperity thanks to its location along the new trade road.

Then, during the Blizzard War, Aithton was leveled. Time obliterated what little ruins remained. Grass covered the chalk dragon, erasing it from the physical landscape. The passage of years (and the Saxa's burning desire to overthrow the Anari) erased its existence from memory. Scant folk tales spoke of a white dragon on a hillside, but no one could tell of its exact location.

The lands now known as Midmark finally threw off the yoke of Anari repression in 119 IR. The Saxa once again began to reclaim the land. Around 135 IR, a priest of Thunor (some legends say he was a paladin) traveling from Hamna to Scathmoor witnessed lightning dancing across the hillside. Oral traditions claim the lightning took the form of a miniature storm dragon, though there is no corroborating written testimony. Taking it as a sign from his deity, the priest began scraping away the grass and soil. Whether fate or divine intervention guided his hands is not recorded, but the priest uncovered part of the dragon's wings—carved centuries ago in the shape of lightning bolts.

Within the month the priest had revealed the entire dragon. He immediately declared it a miraculous sign from Thunor and consecrated the site as a temple. Thunor's pleasure at this act was quickly made evident, for the valley beneath the hill enjoyed warm summers thanks to the south wind and ample rainfall. The uncovering of the dragon and consecration of the site also reawakened the dormant air spirit, which once again became revered by the valley's inhabitants.

Within a few years, a tiny farming community had grown up around the dragon. Named Torton, in honor of Thunor, the village slowly grew in size and prosperity as the years passed by and trade routes reopened. The formation of the Crystalflow Confederacy, and the increased traffic along the trade road linking distant Ostmark to the rest of Rassilon, was a major boost to Torton's economy. And so, for the better part of four centuries, the villagers have worshipped Thunor and enjoyed favorable seasons.

Torton is unusual in that it is not protected by a palisade or ditch. The air spirit watches over the valley and its inhabitants, and Torton's sizeable militia (and the fury of its clerics) is an added deterrent to raiders.

Torton is detailed further is adventure *V1 The Heart of Winter*.

TORTON, THE CHALK DRAGON OF

Spirit Name: Stormbrother.
Ambience: The area around Stormbrother is constantly exposed to a gentle wind, yet there is a sense of withheld power, like a summer breeze concealing a thunderstorm.
Deity: Thunor.
Senses: Notice d10 (has a d6 Wild Die when listening). Stormbrother hears virtually every sound in the valley it protects. This sense extends from hilltop to hilltop across they valley (about half a mile) and a mile in either direction along the valley floor. It has no interest in the petty politics and intrigues of mortals, though it is not beyond eavesdropping just to pass the time.
Communication: Stormbrother alerts the villagers to impending trouble by communicating with the village priest of Thunor using an innate power similar to *voice on the wind*, though with no restriction on the number of words it may speak.
Sacrifice: Stormbrother demands no sacrifice for use of its powers. However, power comes at a price. A terrible storm sweeps through the region a few days after the spirit's help is requested, a reminder that Thunor is both benevolent and cruel, and should never be taken for granted.
Powers: Stormbrother can bestow *fly* on mortals. However, it only does this on holy days to Thunor, thus allowing the villagers to take to the air and worship Thunor. It can cast *bolt* (lightning), *knockdown* (strong wind), and *whirlwind* when called upon by the village's priest of Thunor.
These spells are cast with a d12 arcane die and d6 Wild Die, suffer no range modifiers, and can affect targets anywhere within 500 yards and line of sight of the chalk dragon's eye.

VIEWING HILLS

With the permission of Cwene Saereid a small band of Scaetha's clergy have priests and paladins under the command of Eulogist Anhild Accasdohtor have established a stead six miles from the Tower of Mirrors. Although the tower is ancient, rumors concerning the eye that forms in the remaining lens began only 30 years ago. The tower has never been entered, but it could be the hiding place of Angtharinax, the missing liche from the Withered Lands. The clerics are currently gathering stories and myths regarding the tower in preparation for an attempt to gain access.

WIHTLAFLINGLAW

Population: 552
Ruler: Thegn Eadbald Cynenothsunu

Wihtlaflinglaw (pronounced "Whittinglaw") directly translates from Auld Saxa as "Wihtlaf's place on the heather covered hill," an apt description given its location. Situated in the heather-strewn

uplands between the Viewing Hills and Spiderfell Wood, Wihtlaflinglaw is at the center of Midmark's trade in medicinal herbs.

Granted a royal charter centuries ago, the village is owned by the king and administered by one of his thegns. For the last five generations the family of Thegn Eadbald has governed, being excellent administrators, skilled herbalists, and clerics of Eira.

The charter forbids anyone except the citizens of Wihtlaflinglaw or their appointed agents from harvesting medicinal herbs within 20 miles of the village. To ensure the law is upheld, the village militia (30 men) backed by six paladins of Eira regularly patrols the heath on horseback. First offenders are fined 100 gs, second offenders lose their dominant hand, and third offenders are outlawed from Midmark on pain of death. In all cases any herbs or herbal remedies are confiscated.

With Spiderfell Wood being so close, the village is protected by a ditch and rampart, with a wooden palisade running the entire length and a fortified gatehouse. Like many spider-molested settlements, small holes cut into the palisade allow spears to be thrust into the underbelly of spiders attempting to scale the defenses.

A grand temple to Eira stands near the market square. Like most temples of the goddess of healing, it functions as a hospital and dispensary as well as a place of worship. Such is its reputation that patients come from as far afield as Wald. Although the temple sells herbal remedies, it focuses purely on curative ones. A dozen other herbalists have shops in the village to cater for other needs.

Game Mechanics: Knowledge (Alchemy) or Survival rolls to locate herbs within 20 miles of the village are made at +1 due to the abundance of medicinal plants. If a hero succeeds at a Knowledge (Midmark) roll first, the bonus increases to +2 as he knows where specific herbs grow. Midmarkers may use Common Knowledge.

Dried herbs can be purchased for 3 gs per batch, fresh ones for 10 gs per batch (good for just 24 hours), and herbalist kits for 75 gs. Clerics of Eira may purchase anti-anemia, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antihistamine, healing, healing (regenerative), purgative, and restorative brews from the temple for 80 gs per dose. All other brews cost the standard list price.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Detailed below are some of Midmark's more interesting residents. All are possible allies of the heroes.

ALE-LORD BRUDE GOLDEN-LIPS

Born and raised in Medeton, Brude is the resident priest of Gullveig, chairman of the council, and a master brewer in his own right. Overall Brude has a good physique, though his stomach has begun to expand as middle age creeps closer. His brown hair and beard are flecked with gray, and more often than not his beard is sticky with dribbled mead. His nickname stems from this frequent occurrence. While everyone in Medeton knows Brude is a coward, none know he is an alcoholic. Brude isn't yet at the stage where he has to get drunk every day, but he does overindulge.

BLAZE

Killed off in the Blizzard War, or forced into hiding or driven south by the dominance of Hellfrost dragons, sun dragons are a rare breed these days. Few have been spied in the last five centuries, and many citizens consider them mythical creatures.

One of those who chose to hide is Blazethinrax (Blaz-eth-in-rax; Blaze for short). An ancient specimen, even her might was no match to the sheer number of the white-death dragons that howled out of the north. Snatching up as much of her treasure as she could carry, she fled to the southern Dragonspine Mountains, taking up residence in a massive cave close to the Great Swamp. Here she survived on stray animals and the occasional foolish orc or lizardman.

Her once healthy body is now suffering the ravages of old age and gradual starvation, but that is nothing compared to the state of her mind. Once she believed her concealment was temporary, a delay while her kith and kin gathered their strength and struck back at the invaders who had claimed their skies. The loss of Sigel, whose disappearance she felt in her soul, the growing number of Hellfrost dragons, and the continuing deepening of the winter has left her utterly depressed.

Four years ago, after snacking on a passing orc patrol, Blaze discovered the delights of ale—the orcs had raided a Midmark brewery and were carrying casks back to their lair. Although she drank barely ten gallons, it was enough to dull the pain and misery for a little while. Craving more, she dared a brief sojourn from her lair. Scratching messages on large rocks, she flew across the human settlements, dropping a rock outside each. Although it took a little while for the messages to be deciphered (they were written in Draketongue), the meaning eventually became clear—bring ale to the entrance of the cave (directions were provided) and you would be well rewarded.

Most considered the messages a joke, or a lure into death. Only one brewer had the guts (some say curiosity) to follow the instructions. Word quickly spread that he had returned a rich man. The floodgates had opened. Every summer, breweries across the region send wagon loads of ale to the mountains, for Blaze pays 10 gs a gallon, far more than the brewers make selling to merchants or drinking halls. She has also taken to mead, a stronger brewer, and one for which she pays 50 gs a gallon.

Blaze spends much of her time in an alcoholic stupor, sometimes snoring loudly, sometimes murmuring about the old days, when her kind ruled the skies. Despite this, no one has tried to rob her—her power is still phenomenal, and the locals benefit from openly trading with her.

Unfortunately for Midmark, sales to the dragon are not being recorded for tax purpose. The ale and mead trade with the Crystalflow Confederacy is dropping off, and officials have yet to work out why.

JARL COENRIC BEE-BEARD

Fifth cousin to the late King Gust, Coenric has little love for the other jarls and their scheming. He also has little love for Cwene Saereid as a person. That said, he has publicly vowed to defend the throne of Midmark from usurpers, but only because in secret he believes Orr is alive and will return to claim his rightful title in due course.

A burly, deep-voiced man with a booming laugh and a friendly slap that can knock a man off his feet, Coenric spends much of his time feasting, drinking, and wenching in equal measure. As he himself says, "Nothing beats strong drink and strong women!" He is not married.

He considers himself a patron of the arts, showering gifts and titles on worthy skalds. More than one traveling minstrel has sought nothing more than hospitality for the night, only to stagger bleary-eyed from the jarl's mead-hall the next morning a ridder of Midmark carrying a hefty sack of money.

In his youth, he ventured into Spiderfell Wood. There he met the Bee Queen, a powerful servant of Eostre Animalmother. He emerged several days later with a beard made of living bees. No one can deduce if this is a blessing or a curse, and Coenric claims he cannot remember what transpired in the forest.

THEGN TOSTIG ALFREDSUNU

Commander of the relief force mustered at Aith, Thegn Tostig is utterly devoted to Cwene Saereid, though in a purely platonic manner. He served her before she became queen, becoming her chief bodyguard when she married King Gust. While he accepts his orders without question, he detests being away from his queen, for he knows there are many plots to wrestle power from her and so far from court he is powerless to stop them.

Work on the transport ships has suffered several setbacks due to acts of sabotage. While orcs are blamed, the true culprit is Tostig. If the ships cannot sail, Saereid will have to recall the army and thus bring him back to court where he belongs. If he believes he can trust outsiders, he will hire them to commit more destructive acts of sabotage to see his wish fulfilled.

MISTLANDS, THE

Once famed for its prosperous silver mines, the Mistlands are now a haunted realm of perpetual mist and endless ruins. A realm of ghosts and memories, few adventurers are brave enough to explore the rugged hills, for many who do are never seen again.

RULES OF THE REALM

* **Artificial Light:** The mists dampen the effectiveness of artificial light, be it magical or mundane. Instead of producing good lighting conditions, artificial lights merely reduce the darkness penalties one step within the radius of the illumination.

For example, a light spell affects a Large Burst Template. If the ambient conditions were Pitch Black (–4), light within the spell's area of effect would be Dark (–2). Light has no effect on hearing.

* **Fear in the Mist:** Many strange sights and sounds lurk in the mist. Their constant presence begins to gnaw at the mind, creating a state of near-constant fear. Half the darkness penalty (rounded down) is applied as a modifier to Spirit rolls to resist Fear.

* **Land of Mists:** The Mistlands are aptly named, for mist is ever present. The GM can draw a card to determine the mist's thickness. He can draw as often as he likes, but we suggest no more than four times a day—midnight, dawn, midday, and dusk.

Any red card means the mist is light. Any black numbered card indicates moderate mist, while a black face card (Jack through Ace) produces heavy mist. On a Joker the mist thins to scant, but only for 2d6 hours. After that, it rapidly reverts to its previous thickness. All Notice rolls suffer the penalty, even those based on hearing and smell.

Mist	Day	Night
Scant	Normal	Dim (–1)
Light	Dim (–1)	Dark (–2)
Moderate	Dark (–2)	Pitch Black (–4)
Heavy	Pitch Black (–4)	Pitch Black (–4)

* **No One Home:** The Mistlands are completely unpopulated by civilized beings. Heroes cannot buy or sell equipment here, visit temples for healing, recruit hirelings, and so forth.

NATIVE CHARACTERS

No hero born in Silverdale can be younger than 30 years of age. Those born of the fortunate few who escaped can be of any age. Those looking to play Silverdalers or their offspring might wish to consider taking the following Hindrances:

Phobia: Mist. The hero knows the stories of the mist, and he has no intention of disappearing. Better to avoid the mists altogether!

Vow: To find missing kin. This needn't mean endlessly entering the Mistlands. Many Silverdalers fled further than Chalcis to escape the mist.

HISTORY OF SILVERDALE

Exactly who first settled the area now known as the Mistlands has eluded scholars. Although its former name, Silverdale, comes from the Anari occupation, its silver mines were already exporting ingots before this era. Unfortunately for those who would quest to learn more, the region has been ravaged by numerous wars and heavily settled by the Anari, who were keen on promoting their own culture wherever they went.

While the Selari had the expertise to exploit the mines, their lands were further north and there is little indication they were ever interested in territorial expansion. Similarly, the Vindari were to the distant east, in the lands now known as Heldalund, Trond, Cul, and the Cairn Lands. Given the land lay in the area most heavily populated by the Tuomi, it is quite likely they had settled here before the Anari came. The slow trickle of silver, some sages claim, is evidence for this, for the Tuomi's lack of centralized government makes raising a large-scale industrial workforce difficult. Of course, few dismiss the notion that a civilization as yet unknown could have lived here.

Regardless, the Mistlands first came to true prominence around –332. The Demongate War had left the central continent war-torn and exhausted, something the Anari of Alantaris Isle were quick to exploit. Their armies swept into Aspiria and Chalcis, then quickly moved north to capture the silver mines. Whatever name the region once had, it was changed to Silverdale by its Anari masters and its silver mines exploited to the fullest. The Saxa have always spoken of Silverdale with a bitter note in their voices, for the silver was used to pay the armies who conquered their homelands.

When the Liche-Priest sought to expand his empire to the west his undead armies marched straight through Silverdale, slaughtering and recruiting as they went. A good proportion of the settlers fled the armies' advance, abandoning their homes and seeking refuge in neighboring Chalcis. This was recorded as the First Migration.

After the dark armies were driven back, the people returned home, but the realm never truly recovered. The silver mines were reopened, but the reduced workforce and need for raw material to rebuild the shattered towns and burnt cities limited the export of silver.

When the western armies of the great northern army stalled against the valiant armies of Aspiria and Chalcis they altered course and swept east, tearing from Silverdale like a blizzard as they made for Hellfrost Pass or set sail across the Inner Sea. Old songs tell how a million people were slaughtered like sheep by the ferocity of the attack, leaving the realm depopulated for centuries.

As society began to recover, so the rich grasslands and pastures of Silverdale drew back settlers. The orcs who had claimed the realm after the War were slowly driven back, though they were never exterminated and remained a constant problem. Although Silverdale remained an independent realm, it signed numerous pacts with Chalcis, and many Chalcians and Silverdalers considered the two lands one. Trade deals were signed with Angmark, bringing new prosperity.

In 319 IR the Silverdalers temporarily abandoned their homes in the face of a major orc invasion. Its warriors, few as they were, rallied under the Chalcian banner, fighting with honor and courage at the Battle of Thunor's Fury. Again, when the threat had ended they returned home to rebuild their society.

For a century and a half life continued at a slow pace, the realm avoiding the troubles that plagued other realms, such as the Golem Uprising. Then, 30 years ago, the mist descended on Silverdale, bringing its often-troubled existence to a sudden and mysterious finale.

ORIGINS OF THE MISTS

"From where came the mists?" is a question that has perplexed sages, clerics, adventures, and mages for three decades, and there is little sign any definitive answer will be discovered any time soon. Although there are as many theories as there are leaves on a tree, a small few have risen to prominence over the years.

Among the cult of Scaetha it is widely believed Hela was somehow involved. That the dread liche Angtharinax vanished from the

Withered Lands at approximately the same time as the mists swallowed the realm is just too much of a coincidence. Many clerics believe the mists were created to cover his activities as he strived to create a new realm of the dead and damned, though the few expeditions that have entered and returned claim to have found no trace of him or of any undead, and no one has yet managed to devise a theory on how a mist bank lasting 30 years was created.

Some common citizens also blame Hela, though they point back to the Liche-Priest as a cause. Many speak of a curse the feared undead lord laid upon Silverdale as his armies retreated, though no historical or religious document supports this idea. Quite why the curse took over five centuries to work is met with blank stares and head scratching, for news of the failing wards on his ancient tomb is not common knowledge.

A variant of the above story claims that the Liche-Priest made a prophecy rather than laying a curse. According to some stories he vowed that his return would be heralded by the utter destruction of a realm by "Hela's breath." This is clearly the mists, for when they last rose, revealed a landscape of destruction on a level not seen since the Blizzard War ended.

Others look back further in time, to the dark days of the Demongate War, when the forces of the Abyss walked abroad. One popular fireside tale tells how a brave knight imprisoned a fearsome demon on the rolling hills, imprisoning it beneath a circle of enchanted stones. Those who support this theory claim the Siphoning has weakened the bonds holding down the demon, allowing it to influence the mortal realm. However, it may be this is a case of confusion with the epic tale *Bron* and his battle with the Dark Marshal and the placing of wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb.

More than one mage has pondered whether the mists and the Siphoning have some connection, for the downfall of Silverdale preceded the magical draining by only a year or so. There is no indication the mist affect magic in any way, but a thorough investigation would involve spending extensive periods in the Mistlands, and few mages are brave enough to risk their lives on what might be a fool's errand.

Other theories involve the misuse of a powerful relic, the wrath of a god, an insane or arrogant mage invoking a potent charm, the work of giants and dragons, and even the weird notion that Silverdale never existed and the mists have always been here. All of these stories are highly flawed, yet they continue to circulate.

ATMOSPHERE

Some realms are terrifying to explore. In the Withered Lands, for instance. the constant risk of being attacked by foul undead saps explorers' stamina and stretches their nerves to breaking point. In the Liche Lands of Old the threat is subtler, gently gnawing away at sanity. The Mistlands combines the worst traits of both these dread realms.

The random nature of the mists means that on a good day you can see for miles, while on a bad day it is impossible to see your hand in front of your face.

Not being able to see more than a few yards ahead means there is always the danger of walking off a cliff, smacking into a ruin, tripping over something, or stumbling into a bog. Similarly, predators could be lurking unseen just yards away. The mists also dampen sound as well as sight, and a comrade's voice may be indiscernible even a dozen yards away unless he shouts. Being constantly alert for danger is tiring, and tends to leave heroes on edge, ready to jump at the slightest noise or fleeting shadow.

The reduced visibility means it is extremely easy to get lost. Maps are useless without landmarks, and navigation is based on the position of the sun and stars, objects rarely sighted. With sight and hearing limited by the mist, parties can quickly become separated unless sensible precautions are taken. Even roping yourself together can be a scary experience, for much of the time the person ahead or behind may be swallowed by mist. When the rope starts to shake violently, you can't be sure if your comrade is trying to signal for help or whether some horrible fate has already befallen her.

This in itself is most unfortunate, for the mists contain many strange noises and half-seen shapes. Some say these are ghosts,




the mistlands
Population: Unknown
Ruler: None
Religion: Unknown, possibly Hela
Imports: None
Exports: None
Sigil Peaks
Castle of Tortured Metal
Cloudcap Mnt.
Doom Keep
Orc Camp
Silverdale
The Mistlands
Giant's Throne
Valley of Crows
Four Wind Tower
Glyph Wall
The Fiddler's Cave
Orc Camp
The Giant's Throne
Eira's Spring
R. Scolforflow
haunted hills
Temple of Hela
The Vent
Temple of Teeth & Claw
Frostwater River
Nastrand
Kenaz's Tea
Dunvik
Silverport
Estvik
R. Snowmelt
Skiefovollr
Stone Bridge
Overgheim
Odda
Inner Sea
100
50
25
10
0

the souls of those who vanished when the mist rose, while others blame hallucinations brought on by the lack of sensory input. Whatever the cause, they are a perpetual distraction, for while they might be ephemeral shades, they might just as easily be orcs planning an ambush.

MOVEMENT AND THE MISTS

Without visual references, all movement in Pitch Blackness is in a random direction, determined by rolling a d8. Roll once for each movement action, not for each square. If someone calls out, the character can make a Notice roll at –4 (the mists muffle sound) to head in the general direction of the caller.

Heroes wishing to move faster than half their Pace cannot feel ahead to see what lies in front of them. While this might occasionally lead to a bump or bruise, it may also lead one to plummet off a cliff. In areas of difficult ground, the hero treats each 1" movement as 4" if he wishes to navigate carefully. Any hero moving faster than half his Pace must make an Agility roll. A –2 penalty applies if the terrain is difficult ground. A –4 penalty occurs if he runs. These modifiers stack. Failure causes the hero to stumble or fall. Typically this leaves him Shaken, though in areas of very rough ground he may suffer Bumps and Bruises instead.

HAMPERED EXPLORATION

While the mist can make navigation extremely difficult, if not actually impossible, it is not the only barrier to exploration. Many of the ruins seem to exist only at specific times, such as when there is no mist, when the veil is thick, or during the times of the Deorcmonan. Other sites flit in and out of existence based on celestial alignments, meaning they may not reappear for weeks, months, or years. Some may even cycle around far longer periods, perhaps not set to exist again for decades or centuries, if not longer.

What happens to explorers caught in a ruin when it winks out of existence is left to the GM to determine. Possible solutions include the mist thickening suddenly and then just as rapidly returning to normal, revealing open hills or bog where once stood stone and wooden buildings, the heroes being teleported a random distance in a random direction (though never out of the Mistlands), or the unfortunates being transported to wherever the ruins go when they vanish from the mortal world, but held in a form stasis until it reappears.

For the latter, the adventurers would notice absolutely no effect. The trouble begins when they eventually emerge and return to civilization, only to find much more time has passed then they can account for.

As an example, let's say the heroes enter a ruined temple that appears only when the moon is full. Unfortunately they are still exploring when the full moon passes. Time immediately freezes for the party, though they would have no knowledge of this. A month later, the full moon rises again and the ruin reappears in the Mistlands. As far as the game goes, the GM just carries on as if nothing happened. The adventurers finish their work and return to Chalcis, only to find that a whole month has passed since they left (plus any other time they spent in the Mistlands, of course).

This may be one of the causes for the population vanishing. Perhaps they still exist, but have yet to reappear after being transported to who knows where. Maybe in a few years or decades (or longer) they will return, totally oblivious to any lapse in time and confused as to why the world appears to have moved on without them.

Should the GM choose to have a ruin appear around the heroes, the mists should again thicken and then thin. When it returns to normal, the characters find themselves standing in a ruin that wasn't there a few moments before. The GM should never have the walls materialize on top of the characters, but he can have the party suddenly separated by them!

RANDOM APPEARANCES

While the GM is at liberty to set his own materialization and dematerialization times for ruins, a random method is given below as an aid. Just draw a card from the action deck and compare the value to determine when the ruin exists in the Mistlands.

This system is best used when characters have stumbled across a ruin, rather than for determining when the next one they encounter will appear. After all, they may be waiting for a year for that to occur! If you draw a 7 or 8, simply switch the results to fit the current lunar period. For results based on the mist thickness, you can either change this to fit current conditions or wait a day or so to have the ruin appear, the characters discovering it as soon as the mist reaches the right density.

Exactly when the heroes stumble across the ruin during its time in the Mistlands can be decided by the GM or randomly rolled. For instance, an Ace indicates the ruin is present either during daylight or nighttime only. If the heroes stumble across it just after dawn, they have around 10 hours of adventuring time. If the GM doesn't have a set time in mind he can assume day and night each last 12 hours (for ease) and roll a d12, 2d6, or 3d4 to determine hour many hours have elapsed since the ruin materialized or how many hours remain before it vanishes again (his choice).

Note that this method deliberately precludes random results that cause the ruins to be gone for more than a single year—having the heroes move forward in time beyond this should always be a conscious decision by the GM. Of course, this may make for a great campaign twist. Perhaps the GM wants to change the focus of his campaign (imagine emerging far in the future, in a world where the Winterlands now stretch deep into the Hearthlands or where the Liche-Priest has conquered the continent). Or maybe the goal is to find a way home before the Norns react to the heroes' presence in an age where they should not exist.

Card	Result
2	One specific day per year
3	One week per year
4	One month per year
5	One season per year
6	On a specific phase of the moon
7	Weaxansicol through Fulmonan
8	Waniangibbus through Deorcmonan
9–10	During light mist
Jack	During moderate mist
Queen	During heavy mist
King	During scant mist
Ace	During the day (red) or night (black)
Joker	Always present

MAJOR LOCALES

By all accounts, not that there are many accounts, some ruins exist where no settlement, castle, or temple has stood since before the Blizzard War. Time, it seems, means little in the Mistlands. Because the mists seem to manifest ruins from Silverdale's entire history, the GM can create adventuring sites dating from the Demongate War (or earlier) through to the moment the mist rose. A few notable sites of the Mistlands are included below as examples.

CASTLE OF TORTURED METAL

During the Demongate War the forces of darkness erected a monstrous castle in Silverdale. Records rescued from the cult of Hela after her fall from grace indicate the fortress was home to a demon known only as the Screaming Metal Fury, a cyclopean being whose skin comprised iron plates and whose movements generated a noise akin to finger nails on a chalk board. The records do not tell of the demon's fate, though it is presumed he was banished at some point during the conflict.

When the stars are right, the ruins of his fortress manifest in the Mistlands. No stone and mortar formed his home, for he dwelt in a fortress of iron unlikely anything seen before or since. Although heavily rusted and battle scarred, the castle is largely intact.

Those who would dare to follow in his footsteps may have cause to battle demons and other terrors, but the greatest danger comes not from physical forces but the constant screech of tormented

metal that echoes through the hollow halls. Even *silence* spells cannot dampen the wail, which begins to drive intruders mad.

For each hour spent in the castle intruders must make a Spirit roll. Failure reduces their Spirit die by one step. Below a d4 it becomes a d4-2, and the hero goes temporarily insane, screaming and clutching at his head in a bid to tear off his ears and end the torment. Should he fail another roll, his madness is permanent—all he will hear until the end of days is the sound of screaming metal. Unless the character ha permanently lost his mind, lost dice return at the rate of one per day outside the castle ruins.

DOOM KEEP

This dark, ominous keep was the domain of the Dark Marshal, one of the Liche-Priest's chief lieutenants. From here he guided his master's armies toward Aspiria and Chalcis. Although Bron defeated the Black Marshal, no record of his death exists. The cult of Scaetha, which maintains meticulous records on major undead slain in battle, certainly believes he may still lurk somewhere, waiting to strike once more against the living.

His keep was allegedly torn down after the war by clerics of Scaetha searching for the evil general. Yet his castle, ruined but not reduced to its foundations, has been seen on more than one occasion since the Mistlands formed. Gossips tell that the keep is rebuilding itself stone by stone, though no one who has actually witnessed the fell structure has ever claimed this. The Dark Marshal is one candidate for the creation of the Mistlands, for it is said he had dominion over mist and fog, as well as the undead.

FOUR WIND TOWER

During the Anari occupation of Silverdale the Convocation raised a tower in which to train new members. Archival records in Imperial City mention the tower, and how it came to be dominated by students of air at the expense of all others. According to one document, the resident mages had planned to invoke a potent spell to artificially create an air locus. The Convocation discovered their madness and censured all the inhabitants, executing two arkhwisards for crimes against the Convocation and employing powerful mind-altering spells to wipe the knowledge of the charm from the others.

While the Convocation claimed the purge was successful and ordered the tower abandoned, there are no accurate registers of all the elementalists present or what records detailing what fate actually befell the structure. Perhaps the Convocation was successful. But perhaps they were not, and centuries later someone rediscovered the secret ritual and enacted it. The mists could, in theory, be a product of an unnatural locus. If so, there is the possibility that the Mistlands exist partly in the mortal realm and partly in the elemental Realm of Air. However, if this were so, then why do air-trapping spells have no more potency here than anywhere else? Further investigation may be required before the actual truth is discovered. For their part, the Convocation is tight-lipped on the possibility that one of their number might just have been responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of innocents.

SILVERPORT

The ruins of Silverport are unusual, for the breezes blowing in off the Inner Sea keep the mists largely at bay. (All red cards and numbered black cards indicate light mist, with black royal cards (Jack through Ace) being moderate mist. Jokers work as normal.)

Access is easiest by sea, though few captains ever wish to stay here for long, for if the wind drops the ruins can be quickly engulfed in rolling mist. Built by the Anari during the height of Silverdale's prosperity, the port once served as the point of export for the silver deposits, though in recent decades the silver had ceased to flow and fleece and mutton were more common exports.

Today it is just a ruin. Strangely the town shows no signs of destruction typical of that caused by siege weapons or dragon breath. Instead, it appears to have aged and weathered as if by the passing of centuries.

All the ruins are empty—whatever furnishings and valuables were once here have long gone, though it is unlikely they have been looted. Given the state of decay, it is difficult to tell the former function of many individual ruins, though there are clearly warehouses and workshops intermingled between houses and other structures. What remains of a temple to Neorthe overlooks the wharves, and former citizens recall there being a temple to Ertha somewhere in the suburbs.

TEMPLE OF HELA

Hela's madness occurred in an age before the Liche-Priest and the Blizzard War, both cataclysmic events. Very little is known of Hela's cult in the days she served as guardian of the Abyss, and much of what is told today is tainted by her later insanity and the cult of Scaetha's vehement prejudices. However, within the Mistlands one might well encounter a ruined temple from the days when Hela ranked as one of the good deities. What secrets would engravings and carvings tell? What did she look like before her transformation into goddess of undeath? Could rituals unknown to the clerics of Scaetha be discovered here? Or would the passage of time have left naught but tantalizing glimpses?

The cult of Scaetha has a natural curiosity in such matters, if only to erase facts which might cast Hela in a good light. Hela's own cult would likewise take an interest in a temple to her old self, for there may be material that must be kept out of her enemies' hands. As one of the primary combatants in the Demongate War, a lost temple might hold knowledge on the whereabouts of the missing fragments of the Black Key, something the Seekers of the Black Key would kill to possess.

TENTTOWN

Population: 328

Tenttown is something of a misnomer these days, though the name has stuck. Situated in the Orcblood Hills overlooking the swirling mists, it began life as a small community of ex-Silverdalers.

Living in makeshift tents, the first inhabitants were among the lucky ones who escaped the mists. Here they waited for the mists to lift so they could return home and find their loved ones. Over time, as it became apparent the mists were here to stay, the mood in the camp took on a different air.

Today, the citizens remain in the vain hope missing friends and family will one day emerge from the mists. The tents have largely gone, replaced by a shantytown of wooden shacks clustered around a makeshift temple to Eira. A few of the villagers work, but mostly they pray, weep, reminisce and watch the border, relying on the charity of Chalcis to keep them supplied.

The citizens pay no rent or taxes, nor do they owe allegiance to any lord. However, to prevent Tenttown from becoming a separate state, Duke Howel has ruled that only those born in Silverdale or first generation refugees may reside here. The clerics of Eira are excluded, since they are on a mission of mercy to care for the refugees.

Adventuring parties returning from the Mistlands via Tenttown are pestered as to what they have seen and whether they found any survivors. To date, their tales have only added to the despondency of the inhabitants. Baeth Mistwalker (see below) is a common visitor here.

THE VENT

The Vent may be a myth. According to some stories a deep crack opened in the ground, belching out the thick mist that shrouds the Mistlands. No native Silverdaler has ever been able to confirm this story, for the Vent is said to lie in the Haunted Hills, and no one from that region has been seen or heard from in three decades.

Various additions to the tale have grown in the short time it has circulated. Some claim the missing Silverdalers were pulled, lured, or led into the Vent. Others point to dark forces lurking beneath the ground who cannot stand sunlight and so wish to blanket the

surface world in perpetual mist. Talk of "black elves" is common in taverns, but such stories are complete nonsense.

It is certainly true that the Haunted Hills have many natural caves and mines. One of these may have collapsed, giving rise to the story of the Vent. If this is true, it is equally likely mist would have formed in the crack or basin left behind, as it does any low lying moist ground. Of course, the tales of evil subterranean races might equally be true. Until someone investigates though, the stories remain just that.

PEOPLE OF NOTE

No one actually lives in the Mistlands, despite what you may read below, but there are those who frequently reside along the border. Some of these may become allies to the heroes, while others have their own agendas and may resent nosey adventurers taking an interest in their private affairs.

BAETH MISTWALKER

A former inhabitant of Silverdale, Baeth was a young lad when his home was engulfed in mist. Ten years later he emerged from the mists, a young adult with no memory of what transpired during his absence or knowledge of what fate befell his family. He claims to be a cleric of Iðunn, goddess of the mists, having been blessed by her divine touch.

The cult of Thunor in Chalcis is highly suspicious of his claims, for they have no knowledge of such a deity—all the air god's aspects are male. That Baeth is suffering some sort of mental trauma is possible, but such claims cannot explain away his miraculous powers. Iðunn grants Baeth the use of *deflection*, *fog cloud, obscure*. All spells have a mist trapping.

Baeth has been slowly gaining converts from among the poorest members of society. He claims that the Mistlands are swathed in a veil, which those who do not accept Iðunn into their hearts cannot penetrate. Beyond the veil of ignorance, as he calls it, the people of Silverdale live in carefree happiness, not wealthy, yet content with their lot and free of disease and starvation.

Those who have followed him into the mists have never returned, but that, as Baeth says, is only to be expected—once one has entered the new Silverdale one has no wish to leave. Occasionally, he delivers messages from those who have already stepped over the threshold of ignorance to their friends and family, urging them to accept Iðunn into their lives and join with them.

No one has been able to prove, or more importantly disprove, Baeth's claims, and the cult of Iðunn is slowly growing in popularity. Many clerics of Thunor fear he is a charlatan up to no good, but without evidence to the contrary, his words are a strong lure to those who have lost loved ones to the mists.

FREDBERT

An engro Lorekeeper, Fredbert has devoted the last 25 years of his life to compiling a gazetteer of the Mistlands, cataloguing its ruins in a bid to try and understand the larger picture. His many contacts in northern Chalcis inform him of adventuring parties about to brave the mists, whereupon Fredbert travels to interview them. He never asks heroes to visit anywhere in particular, for finding a specific site more than once has proven very tricky. Instead, he offers a small reward (usually no more than 50 gs per party) if they will tell him of their discoveries should they return.

Fredbert has seen his fair share of adventurers never return, and he has something of a grim, businesslike attitude when discovering the Mistlands. As an act of kindness, perhaps the last one he will ever perform for the adventurers, he ensures they enjoy a good meal before departing civilization for what may be the last time.

MAGUS LUTISSE AP-GIRBERS

Politics and power go hand-in-hand in the Convocation, but neither has ever interested Lutisse. Despite having served the Convocation for the best part of five decades, the elderly elementalist has been content with her knowledge of air and water, foregoing the others elements despite the difficulties it brings when casting. Her colleagues think her slightly mad, but she hasn't much cared about what others think of her either.

For the last six years she has resided in Deepdale (in Chalcis), leaving town only in summer. Once the days warm she packs three months of supplies onto a mule and heads out alone to the Orcblood Hills on the border with the Mistlands. Here she pitches her tent within a hundred yards of the misty border and begins her months long studies in the mists.

She is not searching for a link to the Siphoning (Lutisse sees the closeness of the events as coincidence) but because they are a water-air phenomenon that has lasted three decades with only scant break. Six summers of investigation have revealed nothing of great use to students of arcana, but patience is one of her many virtues.

WHY COME HERE?

The Mistlands is a realm blanketed in near-constant mist. Visibility is often reduced to a handful of yards, navigation through the rugged hills and treacherous bogs is next to impossible due to poor visibility, the only structures are dark, silent ruins, and most of the explorers who dare to tread the haunted lands never return to tell of what they have seen. What in the name of the gods could lure adventurers here?

* Orders. Many organizations send their members into dread lands as part of their regular duties. However, even the cult of Scaetha, whose clerics routinely traverse the Withered Lands, are loath to dispatch followers into the Mistlands. Similarly, while the cult of Hoenir and the Lorekeepers would dearly love to thoroughly explore the many ruins in the hope of finding a clue to the origins of the mists, they have no wish to send followers to their death. Even the Reliquary thinks twice before sending agents into what is surely a cursed realm.

That doesn't mean that heroes with the Orders Hindrance can breathe a sigh of relief, though. Persistent troublemakers, those who superiors view them as a threat to their position, and heroes who have caused offense may at some point find themselves sent to the Mistlands on some quest. In many cases the quest has some importance to the organization, though in truth the superior is banking on the hero not returning to plague his life any further.

* No Choice. Free will is a debatable concept in Rassilon. A man could go mad trying to determine what is the Norns' will and what decisions are truly his own. Most folk just don't care—what will happen will happen, and worrying about the nature of specific events profits a man nothing. Thus, heroes may find themselves forced to enter the Mistlands because of other events. If the party hired on to help defeat orc raiders and those orcs retreat into the Mistlands, then that's where the characters must follow them.

* Curiosity. Many skalds claim cats have nine lives, a gift from the Unknowable One. They are also quick to point out that curiosity, the same god's curse, killed the cat. While heroes with the Curious Hindrance aren't likely to go out of their way to walk the mists, those in the eastern Drachenlands, northern Chalcis, Angmark, or the Palisades may feel the lure of curiosity dragging them toward the cursed realm, for the Mistlands remain one of the great enigmas of Rassilon.

Clerics of Freo, Hoenir, and Niht, and Lorekeepers might well feel a similar lure, for although maps of the realm before the mists exist, no one can say for certain whether anything has changed or not in the intervening decades.

Odds are that anyone who could solve the mystery of the Mistlands' formation would become an overnight celebrity among those who care about such things.

* Treasure. The Mistlands may have fallen on hard times since the Blizzard War, but the citizens had personal wealth and there were several notable temples to Eostre and more than a few to Ertha. Since few thieves or adventurers ever visit the Mistlands, it is possible their treasuries and libraries could still be intact, despite the devastation apparently inflicted on the realm.

NORDMARK

Ravaged by civil war and the subsequent war brought on by the exiled young heir returning to claim his throne, Nordmark has suffered its share of hardship. On the surface the kingdom appears to be on the slow road to rebuilding, but there are those who would see Nordmark ruled by others or crushed altogether.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Nordmark.

* **Old Hatreds:** Anari, whether natives or visitors, suffer –1 Charisma in Nordmark due to the native Saxa's racist attitude.

* **Trial by Combat:** Any Nordmarker accused of a crime may demand trial by combat to prove his innocence. Unlike in other realms, the accused, male or female, must fight their own battle. His accuser, on the other hand, may appoint a champion. Naturally, this favors the already largely unpopular nobility.

* **Unreliable Trade Network:** Even after two years of peace, Nordmark's trade network remains patchy. City items in a town or town items in a village cost 1d4+3 x 10% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost 90 + (1d4 x 10%) as much as normal, if available. Special goods can only very rarely be purchased outside the described location.

This makes it more profitable for heroes to sell their plunder. A Streetwise roll in any settlement allows a seller to unload all of his mundane treasure for 1d4+2 x 10% its normal value. A raise finds a buyer who will take it all for 1d3+4 x 10% the list price.

ATMOSPHERE

Two years of brutal conflict as rival claimants fought for the throne, followed by six months of civil war as the king sought to claim his inheritance, have left Nordmark a scarred land. King Geirmund has sat on Nordmark's throne for two years, yet the people still suffer. Vast swathes of agriculture land lie fallow, the farmers driven from their homes and yet to return. Iron mines, which once supplied much of Nordmark's wealth, remain empty. The blackened timbers of razed villages and steads jut from the overgrown landscape like the nails of a colossal giant. Yet amid all this destruction the shoots of a new spring are blossoming. Construction work has started on new settlements, merchant caravans are returning to the roads, and order has returned to a land wracked by chaos.

The eyes of the inhabitants betray mixed emotions of hope and resentment. Hope because the fighting has stopped, at least on the battlefield, and things are slowly beginning to improve. Goods are returning to the markets, the roads are becoming safer, at least in the central and northern regions, and the power of the jarls has been weakened.

Yet this same king who now brings stability is directly responsible for much of the hardship. He made no attempt to return in peace, unleashing his armies as soon as he had crossed the border. In the eyes of many, his enemies' scorched earth policies were a direct result of the king's heavy-handed approach. No one forgets that while the general population begged for food, the nobility dined in style and demanded the taxes be paid on time and in full.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Nordmark's king, like those in most other Marklands, rules not by divine right or because he is the appointed heir, but because he has the greatest support among the nation's nobility. Geirmund, who lacked support as a youth, has broken this ancient system by using brute force to claim his title. Despite technically being a usurper, none of the jarls who oppose him have the military might, or if truth be told the will, to rectify the situation just yet.

Because of Thunor's influence, Nordmark's kings have only as much authority as they are prepared to impose on the jarls. Under weak kings the jarls were autonomous rulers, freely ignoring royal decrees and acting with impunity. Strong kings would rule by military might, crushing their opponents in order to ensure Nordmark remained strong, or through charisma, swaying the nobility to loyalty with well-placed words. Geirmund believes he has crushed the jarls into submission, and now intends to rule as a charismatic leader.

Unfortunately, his enemies have been given plenty of ammunition to use against him. His reduction in the jarls' armies is seen by many to be a move toward autocratic rule, or as a folly for leaving the border states ill-prepared to deal with invaders.

Although Geirmund knows there are snakes among the jarls, men who whose ambitions stop only with his removal and their ascension, he has retained the full council. Regardless of their suspected loyalties, the king allows all his jarls to advise him equally. After all, he is not duty bound to act on any of their suggestions. Geirmund may be young, but his Knights Hrafn training has instilled the old Anari adage, "keep your friends close and your enemies closer," into him. Even if he did suspect treachery, he would have to act carefully; acting too hastily to punish his enemies further might alienate the jarls still undecided about him.

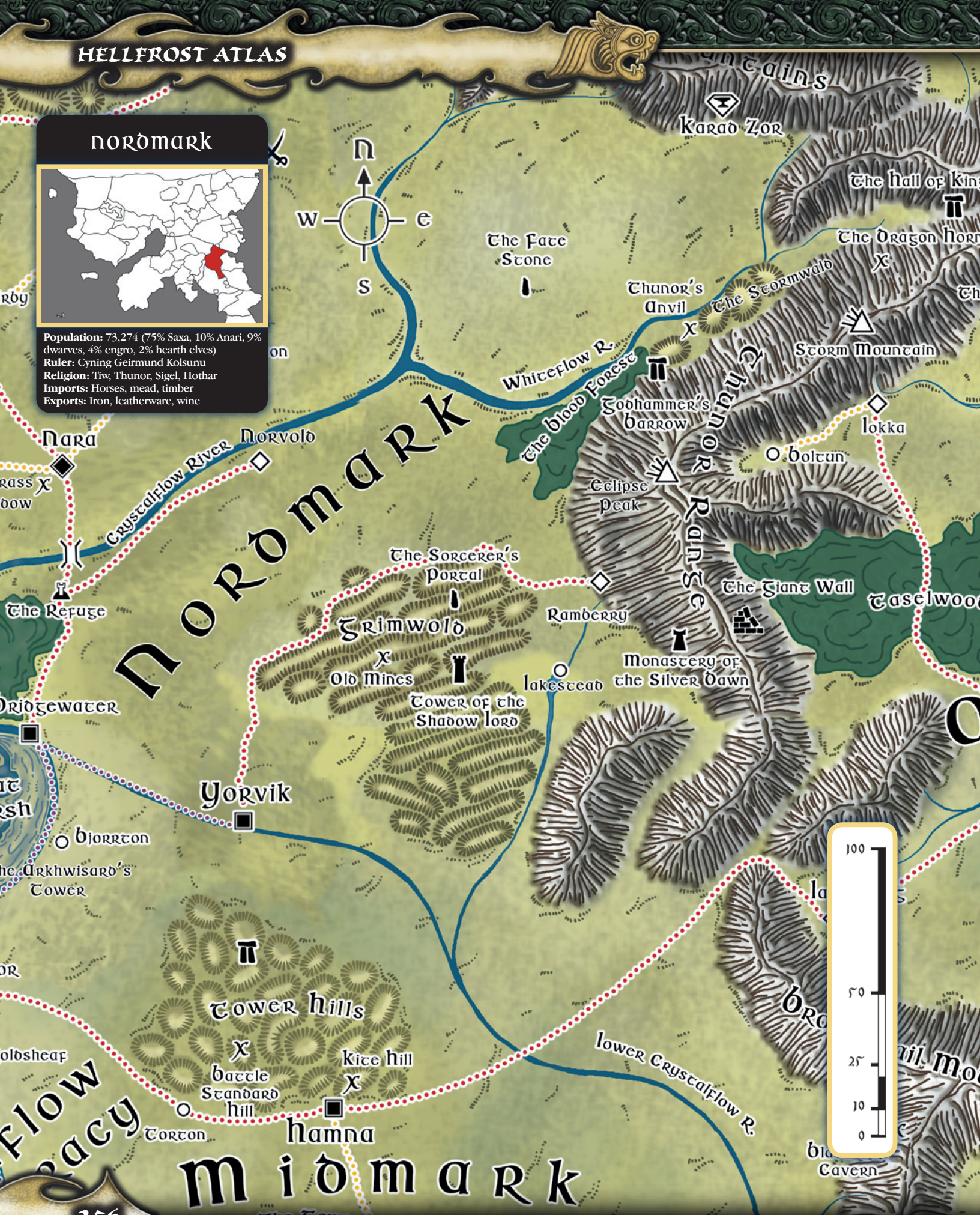
Nordmark has nine jarls. Two of these are strong supporters of the king, three are firmly against him, yet bite their tongues and work their treason behind the scenes while openly proffering their support, and four are as yet undecided. The latter are prepared to give the young ruler the benefit of the doubt, at least for now, but their patience will not last forever. Unless Nordmark blooms soon, Geirmund may find himself opposed by seven jarls.

Whereas in other lands the lesser nobles owe allegiance to a feudal master, in Nordmark all nobles are beholden only to the king by oaths of loyalty. Nordmark's kings have always ruled with a hands-off attitude, leaving the nobles free to impose any laws they desire, so long as they do not actively go against a royal decree or threaten the stability of the nation. Most lesser nobles actually make alliances with a higher status nobleman, if only for mutual protection and strong trade links.

Around 75% of Nordmark belongs to the king and jarls. The rest is free land, owned by wealthy families or the various cults. The upper class is filled with rich farmers and herders, mine owners, merchant princes, and senior clerics.

Forming the middle classes are wealthy landed farmers and herders, master crafters, guildmasters, powerful courtiers, popular skalds, most clerics, mages, and many merchants. Everyone else forms the lower class. Unlike the nobility, the lower classes swear oaths to support their local lord. Those who refuse to take the oath are given one week to leave their homes. After this, the nobleman may legally declare them outlaws within his domain.

Because of Thunor's popularity, the dark stain of slavery has been abolished in Nordmark. Slavers are harshly punished, for their crimes are affronts to the storm god


Nordmark
Population: 73,274 (75% Saxa, 10% Anari, 9% dwarves, 4% engro, 2% hearth elves)
Ruler: Cyning Geirmund Kolsunu
Religion: Tiw, Thunor, Sigel, Hothar
Imports: Horses, mead, timber
Exports: Iron, leatherware, wine
N
W
E
S
Karad Zor
The Fate Stone
Thunor's Anvil
The Stormwald
Storm Mountain
Whiteflow R.
The Blood Forest
Godhammer's Barrow
Thunder Ranges
Nara
Norvold
Crystalflow River
Eclipse Peak
Boltun
Lokka
The Refuge
The Sorcerer's Portal
Grimwold
Old Mines
Tower of the Shadow Lord
Ramberry
Lakestead
The Giant Wall
Monastery of the Silver Dawn
Dridgewater
Yorvik
Bjorrton
The Arkhwisard's Tower
Tower Hills
Battle Standard Hill
Kite Hill
Torton
Hamna
Lower Crystalflow R.
Midmark
100
50
25
10
0

EDUCATION

Nordmark's only educational establishments are the temples. Rich families can afford to hire private tutors, but invariably these are also clerics. Thanks to Thunor's influence, families are free to educate their children as they see fit.

Before the war, children between the ages of 5 and 14 were sent to the local temple two days a week for basic tuition in Nordmark's history, culture, lore, heraldry, and folk stories, as well as basic religious instruction. For the rest of the week they were expected to work, performing minor chores while youngsters, and slowly taking on more responsibility as they grow.

Since the war, more and more children have been denied education, their families keeping them at home to help rebuild homes and herds, plant fields and work as apprentice crafters to try and make ends meet. To many commoners, education is seen as a luxury in a land recovering from bitter fighting. King Geirmund knows that unless attitudes change the next generation of Nordmarkers will grow up not knowing the old stories or understanding their history. Unfortunately, he knows that issuing a decree will not achieve his aims.

RELIGION

Nordmarkers worship all the major deities, but pay special attention to Tiw, Thunor, Sigel, and Hothar.

Tiw's popularity has grown dramatically over the past five years thanks to the two wars. Although peace has now fallen over the land, Tiw's cult has managed to hold onto its popularity. This is mainly due to the Nordmarkers' reluctance to fully embrace peace, for until the land is healed of its ills another war is always possible.

Recent raids against merchant caravans in the south, orc activity in the north, and the rise of bandit gangs is played upon by the cult, whose clerics urge the populace to pray to Tiw lest the dire threats that lurk in the shadows manifest and engulf the land.

Thunor is considered the true patron of Nordmark, a position he has held since the Saxa Rebellion. Under the Anari Nordmark was a frontier province, kept in the grip of tyranny because of its rich iron mines. Although skalds and historians disagree on exactly where the first fires of rebellion were lit, Nordmarkers have no doubt that it was their ancestors who struck the first blow against the cruel Anari. Even today, three centuries after the Marklands were formed, the Saxa look down on the Anari living among them. Actual violence is rare, but racist comments are commonplace.

With a new Nordmark rising from the ashes of civil war, the cult of Thunor has joined forces with the cult of Eira to try and change attitudes. Together they preach that all civilized beings, regardless of race, have the right to be treated equally and live free lives. Unfortunately, there are elements within society who look to blame the Anari for the civil wars, despite there being no Anari claimants to the throne and very few Anari nobles.

Thunor's influence has led to Nordmarkers being able to speak their minds more freely than in other realms. While seditious talk is still punished, every citizen has the right to speak openly to his lord without fear of reprisal. Outsiders often see this as a lack of respect.

Sigel's cult grew to prominence during the rebellion, when the Anari were cast as servants of darkness, in league with the forces of the Abyss. Although such fervent talk has withered with the passage of time, Sigel has remained popular. With orcs and the occasional frost giant lurking in the mountains that border two sides of Nordmark, Sigel's cult is unlikely to lose public support any time soon.

Strong worship of Hothar seems at odds with the Nordmarkers' love of Thunor, for while the storm god preaches personal freedom and expression, Hothar stands for order and conformance. Hothar's popularity is misleading, for Nordmarkers only hold his aspects of justice, law, and truth in high regard. While not all men are born equal in terms of wealth or influence, all have the right to equal justice.

Of the other gods, Eostre Plantmother and Ertha have seen a dramatic loss of influence since the first civil war. With the destruction of fields and large-scale abandonment of the mines, and many citizens conscripted to fight, worship plummeted overnight. Both cults are slowly rebuilding their powerbase, but progress is painfully slow.

The cult of Eira, whose clerics voice strong opposition to the civil wars and called for mediation instead of bloodshed, maintained its limited influence by providing healing services. With peace restored and the young king more open to diplomatic dialogue, the cult hopes to expand its sphere of influence at court.

Vali's fell cult has not been idle, expanding its influence in recent years. The hardship suffered during the civil wars created a population who would do almost anything to improve their lot, while the famine caused by the fighting and scorched earth policies did the cult's work for them. Attempts by some nobles to blame the cult for the civil war backfired, the nobles instead accused of trying to pass the buck. In some instances they were right on the money, for the cult happily stirred the political pot with lies and innuendos.

MILITARY

Geirmund overturned centuries of tradition when he forbade the jarls from amassing permanent armies greater than 100 huscarls, but none of his enemies were in a position to stop him. His intention was to keep the jarls from mustering an army in excess of his own, for while the nobles could keep their armies in one place, Geirmund's would be scattered across the land as a reminder to all that he ruled as king.

While the jarls have obeyed the letter of the law, they have also disobeyed the spirit. Every settlement has a permanent militia or watch, and every able-bodied man is required to join the fyrd. While the size of the fyrd has unchanged, the strength of certain militias and watches has trebled since Geirmund became king. For now the king has not acted openly to crush such insolence, relying instead on his spies to keep him abreast of the nobles' true military strength.

Geirmund's personal army is build around a core of 500 huscarls. Two-thirds of these are seasoned warriors, having fought with the king in the last civil war. The rest were chosen from families who supported his father. Fifty of the huscarls form the king's personal guard. Known simply as the Royal Guard, they are never far from their liege's side.

In addition to his elite warriors, the king can call upon 500 light cavalry (leather armor, medium shield, spear), and 200 heavy cavalry (plate armor, large shield, lance, and long sword), plus 3,000 men-at-arms (leather armor, medium shield, short spear). Most of the latter are conscripts, poorly trained but vital to the king. Nordmark's unusual shape, recent bandit activity in the south, and constant raids by orcs forces the king to keep his cavalry mobile.

The laws of Nordmark prohibit the king from permanently deploying troops in the lands of the nobles without their permission, though they may pass through and set temporary camp as they desire. As his nobles have exploited a loophole in his military decree, so the king has played the same game. Small detachments of cavalry roam the lands of his major rivals, setting up overnight camps and then moving on so as not to be seen to be permanently encamped.

The king, a skilled tactician and strategist, has arranged all his forces into companies of 100 men of the same type and led by a captain. Every company bears its own standard, the captain being allowed a free hand in its design. Companies are known by the name of their commanding officer.

Each company is in turn broken down into five squads of equal strength commanded by a sergeant. The five sergeants are rated in terms of seniority, and carry the honorific First down to Fifth. Should the captain fall in battle, the company's First Sergeant takes his place. If he falls, the Second Sergeant assumes command, and so on down the chain. All captains and sergeants are given tactical training by Knights Hrafn.

Unlike some realms Geirmund does not allow the Knights Hrafn to lead his armies in battle. He knows that having outside commanders could upset his people, so he ensures all captains and sergeants are Nordmarkers. The Knights Hrafn serve only as instructors and advisors.

With most of the country's fortifications destroyed in the civil

wars, Geirmund has few bases from which to impose his authority. Unwilling to give his enemies more political ammunition, the king has been temporarily forced to halt plans to erect new forts.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

While the civil wars raged Nordmark became a no-go zone for merchants, except in the south, where mercenaries made a fortune safeguarding Ostmark's rich caravans. Yorvik, which lies close to the Crystalflow Confederacy, suffered little in the way of reduced trade, but further inland the caravans slowed and finally stopped. Only now is trade resuming. Even so, trade is still far below its pre-war levels.

Because of the king's preference for cavalry, something unusual in the Marklands in general, Nordmark imports horses. Most of these come from Veermark. A number of nobles and rich landowners have cottoned on to the trade and have invested heavily in high quality studs, with the aim of starting their own stud farms. The fruits of these labors are years away though.

With little good quality forest, this having been felled by the Anari centuries ago and the land then put to use as farmland, Nordmark is forced to import building timber from its neighbors. Mead, popular with the nobility, is purchased from Midmark and Royalmark. Generally Royalmark sells to the northern provinces and Midmark to the center and south. With Yorvik now the capital, the Midmarkers have seen a boom in trade, while Royalmark has suffered a decline.

Nordmark could once afford to export livestock and crops, but today it can barely feed its population. Exports of leatherwork, something the inhabitants have always practiced, remain strong. Iron was the main source of income, but during the war much of the mines' output was devoted to military purposes. As prime targets for raids, the mines suffered extensive damage. While exports are beginning to flow again, it will be decades before the pre-war levels are resumed, possibly longer if the mysterious killings in the Grimwold are not ended soon.

The major market for iron and leatherwork is the Crystalflow Confederacy, from where it is sold to the armorers of Vestmark. As Vestmark grows increasingly desperate, prices have risen sharply, giving the Confederacy's merchants a healthy income while leaving the suppliers no better off. King Geirmund is in talks with representatives from the Confederacy to try to balance the equation a little better.

Despite its climate, Nordmark produces wine. Little of this comes from grapes, though (except around Ramberry). Instead, wild berries and fruits are used. Much of the exports go to the Low Winterlands.

While traditionalist Saxa do not erect taverns or inns, preferring to rely on hospitality or space in communal alehouses, Nordmark is slowly changing. Settlements along the trade roads have begun setting side buildings for use as or constructing brand new inns in a bid to lure merchants into staying. Yorvik, which entertains a great number of foreign merchants, already has half a dozen inns. Despite the economic benefits inns bring, especially in more rural communities, the king's enemies stir up trouble, proclaiming they are a sign that the Saxa ways are being eroded by a king educated in foreign ways.

ARCHITECTURE

Nordmark has retained many traditional Saxa values, including foregoing stone as a building material. From steads to palaces, temples to castles, all building are constructed from wood.

Saxa houses are long and narrow, with thatched or turf roofs. Internally the house is divided in twain, with one side (traditionally the left as one enters) comprising a communal hearth and a separate sleeping area for the owner, while the right side houses livestock. Not only does this keep the animals free from the privations of bandits and wolves, but their body heat helps warm the structure. Their dung is dried and used to supplement the peat commonly used in hearths. Even the king's palace, a sprawling, multi-wing affair, has an area for livestock, though the beasts are kept away from the more courtly chambers.

Aside from the Refuge, an ancient hill fort, Nordmark is lacking in fortifications, most having been destroyed during the two civil wars. Geirmund has drawn up plans for a series of ring forts, towering earthworks surrounding a central zone in which the barracks are drawn up defensively in blocks of four to form squares. Until the financial situation improves, he has decided to restrain military expenditure.

MAJOR LOCALES

Below are several new locations for the heroes to visit while they are in Nordmark.

THE BLOOD FOREST

The Blood Forest stretches between the southern banks of the Whiteflow River and the Thunor Range, though it is thickest near the mountains. It is also known as Dargar's Forest and Deathwood.

The forest has a bad reputation, for its trees grow gnarled and twisted, as if writhing in agony, and their leaves are the color of blood. A thick, red sap, the consistency and texture of congealed blood, oozes from the trees, and in autumn, when the leaves fall, they mulch into a similar sludge. Few animals live within the forest's dark embrace, and only carrion birds nest in the branches.

Hunters avoid the place, as do loggers, for the wood is next to useless for construction, and burns with a fell odor and clouds of sickly red smoke. Some say an unearthly wailing can be heard whenever wood from the forest is cut or burned, but these are unsubstantiated.

Many legends exist regarding the creation of the forest. One claims it was a hearth elf realm, cursed by the gods long ago for some slight. A variant of this tale has the curse laid during the Demongate War, when the elves proved resistant to corruption and their armies too strong to crush by force alone. According to one version, a mighty demon was slain here in battle. As he decayed, so his evil presence fed the trees with unholy ichor.

Other stories blame the Liche-Priest, though his reach never extended beyond the Icebarrier Mountains. Those who seek to justify their racist attitudes of the Anari claim the forest marks the sight of a great massacre. Men, women, and children were all put to the sword by the invaders, then buried in mass graves. Trees were then planted to conceal the crime. Unable to reach the Afterlife, having not been given proper burial rights, the spirits of the butchered Saxa possessed the trees.

THE DRAGON HORN

High in the Thunor Range stands a wide cave mouth. Spiraling around the entrance are bas-reliefs of coiled storm dragons, forming a design similar to Saxa knotwork designs. Within is a labyrinthine network of passages and caverns. In times of yore clerics of Thunor traveled the passages to the far end, a natural overhang which overlooked a secluded, barren valley. Here, it is said, was a huge horn carved from dragon bone. When blown by a devout priest, it summoned a storm dragon, who would serve the cleric for a single month. These days the tunnels crawl with orcs and other fell beasts, and the horn has not been blown in generations. Some claim the entire story is a myth.

THE FATE STONE

A large menhir emblazoned with Saxa runes of fate and fortune, the Fate Stone stands on the plains of central Nordmark, close to the trade road between Bridgewater and Norvold. The stone, it is said, once stood as the altar to a temple to the Norns (itself a rarity), which was torn down by the Anari after the clerics prophesized the end of the empire. According to legend, those who carve their names on the stone will be given an inkling into their fate. If the name vanishes by the next Fulmonan, the person is destined to die a poor death. If the name remains, the character is destined to live a full life and die in a manner befitting a Saxa.

THE GIANT WALL

The peaks of the Thunor Range are a natural barrier not only against storms sweeping in from the east, but also against invaders.

As formidable an obstacle as the mountains are, someone saw fit to further strengthen the eastern border of Nordmark. Here and there, atop the higher ridges and running across the low valleys, are the remnants of a gigantic wall. Dating the structure has proven impossible, but given that much of the hard gray stone used in its construction has been largely weathered away, it surely dates back many millennia. In sheltered spots, mighty walls still run for hundred of yards.

Based on the surviving segments, scholars estimate the wall was once an unbroken line running for 500 miles. Surviving sections of wall have allowed them to deduce the structure was a uniform 40 feet high and 30 feet thick. Made from stones as large as men and weighing many tons, it is an impressive feat of engineering.

Those with an opinion concerning the origin of the colossal fortification fall squarely into two camps. One believes the giants built it, the other that it was built to keep the giants out. Those who support the former origin refer to the barrier as the Giants' Wall. They argue that only giants could have raised such as a structure in so inaccessible and inhospitable a place and of such massive stones. Those who support the belief the wall was an anti-giant barrier point to the continuing presence of storm and cliff giants, against whose privations there is no modern barrier. Both arguments leave many unanswered questions.

Who, or what, were the giants trying to keep out? The towering creatures have few natural enemies, save for others of their ilk and dragons (against which a wall is no barrier). If not giants, then who exactly built the wall? Stories abound of great heroes who carried the massive blocks as if they were bricks, the hand of the gods, or the hard labor of the frost dwarves, but the antiquity of the wall is such that no records exist save in folklore. Even the archives and skalds of the dwarves, whose records and memories extend back as far as the semi-mythical Age of Heroes, are silent on the topic.

Godhammer's Barrow

Skeid Godhammer, a Lightningson, is a Nordmark hero of old. Although he began his path to fame by slaying cliff giants, he achieved legendary status when Thunor gifted him Stormhammer, a mighty relic. Stories about its powers vary. Some claim it could fire lightning bolts. Others tell that it had the power to subdue storm dragons, invoke storms, and even shatter the earth asunder. The handle and head together gave the weapon its power—one without the other resulted in just a mundane hammer. Somehow the two parts became separated, but why and how is lost to history.

No one recalls when Skeid Godhammer died, and even the nature of his demise is subject to speculation and heated debate. The most popular theory is that he fell in battle against giants or orcs (or sometimes both). Other stories have him dying a "straw death" (dying of old age or sickness in his bed), being murdered by a jealous family member seeking ownership of Stormhammer, or being slain by a dragon. What no one disagrees with is that he ascended straight to Thunor's realm upon his death.

Godhammer's final resting place is traditionally believed to lie a little over three miles southwest of Thunor's Anvil. No one seems to have disturbed his bones, for peasants passing by have always reported the stone door to be intact. Of course, no one is totally sure the great hero actually lies entombed within—the engraving on the door shows only a stylized lightning bolt.

The finding of Godhammer is detailed in *H2 The Blood of Godhammer*.

Guthren's Camp

The king's army makes frequent patrols, but they cannot be everywhere in force. Banditry is still rife, especially in the mountainous regions. While most are merely troublesome, extorting money and livestock with the threat of violence rather than actual violence, the band of Guthren "Death-Hrafn" Aswulfsunu (see page xxx) are notorious murderers. Any settlement they sack is left strewn with bodies before being put to the torch.

The location of Guthren's camp remains a mystery, though the king suspects it lies somewhere in the Thunor Range. Repeated attempts to locate the camp have failed, only adding to Guthren's reputation for possessing supernatural powers. The actual reason the valley has yet to be found is a mix of the natural terrain and Guthren employing judicious use of *barrier* spells designed to look like natural rock walls and *fog cloud* spells.

Guthren's camp does indeed lie in the mountains. It is nestled in a dead-end valley, its sheer cliffs narrowing in a "V." The valley is 30 yards wide at the mouth, half a mile at its widest point, and twice that in length. A wooden palisade broken only by sturdy double gates seals the entrance to the valley. A narrow stream runs through the center of the valley and out through a culvert.

Inside, the camp is laid out in neat blocks of tents with wide paths between them, allowing the easy movement of troops should the camp ever be assaulted. Supply tents and corrals are located toward the rear of the valley, along with Guthren's command tent. White banners sporting Guthren's crest, a black raven with blood dripping from its beak, flutter over the tent.

Guthren's band comprises some 200 men, though fewer than half are ever present in the camp at any one time (the rest are out plying their trade).

The Hall of Kings

Aside from the 400 years of Anari rule, Nordmark has always been a kingdom. The tombs of its ancient kings are lost, their grave goods plundered and their barrows plowed flat by the Anari. Following the restoration of the monarchy, the early rulers of the new kingdom were entombed in the Mounds of Heroes Gone in neighboring Royalmark. Some 200 years later, the decision was made to inter them in Nordmark. To date, 13 kings have been buried in their native soil. Hated tyrants or beloved by their people, all rest inside a single, immense barrow—the Hall of Kings. None of the kings lie on biers. Instead, they are seated on wooden thrones arranged in a semi-circle around the far edge of the main chamber. Beyond lie smaller chambers, the depositories of the lords' rich grave goods.

It is widely rumored that the spirits of the kings return to their corpses on nights of the Deorcmonan. On these darkest of nights, or so it is said, Nordmark Saxa nobles who present themselves before the kings can petition for their wisdom. Caution is advised, for these are once-mighty lords, and they do not suffer fools gladly.

There may be some truth to this, for it is widely known that only native nobles can push open the massive stone door that bars the entrance, a portal that defies all other attempts to pass through. *Teleport* might allow one to enter the tomb, but those who talk of stealing the great treasure would do well to listen to folklore—all those who have stolen so much as a silver scield have been found dead, their faces stricken with fear, their flesh hacked by swords.

Another story concerning the Hall claims that should Nordmark be invaded or an usurper sit on the throne, the kings will rise from their thrones (with the permission of Scaetha) to defend their homeland. Supporters of King Geirmund have used the tale to their advantage, for no withered monarchs have been spied walking the land since his enthronement (or at any previous time, come to that).

Game Mechanics: The Hall, while not yet a sacred place, uses the same Communication and Powers notes as per the Mounds of Heroes Gone (p. xxx). However, the Persuasion (–6) roll is modified only as follows: +1 bonus for each noble rank (ridder grants +1, lendmann +2, and so on up to +7 for the cyning). Only Saxa Nordmark nobles can attempt the roll.

Lakestead

Population: 50 (+10 vampires)
Ruler: Ridder Lacraed Ingvarsunu

The lands around Ramberry are dotted with vineyards. Lakestead is one such vineyard, though it is not located in the fertile hills—the small community sits on an island in the middle of a large lake. A long wooden causeway connects it to the mainland.

Ridder Lacraed is ruler in name only. The first civil war attracted the attention of Elvorix the Devourer, an ancient vampire fleeing the cult of Scaetha, who saw the death and misery of the conflict as an excellent cover for his bloody appetite. Dominating Lacraed and

his family, Elvorix seized control of Lakestead. The war may be over, but Elvorix, who has turned the stead into a bastion for his kind, has no intentions of moving on.

Wine production continues, though with two changes. First, Lacraed no longer permits outside merchants to collect wine from the stead. Instead, his workers transport the huge casks to Yorvik and Ramsberry by cart. There they kidnap victims for their master and his ilk, smuggling the unfortunates out of town in empty casks. Second, Elvorix plans to transform Nordmark into a realm of the undead. To do this, he adds a pin of his thick, black blood to every vat of wine being fermented. The blood is spread too thin to have an instant effect—long-term imbibing will eventually transform a drinker into a fledgling vampire— but Elvorix is immortal and thus possessed of near-limitless patience.

For reasons Elvorix cannot fathom, some drinkers have already succumbed, though they have transformed into near-mindless, bestial bloodsuckers. Slaves to their basest instincts, the fell creatures have gone on short-lived bloody rampages. The cult of Scaetha, though lacking a strong paladin presence, has already started to investigate the sudden spate of vampire attacks.

Elvorix is an ancient vampire with centuries of unlife behind him and a priest of Thunn, minor deity of vampires. Of the others in Lakestead, two are young vampires, each having survived as an undead for around a century. The rest are fledglings, created in the last decade. Extremely weak, in comparison to their elders, they use the stats for young vampires but have Strength d10, Vigor d8 (Toughness 8), and only ever draw one card to determine additional abilities, irrespective of the heroes' average Rank. See *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2* for vampire stats.

MONASTERY OF THE SILVER DAWN

High in the foothills of the central Thunor Range squats a small Anari castle. A virtual ruin, it had been abandoned since the foundation of Nordmark, for the Saxa saw no strategic value in repairing and occupying a crumbling structure that guarded no pass or road. No records exist of who ordered its construction or its purpose.

Ten years ago, during the civil war that followed the death of King Kol, the previously unknown Order of the Silver Dawn sent a silver-robed representative to the court of Lendmann (now Jarl) Bard, on whose land the ruin stood. The emissary explained that his masters were mystics, sages, and anchorites who sought nothing more than seclusion from worldly affairs in order to study the deeper mysteries of Maera. With war raging, and the mystics posing no obvious threat, Bard granted them use of the ruin in perpetuity.

Villagers living on the slopes overlooked by the brooding castle do not venture too close to the ruin if they can avoid it, for the crumbling structure has gained a bad reputation in the last 10 years. Some who stray too close report feeling nauseous. Others complain of severe headaches, temporary muscle spasms, or short-term blindness. A few, so folklore would have it, have been stricken dead or reduced to gibbering idiots. Accounts of the latter are invariably a case of "I knew someone who'd heard..." rather than firsthand information.

No one has ever seen one of the monks. This is both a great relief (many believe the monks are up to something sinister) and a source of great curiosity among the locals.

Before leaving Bard's court, their emissary entrusted the nobleman with a vast amount of gold scields and a list of provisions, asking only that the supplies to be shipped to the fastness on the last day of each month without fail, irrespective of the weather or other problems. Despite the distraction of two civil wars and rebuilding a shattered nation, Bard has been good to his word.

Each month, a laden cart makes the long journey up to the castle. As per the instructions, the goods are left outside the gates, from where silver-robed figures collect them. Never once have the figures acknowledged the cart drivers or invited them inside.

OLD MINES

Production levels in the iron mines are steadily increasing, but there remain dozens of closed workings. Some are actively shunned because they are believed to contain working golems, others because they are structurally unsafe or flooded after 200 years of neglect.

In the southwest, where the Grimwold and foothills of the Thunor Range merge, orcs have been working the mines in secret for several decades. The ore is hauled back to the mountains, where it is forged into weapons and armor. The orc presence has not yet been detected, for they tunneled into the mines from their mountain lairs. But this may change soon.

Cyning Geirmund, keen to boost his country's economy, strengthen his position, and equip his army, has ordered all the abandoned mines to be thoroughly checked in preparation for reopening them. Unwilling to spare troops while his grip on Nordmark remains fragile, and with the miners reluctant to investigate workings in which men and golems warred to the death, the king is forced to seek outside help.

THE OLD MOUNTAIN ROAD

Known only by its Auld Saxa name, Aldinnfjallhellirstigr (literally "old mountain cave path"), the old mountain road runs not over the Thunor Range, but through its living stone. Those who seek it know they are on the right trail only by the cracked sections of paved road that wind through the foothills. If they stay true to their course, they eventually arrive at the entrance. No towering statues or mighty gates signal the start of the road beneath the mountains—there is only a vast masonry arch.

The tunnel is clearly artificial. The floor is paved with flagstones, the walls are lined with a stone facade, and the high ceiling is vaulted. Long disused, the path is littered with fallen rocks and rent by deep cracks. None can say for sure where the realm of utter darkness and near-total silence exits, for no one has walked its full length. (No entrance has been discovered on the other side of the mountains.)

The few adventurers who have traveled some of its length speak of numerous side passages. Some of these are artificial. While narrower than the main road, they are wide enough for a single cart. Others appear to be natural fissures. Some allow a man to walk normally, but others are so narrow one must shuffle sideways at a snail's pace or so low even a dwarf must stoop. Every ten miles, the main road opens into a huge chamber, its roof somewhere in the darkness beyond the reach of lanterns and *light* spells. These have become known as halls, though their true function remains a mystery.

Few who walk the lonely road care to do so again. Even at its widest, the road seems claustrophobic, no doubt a trick of the mind caused by dwelling on the weight of the mountain above pressing downward. Even traveling with friends, one feels isolated and utterly alone. Talk of slithering noises and strange shadows spied fleetingly at the edge of vision is enough to dissuade many from stepping foot beneath the mountain. Tales of ghosts and shambling undead are commonplace, as they are with any abandoned place.

Popular imagination places its creation in the hands of the frost dwarves of Karad Zor. By carving a trade road through the mountain, they could transport their wares to Vends Bay in neighboring Ostmark. Dwarves are quick to point out that there is no dock facility in the bay, they have never used maritime trade routes, and there is no exit on the Ostmark side. On the subject of who built the road, the dwarf elders remain knowingly silent.

THE SORCERER'S PORTAL

High in the Grimwold stands a trilithon of weathered gray rock. Between the rune-engraved stones is a thin veil of inky darkness, an absolute nothingness through which light cannot pass. The surface shimmers and ripples in the wind, as it were a thin sheet of running water, yet is completely solid (and ice cold) to the touch.

On nights of the Deorcmonan, the surface changes. Instead of darkness it is filled with pinpricks of light, like distant stars. During such times the surface loses its solidity, allowing objects to pass through the veil. By stepping between the uprights, so the tale goes, one is magically transported elsewhere. What no one can agree on is where, for those who have been brave or foolish enough to test the theory have never been seen again.

Although there is no historical evidence to back up the story, locals insist a powerful wizard, possibly a frost dwarf, raised the stones long ago, hence the popular name.

That the site radiates power is indisputable, for many mages and clerics have studied here. The runes contain symbols of travel, attesting to local legends, but the other runes have proven indecipherable, even with the aid of magic. They appear dwarven, but are markedly different to those used by rune mages, cruder in style, yet somehow more potent and menacing.

One possibility is the portal is a remnant of the Demongate Wars, a means through which the forces of the Abyss entered the mortal realm. If this is so, then the portal appears now to be one-way only, for no demons have broken through in nearly a thousand years.

If it turns out this story is true, then the behavior of the local frost dwarf population takes on extremely sinister connotations. Once every human generation (around 20 years), Jarl Thorgrim Frostmane, ruler of Karad Zor, and the ruling nobles of the satellite frost dwarf fortress-cities in Nordmark gather in the Grimwold with their courtiers and a great number of heavily armed huscarls.

The dwarves have paid the kings of Nordmark well for this privilege over the centuries, and in return have been granted permission to drive away nosy intruders using "whatever force is deemed necessary to preserve the sanctity of the dwarven ritual, such as it may be." In addition to the tribute, the dwarves have vowed sacred oaths in Hothar's name before each new king that their ritual is a dwarf matter, and will have no effect upon Nordmark or its citizens.

Despite these assurances, many locals consider the event an ill omen. When the "dwarven moon" is in the sky Nordmarkers across the land stay in their homes and pray to their gods. The next "dwarven moon" is expected to rise within the year, for the tribute has already been paid to King Geirmund.

During the ritual, one dwarf is loaded with scrolls and small caskets bearing precious stones, and then escorted through the veil into whatever lies beyond. Traditionally this occurs on the first day of the Deorcmonan. Four days later, the dwarves pack up and leave, their hearts heavy, for whatever they are trying to achieve has failed.

STORM MOUNTAIN

Nordmark has long been associated with Thunor. The Anvil is one of his most holy sites, an entire mountain range is named after him, and it was in his name the citizens of Nordmark rose up against their Anari overlords. One of the peaks in the northern Range holds the honor of having a perpetual thundercloud hanging over it since the days of the Anari conquest.

Popular myth claims that an Anari arkhwisard specializing in air sought to forge a gateway to the elemental realm of air. Although the Thunor Range had yet to be given that name, the boom of thunderstorms in neighboring Nordmark frequently rolled down the passes, and storm dragons made their nests on the highest peaks. The Thunor Range also boasts the largest number of air elemental loci anywhere on the continent.

Arrogant and proud, the mage conducted a lengthy and complex ritual at a point he considered a natural fracture between the mortal and elemental worlds. Some stories say he succeeded, as evidenced by the cloud, while Saxa versions claim Thunor punished the mortal by sending a powerful spirit to blow him off the mountain, a guardian who still watches over the site of the ritual.

But this is not the only legend. Fragments of an old poem, written down shortly after the Saxa liberation tell of a cave complex in which are housed the skeletal remains of the ancient storm giant kings. Most scholars agree that storm giants probably practice sky burials, but once the flesh has been picked clean (by storm dragons, one supposes, since few birds live at such altitudes), the bones are stored along with grave goods.

Common cult lore says that the fabled relic Stormhammer was gifted to Skeid Godhammer atop Thunor's Anvil (see adventure *H2 The Blood of Godhammer*). However, the poem, whose authorship and age is unknown, hints that Godhammer actually stole the weapon from the storm giants' tomb. If this is true, what other relics may lie gathering dust in that hallowed hall?

Large numbers of storm, thunder, and thunderstorm elementals haunt the region, attacking all trespassers. Clerics of Thunor are not spared their attention, though there are legends that state a true disciple can barter safe passage to the epicenter of the phenomenon to pay his respects to Thunor. Storm giants are frequently spotted nearby, though even they are wary of the mighty elementals. The only creatures guaranteed safe passage are storm dragons, who come here to cavort in the permanent storm.

THUNOR'S ANVIL

Although not the highest peak in the area (it rises a mere 120 yards vertically from the surrounding landscape), the Anvil's isolation and flat summit made for an ideal temple to Thunor. Indeed, the site has been linked with the storm god for millennia.

The flat summit is considerably wider than the pillar of rock supporting it. It is a holy site to the god of storms. Regardless of the weather elsewhere, lightning continually strikes the summit. The flashes of light were once believed to be sparks from Thunor's hammer, hence the site became known as the Anvil. Roughhewn stairs spiral up the vertical sides.

During the Anari occupation of Nordmark, the Anvil served as a beacon of resistance, reminding the oppressed Saxa that Thunor was watching over them and would protect those who remained true to their beliefs.

The steps which wind around the column of rock were hewn by earth elementals controlled by Anari priests and mages. When the steps reach the overhanging summit, they cut through the rock, circling as a short tunnel until they emerge on top of the Anvil. The Anari had planned on defiling the temple to prove their superiority, but when they reached the top they found nothing to defile—the summit was simply a flat plateau.

But things have changed since then. The Anari may have found nothing to mark the site as sacred, but nowadays six standing stones (known locally as Thunor's Splinters) grace the summit. The stones were not carved from the Anvil, for they are of black granite, rock found nowhere within 100 miles of the peak. No one knows who carried them to the summit or how they achieved such a feat, for each stone weighs many tons. Ask any local, though, and the answer is the same—Thunor placed them there after the liberation. Each represents one of Thunor's six winds—north, south, east, west, none, and secret.

The site is considered so sacred, that only clerics of Thunor are allowed on the summit. The holy men and women never use the steps—they fly to the temple. Many Saxa see the continuing existence of the steps as an affront to their deity, but the clerics are quick to point out that they serve as a reminder to the days of oppression, days which must never be forgotten or allowed to occur again.

Even for the most faithful, a trip to the summit is an arduous undertaking. Winged beasts known as wyverns dwell in small caves dotted around the pillar of rock, unpredictable gale force winds tear across the summit, and lightning constantly strikes the standing stones.

TOWER OF THE SHADOW LORD

Strife has wracked Rassilon more than once, leaving countless ruins in its wake. Some have strange and wondrous stories assigned to them before their destruction, but most become the focus for imaginative tales only decades or centuries later. Into which camp the story of the Tower of the Shadow Lord falls is unknown—it has been haunted in living memory, and that is all that matters.

Rising from the rugged hills of the southern Grimwold, the four-story stone tower is widely held to be haunted by a lord of old that is neither truly alive nor truly dead. Traders bringing goods to the mines and wagoners taking the ore to the smelters speak in hushed tones of the Shadow Lord, a figure many have seen standing at the top of the tower and gazing to the far horizon. None can provide much description, for the figure is clad head to toe in a heavy robe the color of bloodless meat.

Skalds tell that the shade is that of an Anari lord, who estates once lay around the tower. So concerned was he with knowing

his future that he kidnapped clerics of the Norns, subjecting them to hideous tortures. All but one took whatever knowledge they knew to the grave, preferring death over betraying the Norns and committing a mortal sin. Finally one spoke, declaring that the lord had no future among the living or the dead. When she refused to elucidate, the lord stabbed her through the heart.

Angered at the lord's demand to know his fate, and driven to fury at the treatment of their clerics, the Norns removed the man's life thread from their loom, untangling it from all those around which it was entwined. The thread was not cut, and thus he did not die. Instead, he became a shade, a creature untouchable by the other gods, a creature condemned to linger in a state of non-existence until the end of time. Nothing is to be found beneath the robe, so the storytellers whisper, for the master of the tower exists neither in the world of light inhabited by mortals nor the world of darkness in which dwell the undead.

Much as they sympathized with the Norns, the other gods could not condone their interference, arguing that it broke the Compact. Having removed the lord's thread, the goddesses could not foretell how his new fate might affect others once destined to interact with him in the future. By their own action they had altered the destinies of an unknown number of mortals. After much heated debate, the Norns finally relented. They would, at a time of their choosing return the lord's thread to their loom. The only other thread it would touch, however, was that of the one destined to end the shade's existence. Knowing that it would torment the Anari noble, the Norns imparted this information to the Shadow Lord, as he had become known, in his dreams.

For unknown years he has kept vigil from his tower, his eyes alert for signs of the one who will bring about his death. Although he tires of his non-existence, the Shadow Lord does not know what may befall him once he passes in Scaetha's Hall.

The Shadow Lord is fated to die only at the hand the Norns have foretold. Other mortals can do nothing to harm him, though he can be Shaken by damaging spells with a light trapping. The Lord has not sat idly by awaiting his eventual fate, nor does he intend to surrender to the inevitable without a fight.

The Shadow Lord is aptly named, for he has mastered the creation of sceadugenga and the summoning of shadow elementals. His greatest power is his ability to take control of the shadows of living creatures, transforming them from harmless nothingness into semi-solid foes with all the strengths of those who they mimic.

PERSONS OF NOTE

ANGVIN BLUECHEEKS

A resident of Nordmark and priest of Thunor, Angvin is a firm believer in personal freedom. He swears allegiance to no mortal, and looks upon Thunor more as a spiritual advisor than a master. He walks where he desires, ignoring boundaries and claims of trespass, and has little respect for personal property. As capricious as Thunor, Angvin may help those in need of assistance or ignore then, depending on his mood.

His belief in freedom also extends to his clothing, or rather lack of it. In summer he walks around stark naked, letting the wind and rain caress his exposed flesh. Even in the depths of winter he dons only a loose fitting fur cloak and fur boots.

His nickname comes from his peculiar habit of dying his butt cheeks with woad. The designs vary from holy symbols to runes to insults, though he writes such taunts is a trick he has yet to reveal. When threatened, he turns from his enemy and bares his naked cheeks. This gesture is usually followed by a loud expulsion of wind, for Angvin suffers from chronic flatulence. He makes no apologies for his violent expulsions, regardless of the company he is keeping, seeing his flatulence as a blessing from his god.

Such is his mastery of bodily wind that he can play the horn with a degree of skill using his farts. It is a talent few wish to see demonstrated more than once, especially when he offers to play the bagpipes in similar manner.

GRAY SAGE STEN RENVIKSUNU

Sten was a gifted child with a flair for languages. His father was a merchant in Norvold, and dealt with folk from across Rassilon. Even without formal schooling, young Sten quickly picked up languages simply by listening to conversations and piecing together the syntax. When he was old enough, he applied to become a priest of Hoenir. On hearing of his gift, the clerics accepted him.

On earning his gray robes, Sten set out into the world to discover its wonders. Within two years he succumbed to a degenerative eye disease and went blind. Although unable to read, Sten never lost faith and became an oral historian, gathering folklore and stories from all those he met. A decade ago, Sten retired from active duties to become a hermit. He had a carpenter construct a wooden frame of his design which would allow him to guide a quill over parchment, and began his final act of devotion—recording the knowledge he had accumulated before his death.

Sten's statistics appear in the adventure *H2 The Blood of Godhammer*. His background is included here as he makes for a useful contact for adventuring parties.

GUTHREN "DEATH-HRAFN" ASWULFSUNU

Guthren Death-Raven is chief of the largest and most brutal bandit gang in Nordmark. Such is his pillaging that King Geirmund has offered a reward of 5,000 gold scields and a barony to whoever brings him the bandit chief's head. Despite this rich reward, Guthren has evaded all attempts to capture him.

Little is known of Guthren's past, but he has reached legendary status among the frightened peasants, who attribute him all manner of supernatural powers. Some claim he carries with him a sword which burns with divine fire. Others say he carouses with demons, calling on them to cloak his camp in shadow. One tale tells that he and his men can cross the land in a single day through fell magic. A small few dare to whisper that he is not only a worshipper of Dargar, but is a demi-god sired by the insane god of slaughter. Guthren actively encourages these tales, and more, for fear is a powerful weapon.

Even those who believe Guthren is mere mortal argue over his history. To some he is an Anari operating under a Saxa name, evidence that the Anari still despise the Saxa. To others he is a nobleman with no love for the king, a disgraced Knight Hrafn, or a noble outlawed during the civil war. Yet others claim he is an Ostmarker, sent here to disrupt trade.

Guthren is a tall, muscular man of middling years, with jet-black hair and beard, and light green eyes. He speaks Saxa with an Ostmark accent, which means little as accents are easy to mimic, displays an astute knowledge of small unit tactics, and is skilled with all manner of weapons.

JARL HENGIST GESNISUNU

One of the poorest jarls, Hengist controls the southern province of Nordmark, located between the Lesser Crystalflow and the Dragonspine Mountains. The soil is weak, the hills are too rugged even for goats, and mineral resources are sparse. Much of the jarl's income comes from the taxation of merchants using the trade road between Midmark and Ostmark.

While the land was spared destruction during the civil wars, it having nothing to offer attackers, and Hengist being disinterested in becoming king, the jarl spends a fortune each year combating the growing number of orcs in the mountains. Now the jarl faces a new threat. Someone is raiding the caravans and leaving behind evidence pointing to Nordmark involvement. Hengist has personally attended court and sworn oaths that his men are not behind the raids, but he knows that unless he acts quickly the king may send troops to deal with the problem. This would mean not only a loss of face at court, but having to feed hungry soldiers.

Hengist is middle-aged, slightly overweight, and prematurely balding. He is prone to walking back and forth while pondering problems of state, his shoulders slumped to indicate the weight of the burden of leadership. In truth he is a dullard, incapable of complex thoughts and unraveling even minor mysteries.

ORCMARK

Once the agricultural and mining heartland of Vestmark, orcs have ruled here largely unopposed for the past two decades. Tyrannized and brutalized, the captive population has suffered greatly, toiling ceaselessly to feed and equip the orc war machine. For now, Orcmark's expansionistic dreams are held in check, but many plans are afoot to break the stalemate.

RULES OF THE REALM

The following rules and notes apply in Orcmark.

* **Enemies of the State:** The orcs have no allies from among the player character races. Orcs attack heroes first and ask questions later.

* **Submissive:** The captive populations have little willpower and are cowed into responding to barked commands and threats without question. Intimidation rolls against them are made at +2. Any attempts to stir them into rebellion, whether through charm, guile, persuasion, or direct orders, are made at –6, however.

* **You Kill Us, We Kill You:** King Nagrat punishes rebellion swiftly and harshly. For every orc found slain, he executes ten captives. A successful Knowledge (Orcmark) roll indicates a character knows of this punitive arrangement.

WHO IS KING NAGRAT?

That orcs band together under powerful chieftains or frost giant jarls is well-known. Typically, though, such alliances are short-lived, lasting no more than a few years before dissension, tribal rivalries, and bids for power shatter the uneasy alliance. That King Nagrat has held his armies in line for 20 years clearly indicates he is something special.

With no eyewitness reports as to his identity, his enemies have fallen back on speculation. That he might not actually be an orc is widely considered a strong possibility, though such claims do not immediately answer the question of his identity.

His strategic prowess and organizational skills, though susceptible to errors of judgment and excessive caution, indicate he might be a Knight Hrafn. Such training might help answer the perplexing question of how he maintains control over the many tribes under his command, tribes that had been bitter rivals beforehand. Many Knights Hrafn argue against this, not because the thought of Nagrat being one of them wounds their sensibilities, but because no Knight, especially one of the Upper House, would make the error of dividing his forces so thoroughly. In simulations, every Knight given the role of Nagrat has withdrawn from Karad Azgul (basing their decision on dwarves' reliable insular nature) and used those troops to conquer Ostersund.

He might just as easily be a cleric of Dargar, or perhaps even Tiw, though his restrain from launching a full-out attack on Vestmark before he has numerical and strategic superiority argues against the former—the cult of Dargar lusts for bloodshed and carnage, caring little for the odds of success.

One rumor the Vestmark commanders are quick to quash is that Nagrat is a *vargr*. An Auld Saxa word, at its most basic it means "outlaw" or "criminal." Yet the word has a deeper meaning, one which strikes fear into seasoned warriors. Vargr conjures images of evil acts which make the deprivations of Dargar's Wolves seem like the work of toothless puppies. It is the epitome of madness and fury, cannibalism and depravity, evil cunning, dark magic, and wanton destruction. Vargrs are supposed to possess supernatural powers, especially resistance to physical harm. Such a claim could well apply to Nagrat, who has survived a dozen assassination attempts. Unsubstantiated reports claim he wears a golden wolf-mask, but talk is cheap and rumors like this serve more to damage morale than provide accurate intelligence.

Whoever or whatever he is, his enemies are careful not to underestimate him. For now, his armies are held in check, yet they know it is only a matter of time before the fast breeding orcs acquire the strength necessary to force victory on one front. And when they do, the full fury of Nagrat shall be unleashed against Vestmark.

ATMOSPHERE

Orcmark is an oppressed land. Beyond the heavily militarized frontlines, the roads are lined with grisly reminders that this is a land occupied by brutal savages. Victims impaled on sharp stakes or crammed into tight cages, left to die in agony, remind the populace of the price of rebellion. Burned timbers, remnants of steads and small villages, jut from the long grass like broken teeth. Sun-bleached skeletons, human and animal, and rusted arms and armor, lie scattered on the grass where they fell, silent testimony to the bloodshed unleashed upon the land.

Near the remaining settlements, palls of acrid smoke hang lazily overhead, bellowed out from the many smithies installed to supply the orcs with weapons. The steady thump of hammers echo like a beating heart hungry for war and bloodshed. Long lines of manacled prisoners march to and from the fields and mines, their heads bowed in submission and acceptance of their fate to work hard and die young. Columns of orc warriors march across the country, scouting for rebels or heading to new quarters, pawns on the strategically balanced chessboard that is Orcmark's war zones. And all the while the air is rent with the harsh voices of orc overseers and the crack of whips.

Along the wild coasts the country is prone to fierce storms, Thunor's fury at the oppression wrought upon the Saxa. Yet inland the air feels still and heavy, Thunor seemingly held back by the might of the orc legions.

NATIVE ORCMARKERS

Although Orcmark has been occupied for two decades, player characters can still have been born in the realm. Those older than 20 years of age likely escaped during the initial assault, though they may equally have already been living in the northern area (now Vestmark). Younger heroes may have been rescued and smuggled out. Regardless, the character likely has family still captive in the orc-held realm.

ORCMARK PACKAGE

Instead of taking a free Edge or two skill points, a human hero born in Orcmark may select this package, gaining the following benefits.

* **I Hate You:** The character may take the Favored Foe Edge at Novice, but only if he chooses orcs as his enemy. He must meet the other requirements as normal.

* **Orc Lore:** The hero either grew up around orcs or has made learning of their ways his business. He begins with Knowledge (Monsters: Orcs) d6.

* **Vengeance Shall Be Mine:** When fighting orcs, the adventurer treats his Strength as one die higher for the purposes of melee damage. This increase allows him to offset Minimum Strength penalties.



Orcmark

Population: Unknown numbers of orcs & goblins, 20,000+ Saxa, 1,500+ hearth elves (est.)
Ruler: His Exalted Barbarity, King Nagrat I
Religion: Dargar, Tiw, Thrym
Imports: None
Exports: None

ARMIES OF THE REALM

Orcmark is unusual in that it boasts armies from four different races. Each is detailed below.

ORCS & ALLIES

King Nagrat has assembled the greatest army of orcs, goblins, ogres, and cliff giants ever known.

In the army battalion listings, references to orc warriors and elite warriors indicate the bulk of the soldiers, not the entirety. Hence, a battalion listed as comprising orc warriors may contain an entire company of archers or dire wolf riders. The exact composition of each unit is left to the GM to determine, as best fits the need of his story. Given the wide variation, there is no such thing as an incorrect company or battalion.

ORGANIZATION

In order to maintain cohesion and discipline, Nagrat has divided his armies on a decimal system, limiting the number of subordinates in the chain of command but also ensuring that each man knows his place in the command structure.

Armies: The largest formation is the army, which is led by a warlord. Warlords answer directly to Nagrat. Armies are comprised of a varying number of battalions.

Warlords do not directly command a battalion, though they have a quadruple-strength headquarters squad serving them. The command group, which is always staffed by orcs, includes one drummer, three priests of Dargar, a priest of Thrym, a priest of Tiw, 20 runners, two apothecaries, and 12 elite warriors

Battalion (1000): The largest battlefield formation is the battalion, led by a battalion-captain, who also commands a company. Regardless of the troops' race, all battalion-captains are orcs. Treat them as Wild Card chieftains.

The battalion company has a headquarters squad. It comprises an Extra chieftain (the battalion-captain's second), a drummer, two priests of Dargar, three runners, and three elite orc warriors.

Company (100): Each battalion is made up of ten companies. Captains lead nine of the companies, with the tenth being the battalion-captain's company. Captains are always orcs, regardless of which race forms the bulk of the company. Treat them as Extra chieftains.

Each of the nine regular companies has a command squad of 10 orcs. This comprises four elite warriors (one of whom is the captain's second and carries the title sergeant-captain), a drummer, two priests of Dargar, and three runners for carrying messages.

Squad (10): The smallest formation is the ten-man squad, commanded by a sergeant of the appropriate race. All sergeants are elite warriors of their race (where such differences occur).

Nagrat uses the squad as his baseline for troop types, not the company. Thus, while all squads are of the same type, one may in theory find archers, engineers, berserkers, warriors, skirmishers, and dire wolf riders in the same company, not to mention squads of ogres or cliff giants. Generally, however, a company has seven squads of one troop type, a headquarters squad, and just two squads of variant troops.

An engineering squad comprises eight orc siege engineers and two cliff giants. They are equipped with two catapults.

SAMPLE COMPANY

Detailed below is a sample company. GMs can use this straight off the page or as a template for designing their own companies with which to plague the heroes. Depending upon where the adventure is set, the company might be escorting a supply caravan, manning a small outpost, or protecting a slave camp.

Commander: Captain Uzgat Nine-Teeth.

Squads: One command squad (led by Uzgat), seven squads of orc warriors, one dire wolf rider squad, and one shock troop squad of eight ogres. Two orc ogre-herders, one of whom is a sergeant, serves with the ogres.

Uzgat's company, known as the Nine-Teeth, serves in the 3rd Battalion ("The Jaw") under Battalion-Captain Strag. Designated as a shock company, the Nine-Teeth focus on direct confrontation. Although they lack missile support, the addition of a dire wolf rider squad allows them to worry missile troops, buying the infantry, led always by the ogres, time to advance.

When marching, Uzgat forms half his wolf rider squad to each side of the column at outriders, and splits the ogres into a vanguard and rearguard. His command squad is always located in the center of the line, with four infantry squads ahead and three behind.

A servant of Dargar, Uzgat enjoys cordial relations with the priests assigned to his command. Standing orders are to take prisoners, not slaughter (something the ogres must be reminded of before every engagement), for Uzgat enjoys torturing his captives before sacrificing them to Dargar.

GREAT NORTH ARMY

Warlord: Giant-Warlord Urk Three-Noses

Battalions: 11 orc warriors, 4 elite orc warriors, 2 orc artillery, 1 orc dire wolf rider, 3 goblin infantry, 2 goblin wolf riders, and 1 ogre. Scattered among these are 200 individual cliff giants; most serve as catapult loaders.

With its headquarters at the heavily fortified town of Nard, the Great North Army prosecutes the war against Vestmark. A full third of the orcs and half the goblin wolf riders are barracked around the town, ready to march wherever they are needed at a moment's notice.

Faced with stern resistance and fortified lines, Urk reluctantly ordered his troops to spend their days strengthening their lines and pelting the Vestmark lines with boulders and arrows. Despite this constant practice, and the occasional foray across the Elve in barges, Urk knows morale is waning. The glorious days of victorious battle are now a faded dream, the memories of conquest and bloodshed tempered by camp life, routine patrols, and boredom. Rivalries between tribes are raising their ugly heads once more, and only last month an entire artillery company was wiped out when their cliff giants decided to "have some fun."

Requests for a major attack against Vestmark have been rebuffed repeatedly, Nagrat being unwilling to weaken any front at what he sees is a crucial phase. Urk has no idea that his liege has allies in the Magocracy constructing him a mighty fleet.

Urk is desperate for the other fronts to finished their tasks so he can unleash the pent up frustration and battle lust of his army before they turn inward. As yet, he lacks the courage to disobey Nagrat, but his patience is wearing very thin.

EASTERN ARMY

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Grizbane

Battalions: 2 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 4 goblin infantry, and 2 goblin wolf riders. A total of 40 individual cliff giants are at his disposal.

Grizbane is the only warlord happy with the current situation. So long as the elves are not eradicated, he is free to torture and maim captives snatched by patrols. Unfortunately, his lack of progress in crushing Kings Wood is beginning to annoy Nagrat and his warlord peers.

While Nagrat knows the elf army is weak and unlikely to ever fight in the open, he is concerned that they could sally forth and disrupt his lines of supply and communication if left alone. Thus, for now, he must be content to keep the forest surrounded and under constant pressure.

The situation may soon change for the better, for Nagrat's envoys have been in negotiation with a Hellfrost dragon roosted in the Mace. If the beast can be convinced to aid their cause, it may be enough to tip the balance in the orcs' favor.

MOUNTAIN ARMY

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Arlik

Battalions: 4 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 5 goblin infantry,

and 2 goblin wolf riders. A force of 35 individual cliff giants serves with the army.

Arlik commands the smallest army. Charged with defeating Karad Azgul, the warlord has had little success to date, though he has successfully prevented the dwarves from emerging from their city.

Unfortunately, Arlik's troops must also watch over the southern coast of Orcmark to ensure enemy forces do not land behind the main orc army, and guard several key mountain passes, any of which might link to Karad Arlik and thus provide access for reinforcements. As a result of this necessity, Arlik's army is spread too thin to complete its primary objective.

While artillery futilely batters at the rune-warded main gates, and several infantry battalions conduct an assault on the lower levels of the dwarven fortress, the bulk of his army is engaged in excavating new tunnels toward the city's heart. Although many years from completion, the shafts are Arlik's best hope of securing victory in the near future.

SUPPLY CORPS

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Azagroth

Battalions: 4 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 1 orc dire wolf rider, and 5 goblin infantry. Azagroth can also call on the support of 50 cliff giants and a number of ogres.

Azagroth is responsible for seeing the army is fed and equipped. As a result, most of his troops are dispersed around the country, protecting the fields and mines, and escorting supply caravans. Rather than rely purely on horses, which his troops have been known to kill and eat, the Supply Corps makes use of ogre pack bearers.

Currently out of favor with Nagrat after the escape of 200 slaves, Azagroth has decided to step-up production in addition to executing prisoners. Long days, meager rations, and constant whipping are taking their toll on the slaves, but Azagroth is determined to win back favor at any cost. Unfortunately, the rapid depletion of his slave workforce may cost him more than his position.

SOUTHERN ARMY

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Shagnath

Battalions: 5 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 5 orc archers, 3 orc artillery, and 2 goblin wolf riders, Shagnath commands a force of 50 individual cliff giants.

Like all the warlords, Shagnath has become frustrated with the situation in Orcmark. Given a few more battalions, he believes he could finally capture the ruined city of Ostersund, removing a perpetual thorn in Nagrat's side and giving the navy a sizeable harbor from which to operate. With Ostersund in orc hands, he envisions his navy ferrying a vast army into eastern Vestmark.

As it is, his troops are confined to sporadic raids and near-continuous artillery barrages against the defenders, while the navy attempts to stop Saxa reinforcements reaching the beleaguered ruins. Ironically, while a city of rubble lies before him, Shagnath's army is dangerously low on catapult ammunition. With Azagroth focused on appeasing Nagrat, he has neglected his duty to his peer.

Shagnath is also in command of the Orcmark navy, a mighty fleet of 35 war galleys which prowls Ost Bay and the Crystal Sound and protects the eastern coast from any attempts by the Magocracy to invade. Two of his orc warrior battalions serve as marines, with slaves (human and orc) manning the oars.

OSTERSUND

Of Ostersund's 8,000 defenders, a full 7,000 are warriors, the rest being medics, clerics, crafters, and other support staff. Despite this impressive army, the inhabitants are a defensive force, occasionally launching lightning raids, but otherwise bravely manning the walls. While Ostersund is a drain on manpower from other realms, it serves two vital purposes. First, the garrison ensures the last Saxa outpost in Orcmark, a staging post for a future invasion of liberation, remains held. Second, the sacrifice the defenders make keeps the orc besiegers from moving to the Vestmark front.

Jarl Osni is in overall command of the garrison. At his disposal are 70 companies, each made up of 100 men. These use the Mercenary stats from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

To date, the companies comprise ten heavy infantry (five regular and five veteran), ten light infantry, four Anari heavy cavalry (one regular and three veteran), four Anari light cavalry, ten skirmishers, 30 archers (10 of which are veteran), and two companies of artillerists.

DWARVES OF KARAD AZGUL

Thegn Jorgrik Battleraven's army has yet to meet the orcs in the open; the current battle for the dwarf city is being fought in the lower mines and passages, territory well-suited to dwarven tactics. While the dwarves are being kept busy by the orcs, they are under little true threat—Nagrat cannot afford the troops for a full assault, and so long as they are kept busy they cannot counterattack deep in his rear lines.

The total strength of the dwarf army is 600 hall-guards, the city's frontline troops, trained to fight as a rigid shieldwall with a second line employing long spears through their ranks, 100 huscarls, and 20 rune mages, backed up by at least 3,000 militia and miners should they be called upon.

ELVES OF KINGS WOOD

While the elves of Kings Wood maintained border patrols when King Horgar ruled here, they had little need for a standing army. Despite being thrust onto the defensive by the suddenness of the orc assault they adapted quickly, stalling the advancing orcs with withering volleys of arrows. Though few in number, their skill and determination, combined with their forest allies, have kept the orcs at bay for two decades.

The total elf population of Kings Wood is actually 1,700. Added to this are 800 Saxa refugees. That the elves allowed humans into the safety of their leafy realm is evidence of the seriousness of the situation in Orcmark.

ELVES

The elf army currently stands at 800 warriors, almost half the population, and comprises both sexes. The army is divided into eight 100-man companies. Leading each company is a warden-captain, an elf trained as both an elite archer and a druid. The remaining soldiers comprise ten bladedancers, experts at melee combat, two spellcasters (druids or elementalists), and 87 rangers. Given 20 years of weathering attacks, half the troops are veterans, with the rest rapidly gaining valuable combat experience.

Unable to defend any one point in strength, the elves patrol in small bands ranging from 10 to 50 warriors. They avoid pitched battles, instead employing ambushes and magic to harry orc patrols. Their ability to melt away into the forest has frustrated the orcs since the siege began. More than one commander has grown impatient and ordered his troops to advance into the forest. King Nagrat has issued a direct command for this practice to stop, for he can ill-afford to have his troops massacred piecemeal.

THE FOREST

The elves greatest asset is not their tenacious archers or Saxa allies, but the forest in which they live, for herein dwell many types of fey. In truth, without these potent friends the elves would have been crushed long ago, their forest homes put to the torch and the survivors playthings for the orcs.

Five leshiji native to the forest, and their host of wood wights, have agreed to help the elves defend the realm. Their power to animate war trees, summon forest animals, summon wood elementals, and awaken the vines and creepers to ensnare intruders has shattered many an orc advance. Glimmerwings raise fogs to hamper orc movements and conceal elf strikes and storms to extinguish attempts to raze the forest, while the normally hostile bugganes tunnel through the earth, surfacing only to claw and rend

at orc commanders. Darklings, a species of Unseelie fey, blanket orc patrols in utter darkness, redcaps (admittedly not true allies) revel in carnage against the invaders, and swiftling swarms snipe at officers.

Ruling over the forest realm is the Auld King, a powerful fey noble for whom the forest is actually named. Although he has never been forced to manifest in person, his presence is felt through bands of fey knights and wood warriors.

SAXA

Only a handful of Saxa are trained warriors, though all the men of fighting age trained as members of their local fyrd and are thus proficient with spear and shield.

Having sworn fealty, albeit temporarily, to the elf nobility, the Saxa were drawn up into three primary and two secondary companies, each of 100 men. The term "men" is used generically, for women who lost menfolk or merely wish to reclaim their homelands number among them.

Knowing the humans are clumsy in the heavily overgrown forest, they rarely patrol near the border. Instead, they serve as second line troops, waiting behind the elf lines to stem any orc advance. One secondary company is assigned to protect the Saxa camp, while the other helps guard the elf settlements. Treat each primary company as mercenary infantry equipped with short spears and medium shields. The secondary companies are town militia, but lack armor.

MAJOR LOCALES

Orcmark's main settlements and war zones are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Detailed here are other sights heroes may have reason to explore.

THE BLACK BOG

The center of the plains that lies between Ostersund and Ost Port is a black bog fed by myriad streams that course down from the Mace Mountains.

Until the orc invasion the ground was fertile agricultural land. In the middle stood a prosperous farming town, at the center of which was a grand temple to Eostre Plantmother. During the initial push toward Ostersund, orc warriors descended on the settlement in such numbers that they were like a plague of flies. All who stood in their path were butchered without mercy. Such were the screams of the town's inhabitants that those sleeping in distant Ostersund were awakened by the terrible sound.

So grim was the fell harvest that skalds' speak of the next dawn only in hushed, reverent voices. Sigel's Hearth rose over ground so saturated with blood, that the rich soil that once gave life was eternally stained black and made barren. The gods, so it is said, wept such tears that the ground grew so sodden it eventually subsided, thus creating the current tainted landscape.

Only the truly desperate or foolhardy venture far into the mire, for the bodies the orcs left for the ravens quickly sank, or were pulled, into the black water. Far from resting peacefully, they rose again as bog men.

Undead they may be, but the bog men are no allies of Nagrat—so many warriors have been slaughtered while crossing the mire that orc soldiers are prepared to risk the wrath of their masters and take a lengthy detour around the southern flank. Whether the bog men are true allies of the Saxa remains to be seen. Opinions differ as to whether the blackened, leather-skinned corpses are inhabited by the spirits of dead Saxa warriors sent from Tiw's celestial realm (with Scaetha's permission) to avenge the fallen or servants of Hela with an agenda of their own.

Bog men are not mindless undead in the manner of zombies, being capable of both speech and reasoning. Though the odds of success are slim, Jarl Osni is prepared to take a risk and attempt to open dialogue with them.

Even if the bog men prove amiable, there are other dangers that cannot be reasoned with—pain spirits, sent by Vali to bask in the misery or created by the hellish torment felt by the innocents who lost their lives that fateful night, also haunt the bog.

FIELD OF SCREAMS

Many prisoners who fall into the hands of a warlord meet a gruesome end, suffering hours of excruciating torment before finally being allowed the mercy of death. Those who fall into Nagrat's hands fare slightly better, at least initially, for he prefers his captives to be fit and healthy when they face death.

Located between Nard and Kings Wood is the Field of Screams. Here, captives are impaled on tall, slender, sharpened stakes, left to die in unimaginable agony as their weight slowly pulls them down the stake. Such is Nagrat's skill, and barbarity, that he can determine the time it will take someone to slide down the entire stake with remarkable accuracy. It is said he uses his victim's scream like one uses a sandglass, timing his meals (he supposedly dines here on fine days and watches the torment) and meetings with impeccable perfection. Those who perish here are left to rot, for crows and ravens (creatures sacred to Thunor) will not dine on the flesh.

HIGH GUARD FORT

Located in a hidden valley in the Mace Mountains, High Guard fort is a temple to Tiw. Warriors trained here in seclusion, without the distractions of the wider world, honing their art before serving Tiw on the fields of battle. When the orcs invaded, the clerics joined the Saxa defenders to a man, dying honorably though futilely. Nagrat's scouts have never learned of the temple's existence.

Unfortunately, it has not remained empty, for foul beasts have made their ruins their home. However, if they could be cleared out the fort would make an ideal base for a resistance cell. Not only does it offer protection, but its armories are full to bursting with weapons and armor. Its musty library boasts many treatises on warfare, as well as strategic and tactical maps of pre-conquest Orcmark. Coupled with its remote location, a talented commander could equip and train a small army right under Nagrat's nose before putting them to good use.

MOON FOG VALE

On the southern side of the Ribbon is a steep-sided valley. As the moon moves through its regular patterns, the valley becomes enshrouded in mist. The density of the mist varies with the moon's phases.

During Deorcmonan the valley floor is completely devoid of mist, though the lack of moonlight causes its own problems. During the crescent and half moon phases, the mist is thin. Treat this as Dim lighting (–1) during the day and Dark (–2) at night. Throughout the three-quarters phase visibility is Dark (–2) in daylight hours and Pitch Black (–4) at night as the mist thickens. During Fulmonan the mist is almost solid—day or night, visibility is treated as Pitch Black (–4). Clerics of Maera not currently penalized by sins suffer no penalties for the fog, though ambient lighting conditions apply as normal.

No record of this phenomenon existed before the creation of Orcmark. Before the orcs invaded the valley was the site of a small temple to Maera, a quiet retreat when clerics and mage came to study in the secluded landscape. Nothing has been heard from the clerics since the first mists rose, and the orcs shun the place, believing it cursed. It is certainly no place for trespassers, for vicious moon dogs hunt here in packs and magimentals roam freely through the mists.

OSTERSUND

Ostersund is a city in name only. With the civic administration dead or fled and the infrastructure smashed, the once majestic port is now a major military base.

Armory: Although some brave ships manage to breach the orc blockade and deliver supplies, arms and armor are always in short supply. The city's forges run day and night, the smiths hammering

any salvaged metal into weapons and repairing damaged weapons as best they can under the trying conditions. Despite attempts to conceal its presence, the glow and smoke of the forges make the armory a prime target for orc bombardments.

Bloody Orc Tavern: Survival is a daily struggle, but the warriors cannot stay on a war footing 24 hours a day. Concealed in the ruins is a makeshift tavern, a place where the defenders can, for a short while at least, forget that the specter of death stands behind them. The drink is poor quality and heavily watered down to make it last, but at least it is free. The tavern is a major morale booster, something the orcs know all too well. Bombarded every few days, the tavern merely opens up in a new location each time it is struck. At night, rousing Marklander songs of war and bravery echo through the ruins from the tavern, a staunch reminder to the attackers that taking Ostersund will come at a heavy price.

The Garrison: While most of the soldiers live underground when not on duty, Jarl Osni refuses to skulk in the warrens like a rat. His command post is located in the old temple of Var. Brave but not foolish, Osni main headquarters is located in the vault, the most heavily fortified part of the temple.

Storehouse: Once used by merchants to store goods for export, the storehouse has been fortified. An army of runners operates from here, their job to deliver supplies to the various companies spread out across the city.

OSTPORT

Population: 2,000 orcs, 2,000 archers, 20 cliff giants (estimated), 3,000 humans (estimated)

Ruler: Orc-Warlord Shagnath (nominal)

With the great harbor at Ostersund unavailable, the orc navy has to make its headquarters in the former finishing village of Ostport, the next settlement with a harbor of any note.

Its flimsy fortifications have been greatly strengthened in the landward side, with rows of sharpened stakes forming a maze through which approaching caravans must carefully weave. In the mouth of the harbor, a cove barely large enough to berth five galleys at a time, stakes tipped with iron barbs have been sunk just below the waterline to prevent the enemy from launching a direct assault.

Ostport is the headquarters for the Southern Army, though Warlord Shagnath spends much of his time at Ostersund. In his absence, the garrison and slaves of Ostport go about their daily lives.

Day and night, an army of slaves works to repair existing galleys and construct new ones. While the orcs greatly desire sleek longships with which to patrol the coast, many of the shipwrights either managed to flee to Midmark or were slain during the conquest. Thus, the orcs must be content with the only type of ship design they have ever mastered. Burly giants stagger around the shipyard and wharf, carrying colossal timbers, lugging supplies, and taking booty to and from the galleys.

PRISON CAMP

This is a generic location. After the conquest of Orcmark, Nagrat divided the captives among multiple prison camps. The largest (outside those near the major settlements) contains 1,000 wretched slaves, while the smallest numbers just a few score souls.

Security is notably lax except in the major camps (and then it is high only because the warlords have their headquarters there)—but there is nowhere for prisoners to run, as those escaping are hounded by hungry dire wolves, and for every slave who escapes ten are out to death as punishment. As such, few are surrounded by any form of barricade.

Typically there is one squad of guards for every 100 slaves,



though in rural areas of little importance this ratio may be as low as 1:400. Regardless of the troop type, guards are issued two dire wolves per squad. Deliberately kept half-starved, the wolves feast on dead prisoners and those foolish enough to escape. Pretty much left to their own devices, the guards are notoriously cruel to their captives.

Slaves are typically housed in tents or draughty huts. The guards' quarters are little better, but orcs are accustomed to hardship. Sanitation is non-existent, leading to disease. Rations are served once a day and consist only of thin gruel, hard bread, and tainted water—meat and vegetables have long since vanished from the slaves' diet. During the early days, citizens used what wealth they salvaged from their homes to bribe guards to deliver better rations or allow the slave to avoid work. Now that money is gone, the slaves are all equal in their hardship.

Depending on the camp's purpose, there may be ore smelting works and forges, threshing barns and granaries, or other workshops.

WATCHER'S ISLAND

Part of the key to defeating the orc pirates is to know their intentions and locations. Roughly halfway between southern Orcmark and Midmark is a tiny island, little more than a towering rock rising near vertical from sea, surrounded by jagged reefs. The cult of Rigr maintains a concealed outpost cut into the living rock. The duty of the clerics stationed here is to watch out for orc pirates using *altered senses* and *farsight*, and then report their strength and course to the authorities in Ostersund, Drakeport, and Aith using *voice on the wind* spells.

Two clerics are assigned here at all times, each pair serving a month-long tour before being relieved. Many end up serving much longer, for bad weather can hamper attempts to reach the small island, and orc patrols must be avoided to maintain the strict veil of secrecy concerning the occupation of the isolated outpost.

Although the island's location is far from ideal, it has served the Saxa well. Frustrated by their increasing inability to find suitable prey, and too often running into heavy resistance where none was expected, many orc crews now believe an invisible ship crewed by clerics of Neorthe sails the Crystal Sound, spying on their fleets.

WATCHTOWERS

After the conquest Nagrat's forces began major engineering works. As well as laying paved roads between the settlements, garrisons, and camps, they took over the Road Warden travel towers, extending the network to cover the land. Although supply caravans do make use of them as resting posts, their main purpose is as a line of communication.

Raised upon high ground whenever possible, they provide a commanding view of the surrounding land. Any terrain which could allow an enemy to sneak up close has been cleared, with trees hacked down, vegetation burned, and small hills flattened. Stationed in each tower is a single squad of orc warriors or runts.

The lower levels are as per travel towers, consisting of two open-plan floors. Stretching a further forty feet into the air from the flat roof is a thin, stone spire, accessible only by an exterior ladder from the roof. Atop each spire stands a signal beacon, which is lit only when messages must be relayed. Due to their positioning and the ferocity with which they burn, each tower's light can be seen for many miles, even in daylight. A metal shutter allows the orcs to send relatively complex signals consisting of long and short bursts of light.

A constantly burning light indicates the tower is under attack (it is kept constant because no one can be spared to operate the beacon's cover). A regular series of single flashes means a large force of invaders has been detected and reinforcements should be dispatched immediately. A pattern of two flashes and a long pause signifies the presence of a small group of outsiders. Three flashes means a patrol has failed to return or has spotted lost intruders. Either way, help is required. One flash, a pause, and then two flashes indicate the capture of prisoners.

Because of the towers' capability to rapidly transmit message to neighboring stations and thence to local garrisons, any heroes detected in Orcmark will quickly find themselves harried by tireless pursuers. The towers are also a weakness as much as a strength; if a party who knew the codes could take over a strategically placed tower they could relay false signals, sowing confusion in the enemy ranks and possibly opening a breech in the defenses they, or others, could exploit.

YETAND

The foundries and forges of Yetand are a vital cog in Nagrat's grand plans of conquest. Shipments of metal flow in and tools of war flow out, keeping the orc armies well supplied. Disrupting production would hamper the orcs' ability to reequip their forces. Utterly destroying it would give Vestmark's beleaguered troops a much needed boost in morale and possibly provide the breakthrough they need to tip the balance of war firmly in their favor.

Word has reached Marshal Theodred from trusted agents that Nagrat has recently ordered the construction of powerful siege weapons. Where he might unleash them is not yet known, but Vestmark's generals suspect Ostersund is the intended target—if Nagrat can remove that thorn from his side he can move the entire Southern Army, a force some 16,000 strong, to bolster his troops facing Vestmark.

Marshal Theodred knows he must make a decision as to whether or not to send saboteurs into Orcmark to inflict as much damage on Yetand as possible in order to break the stalemate that is inexorably grinding Vestmark down. Strategically he knows it makes perfect sense, but his mind ponders a related issue that cannot easily be cast aside—any attack on Yetand would undoubtedly result in the cruel torture and slow execution of prisoners in reprisal. Condemning hundreds, maybe thousands, of innocents to such a fate is a heavy burden for any man to shoulder. In the end, though, the decision may come down to cold numbers—sacrificing hundreds now could save many thousands later. It might even save an entire kingdom from extinction.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Nagrat and his warlords, the major villains of Orcmark, are described either in the chapter text or in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

BATTALION-CAPTAIN GROND

Grond has served Nagrat since before the conquest, though he has never seen his liege's face. Despite working his way up from the ranks through a mix of lethal cunning, dead-man's boots, and natural leadership qualities, Grond has no love for Nagrat and would work with anyone to see the king slain.

This is not to say Grond has any desire for the orcs to withdraw. Quite the contrary, in fact. He sees Nagrat as having failed his race, for the conquest has stalled and orcs die each day for a yard of ground or in a pointless raid to test enemy defenses and firepower. Grond doesn't have aspirations of kingship, either. While a capable battlefield commander, he doubts he could command a kingdom. To that end, he is willing to support any claimant who would advance the armies.

Grond, acting through trusted agents (trusted once and then put to death to ensure their silence), has made overtures to the Vestmark Saxa. Playing a deadly game, he is trying to arrange Nagrat's death and lure the Saxa into weakening their lines. Grond claims the orc resolve is weakening and all that keeps them fighting is Nagrat. Should the Saxa commit to a major offensive, he swears he will assassinate the orc king. All Grond asks in return is a portion of the realm where his race can live in peace.

As yet unsure whether an orc can be trusted, the Saxa are content to communicate, but not to commit forces. Should suitable candidates, say a small team of skilled (and expendable) adventurers, turn up in Vestmark, they might be persuaded to cross the border, meet with Grond and size up his honesty.

KRAHNAK, WOLF OF DARGAR

Known among the orcs as the Hand of Terror, Krahnak, a paladin of Dargar, commands the Jaws of Misery, a half-company (five squads) of crazed dire wolf riders. Answerable only to Nagrat, the heavily-scarred paladin is universally despised by the warlords and greatly feared by the rest of the armies. The Jaws of Misery are not assigned to any of the four fronts on a permanent basis. Instead, they go wherever Nagrat orders and carry out whatever commands he places on them.

Krahnak enjoys killing, but his crimes are rarely that straightforward. Simple murder rarely produces terror, especially in enemy warriors—death is, after all, every warrior's shadow. Krahnak's forces mutilate and despoil their victims in ways so gruesome that even other orcs find unsettling. It is not just the hated enemies of his race who incur his particular brand of terror—orcs who fail Nagrat are thrown to Krahnak for sport.

THEGN EDMUND GEIRSUNU

The highest-ranking Saxa noble not in captivity or slain in combat, Thegn Edmund leads the Saxa community in Kings Wood. He has sworn allegiance to the elf nobles, though he has not forsaken his vow of fealty to King Horgar. While he knows his men are too few to present any threat to the orcs, he nonetheless chomps at the bit, eager to avenge the deaths of his kith and kin. Edmund continually presses the elves to go on the offensive, but so far they have refused to entertain the notion—while they hold true to their oaths of friendship with King Horgar, they refuse to endanger the continued existence of their people with futile gestures against a far superior force.

Edmund has yet to go against their wishes, but should the opportunity arise, he would gladly lead his people from exile to form a new community beyond the restrictions of the elves, so long as the chance to wage war presented itself as well.

THE WHITE GENERAL

A mere girl when the invasion occurred, Thora managed to escape the massacres and captures, though she cannot say how. For the last 20 years she has somehow survived in the hostile realm, growing to maturity without support. At the age of 14 she devoted her life to Eira, though she has no religious training beyond stories she heard as a child. Eira, it seems, cared little for matters of doctrine, for Thora has been blessed with divine power.

Neither a strategist nor a warrior, Thora has tried to wage a passive war of resistance— smuggling food and medicine into camps, aiding and sheltering escapees, and, on rare occasions, passing on messages from Vestmark.

Years ago Thora treated a band of rebels who had survived the conquest. Shamed by fleeing the field of battle while their comrades died, they sought penance for their sins. Thora commanded them to serve her for one year in aiding the helpless without resort to violence. Four years on, they remain in her service, still vowed only to kill in self-defense and when no other options are available.

Although Thora dislikes the term "White General," a title granted her affectionately by her men in deference to her robes and religious calling, but one she sees with connotations of war and battle, she has made no attempt to halt the men using it—the men require a leader, and fate has decreed that to be her destiny.

The orcs have heard of the mysterious White General, and some are now beginning to fear the name. With reports of attacks against orcs exaggerated with each retelling, many believe a talented Saxa general and an elite band of vengeful warriors is operating behind their lines. Every attack on an orc caravan or fort is attributed to the White General, a general who is rapidly gaining all manner of supernatural powers as the stories spread.

With patrols having failed to discover "his" camp, the orcs have recently resorted to threats and treachery. Human "escapees" have been set free; some traitorous curs voluntarily serving the orcs under the promise of freedom should they hand over the White General, and others not so willing, but with the promise their kin will suffer all manner of terrible, prolonged torture if they do not.

WHY COME HERE?

Orcmark is a dangerous realm. With four active military fronts, constant orc patrols, no allies to call upon, no places to resupply, and harsh punishments for those caught wandering in the realm, why would any hero venture here?

* Orders. Characters beholden to the cults of Tiw, Eira, or Neorthe, to the nobility of Vestmark or Midmark, or to the Knights Hrafn may be called upon to serve at the front in some capacity. While the main armies are deadlocked, small raids, intelligence-gathering missions, sabotage, assassination attempts, and rescue missions are being conducted on a daily basis by all sides.

GMs looking to run more militaristic adventures will find a quick but detailed adventure generator in the *Hellfrost Expansion* book.

* Glory. Defeating roving bandits, slaying dragons, and looting old ruins can all earn Glory, but Orcmark offers such rewards in abundance. Heroes looking to test their mettle, or leadership qualities, against a well-armed and disciplined foe will find the orcs only too happy to oblige.

* Personal Reasons. Whether a hero is a Saxa, Anari, hearth elf, or frost dwarf, there is always the possibility he had family in Orcmark at the time of invasion. The character may even be a refugee, forced from his homeland by the cruel invaders. The chance to strike back or rescue kin still in captivity after many years may prove irresistible to certain types of hero.

* Humanitarian Aid. Heroes with a humanitarian streak may be lured here by the chance to do good work. Clerics of Thunor may wish (or be ordered) to liberate slaves, while those of Eira might desire to smuggle in herbal remedies or alchemical ***healing*** and ***succor*** potions. Even a journey to Ostersund to deliver supplies, once a dull voyage from Midmark, is fraught with peril; mariners and clerics of Neorthe would find challenges to suit their particular talents in the form of sea monsters and orc pirates.

In general, Orcmark is a perfect adventuring realm for characters with Leadership Edges, or who command mercenaries or followers. While other realms present opportunity to shine in skirmishes, only in Orcmark can a leader of men show his true potential in battle.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A Saxa slave has escaped captivity and somehow made it to safety in Vestmark. During his debriefing, he reveals that the family (direct or distant) of one of the heroes is alive but being held in a prison camp. That they live is heart-warming news, but the future looks grim—they have been selected for execution, a sentence to be carried out at the next Deorcmonan. The escapee has no wish to return to Orcmark, but he can draw a mostly accurate map.

* Although assassination attempts against Nagrat have failed, his warlords may present easier targets. Such attempts are fraught with danger, not just because the top commanders are well protected, but also because any death may result in brutal reprisals against the enslaved population. Although the death of a warlord would result in a replacement being appointed, any delay could sow confusion, and that confusion may just be enough for one of the fronts to profit.

* Vestmark is vaguely aware that the dwarves of Karad Azgul closed their doors on the Saxa, but it is also hopeful a deal can be struck that would allow the war on both fronts to be taken to the enemy, forcing them to divide their forces or at least withdraw troops from the coastline. A small team is required to smuggle messages into and out of Karad Azgul. Heroes with the right skills may also be selected to serve as envoys, charged with trying to secure an alliance that profits both factions.

Variants on this theme involve making contact with the elves of Kings Wood or Saxa rebels hiding in the Mace Mountains, or encouraging the defenders of Ostersund to launch more raids to draw off troops from other fronts (perhaps as a prelude to opening negotiations).

Alternately, the adventurers might be hired to start a rebel group, giving them opportunity to find recruits, liberate slaves, disrupt supply lines, and use those Leadership Edges they invested in.

OSTMARK

Nestled behind the Thunor Range, Ostmark was never conquered by the Anari, and survived the Blizzard War with minimal damage (though the aftermath caused as much chaos here as elsewhere). Although a Saxa stronghold, the inhabitants of the realm are unlike any other Markland, for here it is money that determines who rules, not blood.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Ostmark.

* **Money Talks:** An old saying claims that in Ostmark wealth is everything. This isn't quite true, as influence is also important; but as those with money know, you can buy favors if not friends. Every hero with the Noble or Rich Edge receives +2 Charisma while in Ostmark (these are not cumulative). Those with Very Rich add a further +1 bonus, regardless of their title, giving +3 in total.

* **Nobility:** The highest standard noble title an Ostmarker hero with the Noble Edge can reach is hauld. Beyond this, he must be elected to one of the merchant councils. It is important to note that any Ostmarker hero, regardless of his bloodline, can become a Marchand-Jarl or –Thegn—if he has enough wealth and resides in Ostmark for the tenure of his office (ten years).

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Ostmark is a plutocracy, a realm where those with the most money rule. At the top of the social ladder is the Marchand Aethling, the man or woman calculated to have the greatest wealth, in terms of assets and ready coin, at the last census. Although he wields much power, especially over the Marchand Counseil, he is not an absolute ruler. Rather, he is considered the first among equals, for his peers on the Trada Counseil are citizens of considerable wealth and influence in their own right.

Every town, deemed under Ostmark law to be a settlement of 3,000 or more citizens, is ruled by a Marchand-Jarl. Despite the noble connotations, the position is based solely on wealth, not heritage. Similarly, a Marchand-Thegn governs each village, which the law defines as a single settlement of 200 or more inhabitants but less than 3,000.

It should be noted that in order to be a candidate for any Marchand title the citizen must have been born in Ostmark and reside there while in office. (This tends to limit the opportunities for adventuring heroes, regardless of their wealth.)

Ostmark once had a true nobility, but this has been eroded over time. While the noble titles of hauld, lendmann, and ridder remain hereditary, those of jarl and thegn are now tied firmly to personal and familial wealth. These lower titles are known as blood nobles. Nothing prevents a blood noble from holding a merchant title as well. Thus, one might come across a noble with the impressive title of Marchand-Jarl Tradaman Hauld, for example.

Much time has passed since the merchants took control, but there is still animosity between the old nobility and the new. Much of it stems from jealousy, though few blood nobles would ever admit this. Those families who saw the tide turning switched from being old-fashioned landowners to businessmen, riding the new tide to positions of power. Those who failed to see the change in time, or who dislike merchants and their greed, have been condemned to lower social status than they feel they deserve.

Because the higher station rulers come and go, Ostmark is not a true feudal system. Those beholden to blood nobles swear oaths as normal. Those directly answerable to the merchant nobility swear to obey whoever wields the title, rather than the titleholder in person. Thus, a citizen from Iarnsburg would swear loyalty and pay taxes to the office of the Marchand-Jarl, not Olvir Ulfhedinsunu.

Below the merchant-nobles and regular nobility are the upper classes. These are citizens with wealth, assets, and influence. As such, it is generally restricted to merchants, guildmasters, and senior clerics, though any citizen with the right amount of cash and power can call himself upper class. As with most cultures, acceptance is not based on any finite values but one's peers. Thus, even the richest merchant may be shunned by higher society if he fails to make friends in the right circles.

Filling the middle class are lesser merchants, clerics, mages, senior bureaucrats, skilled craftsmen, military commanders, and so on. Lastly there are the masses, who make up the lower class.

EDUCATION

Educational establishments exist in all towns and in many large villages, though tuition fees are expensive. Regardless of whether one learns at a formal school, from the local temple, or on the knee of an older family member, all citizens are instructed in the "Ostmark dream." In theory, any citizen can rise to the position of Marchand Aethling, for social class is no barrier to power in Ostmark. Thus, children are told that hard work, careful management of money, and the right social connections can lead any citizen from abject poverty to a position of authority.

Of course, the reality is that those with money will always have money, and those without can only aspire to greatness forever beyond their grasp. Still, the ladder is not impossible to climb, and skalds know many tales of common men who rose from the slums to rule Ostmark, or at least take a seat on one of the Counseils. Whether or not these have any semblance of truth no one questions, for to dispel the dream could lead to a break down of social order.

RELIGION

Var, god of trade, is the most popular deity in the land of merchants. Every settlement, even lone steads, boasts a shrine or temple. In most steads and small villages the shrine takes the form of a market stall or stalls, with brightly colored awnings decorated with Var's symbol. Here, visiting merchants are free to display their wares to the locals. Within larger villages and small towns the marketplace is bigger, encompassing a clearly defined region. A carved stone typically stands in the center, marking the shrine proper. Some shrines are decorated with images of Var, while others sport tracts from holy texts. On one face is always engraved the market's rules and regulations.

Large towns, cities, and even some prosperous smaller towns and villages have temples. As normal, these are covered buildings boasting an indoor market with permanent stalls, offices for tax collectors and trade mediators, meeting rooms, and on occasion guest rooms for visiting clerics. Whereas in many lands markets are limited to Marketdaeg, within Ostmark's temples of trade every day is a business day, though Marketdaeg remains the most lucrative day due to the influx of outside traders.

While few citizens are devout worshippers, prayers to Var are commonplace. People pray before going to market, wishing for good deals and skillful haggling, after shopping to thank Var for the bargains or to beseech him to send goods the buyer desires, when trade ships or caravans are due to arrive in or leave the settlement, and so on.

Next in order of worshippers, dedicated or casual, is Neorthe, god of the sea. Ostmark relies heavily on the whale-roads, both for fish, which it exports in great quantities, and for the valuable trade ships from the Jade Empire and Al-Shirkuh. Merchants who rely on the water for transportation or delivery of cargos pray to Neorthe as much as Var, often working prayers to both gods together to form a single act of worship.

Ostmark's fertile soil allows for the inhabitants not only to feed themselves well, but also to export surplus grain and vegetables. Rural settlements sport shrines or temples to Eostre Plantmother, with her Animalmother aspect receiving less attention except in the form of token offerings and supplications. Veth, goddess of granaries, is a popular lesser deity due to the large number of granaries dotting the landscape. For similar reasons, the cult of Vali Verminlord is especially despised.

Iron ore is another of Ostmark's exports, and Ertha, patron of the earth, is given enough worship to place her as the fourth most popular deity. Her worship is focused in the northeast, along the edge of the Thunor Range, and in the southeast, near the Brokentail Mountains.

While Ostmark has escaped every major disaster to befall Rassilon relatively unscathed thanks to its geographic position, its citizens are Saxa, and thus Tiw, god of war, is always in their hearts. Never an aggressive nation, citizens favor Tiw's defensive aspect most.

Worship of Nauthiz, while outlawed, is rife. Trade and stability bring money, and money attracts thieves and other ne'er-do-wells. While the Trade and Marchand Counseils regularly proclaim success against the cult, trying to root out thieves in Ostmark is no mean feat, for they are as plentiful as rats. Most towns boast a thieves' guild, and even in the villages the cult has its adherents. Penalties for theft are high, but in a land where the divide between rich and poor is vast, Nauthiz is a popular god.

Military

Ostmark's standing army is controlled by the powerful Trada Counseil. It currently maintains an army of 4,000 men, or around 5% of its population. Of these, half are foreign mercenaries. Many of the companies are on long-term contracts (some units have served for well-over a century), with payment including small plots of land as well as coin. The Trada Counseil knows that coin is no substitute for patriotism, and granting land gives the mercenaries something to fight for other than monetary reward.

Regardless of the mercenaries' company strength or track record of loyal service, a native Ostmark captain is always placed in the company command structure. In many cases he is not the strategic military commander, but placed there to ensure loyalty to Ostmark remains strong. While new companies grate at being commanded by a stranger, the pay is good, the land is fertile, and the duties far from taxing.

Half of Ostmark's army is heavy infantry, clad in chain mail hauberks and sporting long swords or battle axes along with a medium shield. They watch over trading centers and natural resources, ensuring the Trada Counseil always has a military presence close by. This allows the Counseil to keep an eye on local rulers, as well as protect its income revenues.

Despite being a Saxa nation, Ostmark makes use of cavalry. Equipped as medium cavalry, they form a quarter of the army. Unlike the infantry, who guard settlements, the cavalry are garrisoned in forts along the borders and trade roads. From here they can reach trouble spots quickly and maintain a watch for invaders. Cavalrymen wear scale armor, and carry long swords or battle axes along with large shields. They lack lances, being a mobile skirmisher force rather than shock troops. They ride riding horses.

The remaining quarter are archers and light infantry serving as marines. Each wears a leather shirt, and carries either a long bow or three throwing axes, a hand axe or short sword, and a small shield.

Every settlement boasts a militia, though membership varies from one or two kinsmen in steads to many hundred volunteers in the towns and cities. As elsewhere, those in power have no wish to lose their position. As a result, the militias are a reserve force, called up and armed only rarely. In most villages and towns, security is handled by members of the standing army.

Infantry and cavalry companies may be widely scattered, especially in rural communities, where a village may boast just a handful of permanent troops. In general, a company comprises 100 men under a Captain-of-Foot or Captain-of-Horse, as appropriate. Assisting the captains are five sergeants with the same suffix. When a company is divided among more locales than there are sergeants, one of the men is given the title Constable. He becomes the *de facto* military commander in his outpost, and is responsible for day-to-day security.

With the sea vital to Ostmark's economy, the Trada Counseil spends a small fortune maintaining an impressive navy. Sandvik, the main port, is home to eight drakkars and a single snekke, along with the 520 marines who crew the ships. The secondary base at Lieksa houses a single drakkar and snekke, along with three river barges equipped with ballistas and a single catapult (25 men per barge total).

Naval companies are sized based on the ship they use. Thus, they range anywhere from 20 men on the barges up to 100 men on a snekke. Regardless of size, a Captain-of-Ship commands each vessel, with between one and three Sergeants-of-Ship acting as lieutenants.

While many citizens accuse the Counseil members of being tight-fisted, they lavish a king's ransom on ensuring the army is well-equipped, well-paid, and well-trained. In addition to their standard armaments, commanders are given alchemical devices, such as *voice on the wind* charms to ensure lines of communication remain intact, or *gift of battle* potions to boost their already formidable leadership talents.

Trade & Tribute

While the Crystalflow Confederacy dominates trade in the central and eastern Hearthlands, Ostmark is a major mercantile force. While the Confederacy distributes trade goods from across Rassilon, it produces very little in comparison to its distant neighbor.

Sandvik is the capital of Ostmark and its largest town, yet it is the centrally-located settlement of Lieksa through which all trade roads flow. From here the Grain Road runs to northern Lokka, the capital of the rich farmlands. To the south is the Leaf Road (formerly the Horse Road), along which bales of pipeleaf are carried to distant markets across the continent. Lastly, the Iron Road runs to the west, disappearing out through the mountains to the wider world.

No road heads east to Sandvik, for Lieksa and the great port are linked by water, the Broadstream being navigable to a point a few miles west of the trading town.

The sea is a vital trading route to the merchants of Ostmark. While the rulers of the Jade Empire and eastern Al-Shirkuh permit no foreigners to touch their soil, their heavily-laden ships bring ivory, rys, and silk. From the northern realms of Rassilon the merchants buy great quantities of whale oil, which fetch high prices in the core Hearthlands. The catch of Ostmark's fishing fleet is smoked, pickled, and salted by the barrel load before being exported.

Much of the country's iron exports head east to the neighboring Marklands or the Confederacy, though with Nordmark slowly restabilizing, the monopoly Ostmark held on the iron trade is being eroded. Its surplus of grain and vegetables is primarily shipped north to Trond, from where it is transported to the eastern Low Winterlands, and south to the Blackstone Barony.

Ostmark is renowned as being a land of merchants, yet it is also known as the land of taxes.

Duty: Most imports are charged at 2%. Goods which compete with local resources are charged at 10%. All local exports are charged a flat 3%. Merchants from other realms who wish to use the port at Sandvik, through which to transport their goods elsewhere, are charged 10% of the goods' value.

Hearth Tax: A flat fee of 5 gs per year is paid for each hearth in a building. This goes to the local ruler.

Income Tax: Citizens pay 10% of earning directly to the Trada Counseil. An additional 5% is paid to the local ruler for upkeep of local services. Merchants pay an additional 10% to the Trada Counseil.

Sales Tax: 3% applied to all transactions except food. Goods and services sold by foreigners are taxed at 15%. This "encourages" foreign merchants to sell their wares to local merchants, albeit at a lower price than if they sold to the end user directly.

Security Tax: Every citizen of adult age pays a flat 10 gs a year to the Trada Counseil to help pay for the upkeep of the army and navy, as well as the forts and ships.

Temple Tax: While many citizens donate to local temples, all citizens must pay 3% of their income to the cult of Var. This helps pay for upkeep of the temples and security at markets, as well as maintenance of the main trade roads. It is also used to subsidize key industries, ensuring the realm remains competitive.

Weapons Tax: Any citizen wishing to carry a weapon must purchase a license. This costs 100 gs per year. Outsiders are charged 25 gs per month of part thereof.

ARCHITECTURE

Rural Ostmark looks much the same as any of the Marklands, with low wooden buildings and thatched roofs being the norm. Despite being relatively safe from the privation of bandits and orcs, at least compared to many countries, palisades and ditches encircle most settlements. In the towns, though, times have moved on, and stone buildings are now more common.

This is not to say stone structures are common, for they are not. Such dwellings are expensive, for masonry is not a Saxa art and, even after centuries of rule by the merchant class, the art has never caught on. Thus, most masons are foreigners, normally Anari, but occasionally a frost dwarf. Ostmark is also poor in good quality stone, forcing those who wish to use the material to import it at great cost. The use of stone came about as Ostmark recovered from the aftermath of the Blizzard War. Not only is stone stronger than wood, ideal for protecting valuable trade goods and chests of coin, but it offers great protection from fire and the ravages of vermin. Thus, most stone buildings in Ostmark are warehouses, guild headquarters, temples (though rarely those of Eostre or Neorthe), and the homes of the rich elite.

Despite the use of Anari architects and masons, the look of stone structures remains Saxa. Walls are still carved to resemble logs, pillars look like tree trunks, and even slate shingles resemble wooden ones.

A small few of Ostmark's wealthiest citizens have built two story structures, allowing them to expand their properties without buying more land. Such designs have divided the populace, many of whom think them un-Saxa, and therefore an insult to their ancestors.

MAJOR LOCALES

THE BLACK HALL

In the far north of Ostmark, where Vends Bay cuts toward the mountains, stands the Black Hall, a stone compound dominated by a tall tower. In days of yore, before even Hela's madness, it was the seat of a powerful noble family, close relatives of the kings of Ostmark.

According to legend, the last owner, Jarl Skuma, fell from grace and was damned. The story goes that Skuma was a noble man, too proud perhaps, but of good heart and noble virtue. It is said he desired to be king, not out of lust for power, but because the incumbent monarch was leading Ostmark to ruin.

Skuma prayed to the gods for a solution to his quandary, for he would not raise arms against his king. The gods seemingly answered, for during a terrible storm a stranger arrived at his hall. The stranger promised the nobleman aid, but he led Skuma to corruption through sly words, for the stranger was a demon in the guise of man. Skuma raised an army and declared war on the king, now intending to seize the throne by force. That he succeeded in slaying the king is historical fact.

Skuma is widely believed to have been killed by clerics of Sigel, yet his corpse was never recovered. Some skalds claim the demons dragged him back to the Abyss on the eve of his ascending the throne. Regardless, the tale of Skuma is used as a morality play, warning people to be careful what they wish for.

Several small steads close to the Black Hall have recently been put to the torch, the inhabitants brutally slain. Some say Skuma's war banner, a mailed gauntlet clutching a hiltless sword blade, flutters once more from his tower. Fear has gripped the northern land, and rumors abound that the black lord has returned from death to reclaim Ostmark in the name of his demonic masters.

More level-headed commentators insist the occupant of the Black Hall is naught but a cunning bandit or orc chieftain, relying on the fear associated with Skuma's name to quell investigations into his presence. But these commentators have not seen the black-clad knights riding abroad at night, or heard the strange screams that now echo through the hilly land.

BOLTUN

Population: 872

Ruler: Marchand-Thegn Halfdan Snorrisunu

A farming community in northwest Ostmark, Boltun's inhabitants pride themselves on their cattle herds. Dried meat, milk, leather, bone, and horn are exported across Ostmark, prize bulls are rented out to stud, and live cows are sold at the market.

Although listed as a village, the community is spread far and wide across three wide, shallow valleys, for cattle require a great deal of grazing land. The village center, which houses barely 200 souls, is dominated by a huge temple to Eostre Animalmother that doubles as a cattle market. Although grand in size, the temple is constructed from wood and thatch, and is designed to be functional rather than ostentatious. Located around the temple are the marchand-thegn's official residence, workshops, stores, a slaughterhouse, and a single inn ("The Plentiful Udder").

The title of Marchand-Thegn is awarded each ten years to the herder with the biggest herd. His prize bull, another requirement, is housed in the temple, serving as the altar to which prayers are offered. The village's name, which translates as "the bull's enclosure" indicates the animal's importance.

Worship of Bolverk runs a close second to that of his mother, and most herders have at least one cleric on staff, giving his cult greater presence here than anywhere else in Rassilon. Cattle raids are frequent, and accepted as part of daily life. Raids become more frequent, and often more bloody, in the months before the census.

The village is currently in uproar. The marchand-thegn's prize bull, Blackhorn, has been stolen. Not only is this a personal slight against the nobleman, but it is an act of sacrilege that has offended the entire village. Accusations and counter-accusations are rife, but so far investigations have failed to find the culprit. The marchand-thegn is currently trying to impose a new tax to raise a reward, an act which is meeting stiff resistance from his rivals, for the next census. The local high priestess of Eostre, Cuthwilda Herd-Mother, has demanded the nobleman recover the cow by the winter Herding Day festival or suffer sanctions. With a census looming, this could seriously hamper his chances of holding office again.

On a lighter note, Boltun is also home to the famous Bull Run (famous in Ostmark, Veermark, and Nordmark, anyway). Each year on Birthing Day, which is judged according to the first calf born, the single men of the village gather outside the temple, in which each farmer has placed a bull the night before. At dawn, the bulls are released from the holy place and allowed to run amok through a maze of fences erected especially for the occasion. The unmarried women judge the virility of potential husbands based on the men's ability to outrun the stampeding bulls, avoid injury, and leap on the beasts' basks. Farmers judge their bull's virility on the number of young men their bull tramples or gores. Injuries are commonplace, but healers are always on standby.

BROKENTAIL MOUNTAINS

While growing orc numbers beset the northern settlements, those along the Brokentail Mountains are suffering raids by beastmen. United under Gorgoth the Foul, an abomination said to have the legs of a goat and the head of a bear, the once disparate beastmen have grown in confidence. Unfortunately, the settlements produce little of interest to the Trada Counseil, and help has been slow in coming. Rather than pull troops away from the more important areas, the Counseil is planning to hire adventuring parties to end the threat.

ostmark



Pop: 72,824 (70% Saxa, 15% hearth elves, 5% Anari, 5% dwarves, 4% engro, 1% frostborn)
Ruler: Marchand Aethling Aran Thormodsunu & the Trada Counseil
Religion: Var, Neorthe, Eostre, Ertha, Tiw, Nauthiz (secretly)
Imports: Ivory, rys, silk, whale oil
Exports: Fish, grain, iron, vegetables

THE GREAT FLEET WRECK SITE

Ten years ago, a large fleet of galleys from the desert realms disappeared before reaching harbor in Sandvik. What became of the ships, their crews, and the valuables they carried remains a mystery. Most Ostmarkers believe the fleet sank in a terrible storm that ravaged the coast for four days without rest, though stories of kreana, sea giant, and sea dragon attacks are frequently mentioned when outsiders are in earshot.

A small few believe the fleet sailed past Ostmark and found safe harbor further north, though why they never returned to their homeland is casually ignored. Certainly no foreigners of dusky skin have been mentioned as settling in the Winterlands, a land they would surely find uncomfortably cold, though there is much unclaimed land available for those seeking a fresh start.

Fishermen sporadically dredge up small items of southern origin, but investigation by the cult of Neorthe has revealed no shipwrecks in the vicinity of the finds.

The local cult of Var suspects the cult of Neorthe knows the location of the wrecks but is refusing to reveal it, believing that Neorthe has claimed the treasure, and thus it should not be removed and sold. The merchant-clerics have no such qualms about robbing the ocean, seeing only the chance to scavenge the valuable non-perishable goods and sell them at high profit—as treasure, the goods are not subject to import tax.

Legally, the cult can do nothing to search for the fleet, for the next fleet brought with it a clear message that any goods or corpses recovered from the missing ships belonged to the desert rulers, and any theft would be duly punished. The nature of the punishment was not set out, but the Trada Counseil had no wish to anger Ostmark's trading partners. The Counseil duly passed a law forbidding any Ostmarker from searching for the wrecks, looting them, or selling any goods recovered from the ships. The law applied equally to hired agents, regardless of their nationality.

Although selling stolen goods is a minor sin, and any goods from the wreck would count as stolen due to the Counseil's law, most clerics are prepared to suffer in order to increase their profits. As for repercussions from the Counseil, one of the cult's cardinal rules is don't get caught.

IARNSBURG

A spate of recent murders has left the industrial town in the grip of fear. All the victims were found with a mask of terror on their faces, their tongues ripped out. No trace of the muscle was ever found, leaving the investigators to conclude it had been taken as a grisly trophy. While many put on a brave face and insist the victims are being slain for breaking some vow or revealing a secret, in their beds they shiver and drip cold sweat, muttering prayers to protect them from Morgwyn the Black.

Long ago, when demons walked the land and the day was as night, Morgwyn the Black was a feared witch. As the Demongate War expanded, Morgwyn used her powers against the innocent citizens of Ostmark, unleashing cruel curses and striking brave heroes down with words of fell power. In the end, she met her doom, being cast into a dark pit to rot, her tongue ripped out by its root to prevent her from using her magic. Thus Morgwyn passed into folklore, becoming a bogeymen with which parents would frighten their wayward children.

The Sword & Anvil: A popular tavern, the Sword & Anvil is named after the colossal anvil that stands in the center of the drinking hall. Protruding from it is a mighty sword emblazoned with runes of dragon slaying.

The innkeeper, Tind the Gossip, happily tells strangers that the inn was constructed around the anvil. He adds that after the Blizzard War, a paladin of Sigel thrust the sword into the anvil, claiming that in days to come a mighty hero would draw it forth. Any visitors are given permission to see if they are the chosen one.

In truth the anvil and sword are a cunning device. Both are real, though the sword is nothing special, having been forged by Tind's grandfather. The sword is kept in place by a locking bar concealed in the anvil, which while heavy is partly hollow. With a flick of a hidden switch, the bar can be withdrawn and the sword drawn. Tind waits until a would-be hero is heaving with all his might before releasing the lock, causing the "champion" to tumble onto his butt.

For all his practical jokes, Tind is a good man and a collector of gossip. Heroes seeking news regarding events in Ostmark need only buy drinks to ensure his tongue begins wagging.

LOCKSBURGH

Population: 505

Ruler: Marchand-Thegn Frodi Runulfsunu

Situated on the southern edge of Greenwood, close to the border with Veermark, the small village of Locksburgh relies on logging for its existence. Unfortunately, that income is in serious decline.

Eight months ago the elves of Greenwood tried to expel a logging party from their home. Violence ensued, and several elves were slain. The survivors retreated back into the dark depths of the wood, vowing revenge against the trespassing humans. Since then, a giant boar now known as "Old Tusker" has plagued logging parties. The monstrous beast, described as being the size of a horse, has killed a dozen loggers and inflicted scores of injuries.

Marchand-Thegn Frodi, whose status relies on regular exports of timber, ordered his only son, Hring, a skilled warrior and a captain in the Ostmark army, to hunt down the beast. Hring's shattered body was dragged back to the village three months ago. Frodi was cast into a black pit of depression. Since then all he has done is drink heavily, mourn his son, and curse the elves.

Acting in her master's place, Kara Nerisdohtor, the thegn's senior advisor, has placed a bounty of 2,000 gs on the boar's head and promised the villagers they will dine on the boar's flesh before the year is out. So far no one has taken up the challenge.

SANDVIK

The Docks: Only merchants from Al-Shirkuh's trade ships make landfall, the ships remaining anchored in the harbor along with their crews. Rumors that the crews are slaves have spread through Ostmark and into the lands beyond. Several merchants have been attacked in Sandvik and two attempts to board the galleys have been thwarted. Fearing a loss of trade if the attacks do not cease, the Trada Counseil has posted a reward for the capture of the ringleaders.

Jory Franz, that well-known rogue and taleteller, claims to have snuck aboard one of the ships. While he says nothing of slaves, he does mention passing a few hours in conversation with a beautiful sphinx. As always, no one can be sure if the con artist is lying or telling the truth, such are the wild natures of his claims.

The Jade Quarter: Recent changes to the Empire's trading practices have caused tongues to wag. Until recently crews were marched through town to the embassy, while local stevedores loaded and unloaded the ships. After negotiations with the Trada Counseil, the Empire was given sole permission to dock at several wharves. Access to the area is now prohibited except by permission from Mandarin Hu Yu Shin, and masked guards enforce his authority. As well as wharves, new warehouses have been erected, along with an inn. Work is under way to move the Empire's embassy to the new district.

Sandvik is awash with rumors regarding the changes. One rumor concerns the unloading of the trade ships, known as junks, as this only occurs at night. The stevedores apparently wear porcelain mask, as if to conceal their identities. Stranger still is talk they wear strong perfume. While the citizens generally show curiosity about the foreigners, a small number are beginning to wonder if the Empire is planning something other than an expansion of trade.

The Navigator's Arms: Located near the docks, the inn is frequented by sailors. The innkeeper, Angvold Bretwaldasunu, posts notices about ship captains seeking crews inside the tavern, thus ensuring out of work sailors are frequent visitors.

Few of the job offers are real, for the inn is also the headquarters of the local branch of the Velvet Shackle, the infamous slaver brotherhood. Sailors, tough men used to long hours, hard work, and harsh conditions, make ideal slaves. While the Blackstone Barony is the largest consumer in the region, the mine owners of western Ostmark have secretly begun using slaves in place of paid workers.

When a likely candidate enters the inn, Angvold discretely grills his background. Assuming he fits the requirements for a slave, the innkeeper tells the mariner the captain has arranged for a room at the inn and free drinks as a token gesture of friendship. Once the mariner falls asleep, he is kidnapped and taken to his new life. Should anyone come calling about the sailor, Angvold tells them he signed on with a ship, producing the appropriate notice as "proof" of his claims.

Thieves' Guilds: Ostmarkers frequently joke that the thieves' guilds are in the employ of the rich merchants, and for the most part they are right. Through the guilds the merchants control the black market, as well as much of the country's gambling and prostitution. Clever accounting diverts much of this illegal activity into legal assets. But the guilds also serve a secondary purpose.

Each guild operates in a specific district, and never in one where its controller has financial interests. Instead, they hamper the business activities of rivals, as well as steal their personal wealth.

With a new census looming in 501 IR, the various hopefuls for seats on the Counseils who have control of a guild have stepped up activity. Acts of arson and murder have increased dramatically, and in the last week the trouble has spilled onto the streets, with the rival gangs engaged in open, brutal warfare.

THE WYRDING WELL

In the heart of the Holy Hills stands a small pool of crystal clear water. According to one legend, the well formed from the tears of the Norns during the Blizzard War, for Thrym's actions, while known to them, wrought much devastation on the mortal realm. Cynics claims the only tears they shed were because the War meant they had to work harder spinning and ending fates.

The site is actually sacred to Loki, the great trickster and father of the Unknowable One. Those who drink from the water are blessed or cursed, depending on the god's capricious whims. The water did come from Loki's body, but it is not his tears.

Spirit Name: Wyrdcwene ("Fate Queen").

Ambience: Characters feel uneasy, as if they are not welcome.

Deity: Loki.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: Fate Queen speaks in the voice of a young girl. She speaks only to warn those who would drink that the waters are meant for true heroes, not commoners. Her words are deliberately designed to goad heroes into drinking by mocking their status.

Sacrifice: Spiritual energy (in the form of a benny).

Powers: Any Wild Card who spends a benny and drinks from the well, is blessed or cursed. Draw a card and consult the table listed under the Disciple of the Norns Edge (see the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*). The result lasts for the next year. During this time any other use of the Edge, whether through this well or a Norn cleric, automatically gives a confused result (as if a 2-5 were drawn).

PERSONS OF NOTE

MARCHANDSMAN GEIRSTEIN ULFSUNU

Head of a powerful merchant family from Iarnsburg, Marchandsman Geirstein and his family have grown rich through trade with the mighty Crystalflow Confederacy and economically stable Midmark. Despite his vast wealth, Geirstein is a greedy man, and desires a seat on the Trada Counseil above all else. While Nordmark's emissaries speak of opening a new road to Yorvik, a road that would facilitate better trade links, Geirstein has been using his personal fortune to hire orcs and bandits to attack Ostmark caravans crossing the narrow stretch of land. Evidence linking Nordmark to the unprovoked attacks has been left behind to help stir up support back home.

Once the outcry has reached fever pitch, and it isn't far from that, he intends to petition the Trada Counseil to unleash Ostmark's army against Nordmark's southern arm. Although intended solely for defense, the army is sufficiently powerful to achieve his aim with ease. Controlling this land would weaken Nordmark's ability to sell its iron to Midmark, a market Ostmark dominated until the young king returned, and give Ostmark's merchants clear passage to Midmark and its Lesser Crystalflow trade route, as well as removing the border duty currently imposed by Nordmark. With a little more encouragement, Ostmark could capture Nordmark's iron mines, removing the battered nation from the trade lucrative altogether.

At present the Trada Counseil is split over the attacks, for Ostmark has never been an aggressor and King Geirmund speaks openly of peace and prosperity. But the warmongering merchant is relentless in his ambitions, for he knows that every day King Geirmund remains on the throne his land becomes more unified.

RIDDERA ODDRUN TOKISDOHTOR

Riddera Oddrun sold her ancestral lands and used the money to build a small fort on the Iron Road. She is head of a small chivalric order, the Knights of the Gilded Drake, an organization sworn to serve Sigel. Convinced that clues to the disappearance of the sun god are strewn across the land, she and her knights (of which there are around 50) constantly quest the length and breadth of Rassilon. When necessary, she hires adventurers to assist the knights, typically by having them explore ruins her knights cannot enter due to other duties.

The order is also keen to make contact with any sun dragons. Oddrun hopes to recruit them to her cause, since they are widely regarded as holding allegiance to Sigel. So far she has met with no luck, which is hardly surprising given many died during the Blizzard War and the survivors hid themselves away. Still, she is nothing if not persistent.

Quick-witted and not unattractive, the golden-haired noblewoman is popular with the local peasants, for she donates part of any treasures found on the quests to good causes, keeping just enough to keep her fortress maintained. The cult of Sigel is divided in opinion, some believing she is a virtuous soul of strong faith and others claiming she is a heretic.

TINDLE THE SKALD

An engro skald (the magical sort), Tindle has made it is his life's goal to tag along with adventurers in the hope of composing an epic that will last the ages. In return for room and board, and a few gold coins every now and then just so he can buy essential supplies, he vows to record the heroes' deeds and immortalize them in song. A plucky little soul willing to follow heroes into danger, he is a poor bard, lacking the vocabulary and understanding of kennings to do heroic deeds justice. He also has a knack for getting into trouble, drinking far too much (he claims his great-grandfather was a clurichaun), and shooting his mouth regarding his companions' plans. He's also like a bad penny, always returning to plague those he thinks have promise. Short of killing him, Tindle continues to haunt those he likes until he finds someone more promising to latch onto.

WIHTHELM MARESCALSUNU

A white-haired man of advancing years, Wihthelm is a resident of Lieksa. A former explorer, Wihthelm devoted much of his early years to traveling Rassilon. As he went, he documented the various festivals to the gods and regional variations. Now infirm, he has started putting pen to paper, recording all he has learned.

While many consider him one of the most learned men in Ostmark, Wihthelm is quick to point out that his knowledge is far from complete. Hence, he pays well for information on religious ceremonies, especially minor ones from regions he never visited. He has been known to hire heroes to visit remote parts of the world simply to observe local rituals.

No one knows how old the sage is. One story in the taverns of Lieksa claims the Norns forgot his name when he was born, and so he has no fate and cannot die. Others insist he serves the gods, being a celestial minion sent to observe the ritual observations of mankind. Doom mongers insist that when the record is complete anyone who partook in one of the erroneous rituals will be judged and punished. When confronted with these stories or asked about his age, he gives a coy smile and a quick wink of his youthful eyes before replying that he has lived as long as the gods have allotted, and will continue to live until they summon him.

ROYALMARK

The ancestral heartland of the Marklands, Royalmark is home to the High Cyning of the Saxa. A large state with a powerful army, Royalmark could be a major political and military power in the Hearthlands, yet time has seemingly passed the royal land by, and the natives remain insular, proud of their ancient ways and unwilling to alter them to fit a changing world.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Royalmark.

* **Bartering:** While foreign merchants demand payment in coin, local merchants are happy to barter, for this is the old Saxa way. When heroes trying to sell goods normally make a Streetwise roll to find a buyer; in Royalmark they can trade them for 25% of their value with no roll required.

* **Out of Touch:** The majority of Royalmark's citizens are out of touch with the rest of world thanks to their staunch traditionalism. While they accept that foreigners (i.e. non-Saxa) are naturally different, they react unfavorably to Saxa who sport unusual fashions, sing new songs, or honor the gods in different ways. Unless a Saxa hero from another realm adopts staunch traditional Saxa attire, mannerisms, and beliefs, they suffer a –1 penalty to Charisma in Royalmark.

* **Stubborn:** This staunch conservatism of the Royalmarkers means many have the Stubborn Hindrance. This manifests openly when exposed to new ideas, especially foreign ones.

* **Ye Olde Language:** Natives speak Auld Saxa as their first language. In rural communities, that is often the only known tongue. Saxa heroes born here must take Auld Saxa as their native language.

LOST IN TIME

Stepping into Royalmark is like being transported back in time several centuries. Even Saxa from neighboring lands find the realm an oddity. Despite 10% of the population being of Anari stock, Royalmark is a staunchly traditional realm, opposed to any change or dilution of their cultural heritage, irrelevant of the fact the world has moved on since the days of the Saxa rebellion.

Fashion, encompassing clothing, art, and jewelry, has not advanced since the foundation of the Marklands. When a stranger passes by clad in unusual garments, folk actually gather to stare as if the visitor had descended from the heavens. Songs and poems composed less than a century ago are largely unknown to local ears, and if they tell of things the locals do not wish to hear, they are branded as seditious, heretical, or foreign propaganda. Native dances, while known to all Saxa as traditional dances, are considered quaint, being performed outside Royalmark only on religious holidays, weddings, and such like, not for everyday celebrations.

Saxa elsewhere have largely moved away from log houses when stone is available, yet in Royalmark there are very few stone buildings, and those that stand were raised by Anari masons and generally for Anari families. The addition of a slate roof would cause uproar, for wooden shingles, thatch, or cut turf, are the traditional Saxa roofing material.

Speech patterns are not only archaic, but almost all citizens speak Auld Saxa as their native tongue, a language spoken only by priests, scholars, and the scions of ancient noble families in other Marklands.

Mixed marriages, the union of a Royalmarker with any outsider or non-Saxa stock, are unusual save in border regions. Gossip quickly spreads that the Royalmarker is suffering from some sort of mental illness, and any children resulting from the union will be malformed freaks or mentally retarded. Unless a family has lived in Royalmark for five generations and avoided marrying non-Saxa stock, they are considered to be foreigners; loyal to the high cyning perhaps, but not quite as loyal as true Royalmarkers.

None of this means Royalmarkers are openly racist. They may stare open-mouthed at foreigners, but they don't insult them or try to inflict physical harm. Generally they are happy to talk and trade, but they have little to no interest in discussing foreign ways or other lands.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Like most Saxa lands, the social hierarchy in Royalmark runs downward from the king (in this case the High Cyning) to the jarls, to the lesser nobles serving the jarls, and then to the masses. Below the noble ranks, clerics are top dog, followed by huscarls, mages, merchants, master crafters, crafters, common soldiers, and finally peasants.

Social promotion is easy at lower ranks, but it is rare (though not impossible) for anyone not born of noble blood to be granted a title. The High Cyning has the authority to award titles. Those granted this boon swear loyalty directly to the king, forgoing the usual feudal hierarchy.

While many Saxa have adopted the Anari method of titles going to the eldest child, those of Royalmark hold true to the old ways. By law, any person with a legitimate claim to a noble title may nominate himself as a candidate. It is then the duty of the lower ranking nobles beholden to the vacant seat to decide which candidate is best fit to rule them. Political maneuvering is an acceptable practice, as is civil war, though the latter is heavily frowned upon as it risks involving the other jarls. Since ridders have no one below them who holds a title, it falls to senior members of the local community to elect a new master.

EDUCATION

As one might expect in this time-locked, insular land, all children are taught the ancient customs and culture of the Saxa. Those not of Saxa stock may learn their own racial customs, but they must also master the Saxa ones.

Like elsewhere, formal education is the reserve of the rich and the nobility. While many children of such families learn of religion, law, heraldry, tactics, and such like, their knowledge hardly ever extends beyond the borders of Royalmark. Indeed, even among the educated, knowledge of the outside world, including other Marklands, is rudimentary.

Those living on or near the borders of neighboring states may know some basic facts and be able to name a few settlements or notable persons in the next realm. However Midmark, for example, separated by just a few miles by the Crystalflow Confederacy, remains a mysterious, distant realm. That there is a vast expanse of settled lands beyond the Icewall Mountains is a shock to many Royalmarkers.

Royalmark boasts no schools, and clerics of Hoenir are discouraged from introducing such foreign ways of educating youth. Private tuition and on the job training are the norm here, and that's how the Royalmarkers would like things to stay.

THE GREAT SAXA TREASURES

As well as Brisingamen (p. xxx), Saxa tales tell of other legendary treasures once in the possession of their ancestors. Whether or not these relics ever existed is speculative, for the stories regarding them originated long before the Anari conquest.

Draupnir: Hothar bestowed this gold ring on the Saxa. Skalds sing that the wearer could cause the ring to create a duplicate. These lesser rings were given to nobles beholden to the tribe's king. The rings granted the wearer physical protection, but also informed the owner of Draupnir if they were planning treachery.

Saxa kings are still known as ring-givers. Traditionally, the kings present a gold ring to nobles who swear allegiance to them. Each Oath Renewal Day, the nobles hand their ring back to the king before swearing oaths of continuing loyalty, at which time their ring is returned.

Gjallar: A large aurochs horn, Gjallar ("Yelling") was created by Thunor but gifted to the Saxa by Rigr. When blown, its low note could be heard across the entire lands of the Saxa, alerting the fyrd and huscarls to impending doom. Skalds claim the last time its note was heard was when the Anari invaders first set foot on the continent.

Gjallar may be lost, but blowing a horn is still the traditional means of raising the fyrd in Saxa communities.

Meginggjardi: Tiw's gift to the Saxa was a belt named "power-belt." A wide, leather belt with a large buckle engraved with runes of strength and might, it supposedly doubled the wearer's strength.

While belts are not uncommon, especially among sword-wielding warriors, the wearing of wide belts representing Meginggjardi is largely constrained to the cult of Tiw, and even then mainly for ceremonial purposes.

Odherir: Eira gave the "vessel of blood" to the Saxa. Legends say it was a vast cauldron which held Eira's tears. According to the songs, any living creature who sits in the liquid overnight will emerge with all their wounds healed, no matter when the injuries were inflicted.

Odherir has never been forgotten, for modern healers still brew up herbal remedies and alchemical potions in small cauldrons.

RELIGION

With one noted exception, Royalmarkers are followers of the traditional Saxa deities. Sigel wards them against the evils of the world and keeps the darkness at bay, Tiw gives them the strength to crush their enemies and defend their homes and property, and Eostre blesses their fields and flocks, ensuring they have enough to eat. Scaetha receives worship predominantly in the north of the country, where the undead are a constant threat.

The key difference is in the worship of Hothar over Thunor. While Thunor represents free will and independence, Hothar is the god of law, order, and traditional values. The other Marklands have accepted outside ways (some far more than others), introducing new aspects and ideas to their culture and becoming more diverse as a result; whereas Royalmarkers close their eyes and ears to new ideas and hold to values and ideals centuries out of date.

MILITARY

Royalmark maintains an impressive army of 4,000 huscarls supported by 700 mercenary cavalry. Of the former, 2,400 are members of noble households, with just 1,600 directly loyal to the High Cyning. However, the king demands his nobles supply troops for the army. In reality, the king has command over 3,000 of the huscarls, leaving the collective nobility just 1,000 to protect their lands. Half of the mercenaries are directly in the employ of the king or nobility, with the remainder serving merchants as caravan guards.

The high cyning maintains a bodyguard of 400 huscarls. These are stationed at Ravensburg in the great barracks and divided into four companies of 100 men. Each company boasts 80 veteran huscarls, 10 paladins of Tiw, and 10 berserkers.

The four companies are distinguished by their battle dress, which comprises of colored raven designs on their shields and dyed feathers attached to their helms. The companies are named the Storm (black), Silver (white), Blood (red), and Gold (yellow) Ravens.

Competition is fierce to join the Ravens, for they are well paid and comfortably housed. Each year, applicants are pitted against a huscarl drawn by random lot. If the applicant wins, he takes the loser's position in the company. The loser may either quit as a huscarl, or join one of the regular royal companies.

Although the army numbers 4,000 huscarls, only half are ever on duty at any one time. The remainder lives as rich peasants, tending their land or working a trade. Huscarls are forbidden to serve as mercenaries, for they are oath-bound to a nobleman and must be available for duty at instant notice. One-quarter of the troop strength is rotated every three seasons, with no change during Wulfmonan. The sole exception to this is the Ravens, who are a true permanent battle force.

Some 10% of Royalmark's population have taken oaths to serve in the fyrd should their liege call upon them. Were all to answer the call, Royalmark could muster nearly 12,000 troops. Despite swearing oaths, the true total who would ever likely answer the summons is closer to 1,200, and half of these have only rudimentary militia training and poor quality weapons.

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Royalmark's army of 4,000 huscarls is a powerful force, for these are trained warriors in heavy armor, not peasants with spears and leather jerkins.

The High Cyning has so far resisted calls to send troops to Vestmark and Sutmark. He could not support one ally without supporting the other, lest he lose what little fealty remains, and in both wars his men would be entering a meat grinder. This has won him few friends in those realms, but the king also has many other issues to which he must contend.

The undead of the Withered Lands are a constant threat, and troops must be constantly vigil against invasion. Neighboring Nordmark is hardly a stable realm. Should it fall to enemies of the current king, they may seek to expand west, grabbing the loop of land in which stands Moot Hill. Hence, a permanent garrison must be stationed at the hill fort. Loyalty to the High Cyning is on the wane, and thus troops must be on hand in case of open rebellion.

Furthermore, the expansionistic realm of Coglelund must be watched, lest the greedy merchant-prince makes a land grab. Settlements must be protected against orcs and bandits, and trade caravans must be guarded. It is also expensive to keep 4,000 warriors in the field, one reason why the rotating duty was enforced.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Much has already been said on the politics of the northern trade road and the plans to bypass Darkwood and take it through Royalmark, thus no more need be said here. It should be noted, though, that Royalmark has no major trade roads. The north road from the Magocracy runs through the Freelands, though it does strike extremely close to the border with Royalmark before entering Darkwood, and the great route up the Crystalflow strikes lands across Nordmark and the eastern Freelands. Indeed, the only decent road in the entire country runs solely between Ravensburg and Moot Hill, and that is only maintained because it is a military road.

As a result, many of the trade caravans navigating across Royalmark are internal ones, moving from town to village to stead in an endless procession, buying and selling along the way. Fortunately, Royalmark is largely self-sufficient, and its imports are luxuries rather than necessities.

Struggling to come to terms with its role in a changing world, Royalmark's conservatism is stifling trade. Its jewelry and artwork, once considered the height of fashion, are now seen as quaint and out of touch with current fashion trends. While some customers

still like the old touches, many want something new to impress their peers and underlings, and Royalmark fails to deliver that. As a result, the trade in artwork and jewelry is in serious decline. Even if Royalmark could change centuries of entrenched ideas, the flow of silver from Vestmark has been reduced to a trickle, which in turn has caused the price of jewelry to rocket.

Beer and cheese remain profitable markets, though there is increasing competition from elsewhere. Fortunately, perfecting the recipe for these goods can take time, and old tastes are rarely replaced by new ones quickly. For now, Royalmark maintains a healthy export to its neighbors.

One unusual feature of Royalmark is that it boasts no taverns or inns (these are Anari "inventions"). Most settlements boast an alehouse, a place where peaceful, law-abiding visitors can enjoy drink, food, and a warm bench at no or minimal cost. Communities who trade frequently typically erect a small palisade within the outer defenses for merchants to park their wagons and stable horses. Steads are too small to boast an alehouse, and the comfort of accommodation depends on the owner's respect for the law of hospitality.

MAJOR LOCALES

This section details new areas of interest and includes plot hooks GMs can expand into full adventures.

BRADWALD

Population: 528
Ruler: Lendmann Leofhelm Osnothsunu

Situated on the outskirts of Fifty Acre Wood, Bradwald ("Broad Wood") is a bustling village. Its inhabitants tend the soil, producing barley and wheat for beer, and harvest the forest for timber. Until a few months ago it was a quiet, rather dull place. There have been six fires in recent times, resulting in two burned out cottages and four deaths.

Despite stepping up militia patrols and putting out a bounty of 200 gs, the lendmann has been unable to put a stop to the attacks. Initially the locals blamed a mortal agent, but as the arsonist continues to evade capture they are beginning to whisper the perpetrator might be of supernatural origin.

BRISINGATON

The term Saxa is akin to the modern term Germanic. It carries with it notions of a single people, yet accurately relates to diverse tribes with certain shared cultural and religious elements, and bonded by a root language (Auld Saxa, in this case).

Although modern Saxa group themselves by nation, calling themselves Midmarkers, Royalmarkers, Sutmarkers, and so on, before the Anari drove them from their ancestral lands they used different tribal names. Among those still recalled by skalds were the Aesa, Brisinga, Franca, Juta, Norga, Rusa, Suema, Vana, and Vika. Forced into smaller territory, the tribes interbred on a scale not seen before, slowly losing their unique tribal identities. When they emerged victorious, they adopted their current names to differentiate their new beliefs and evolving identities.

The Brisinga were considered the most powerful tribe of old. Their lands encompassed much of central Nordmark and the lower eastern Freelands. The tribe took its name from a relic worn by their kings. Known as Brisingamen, its name means "glowing or flaming jewelry." Skalds record it as a large, heavy golden necklace engraved with runes.

Most tales agree the necklace was given to the first Brisinga king by one of the gods, though which one varies depending on the translation. One version says it was given by Sigel to help the Brisinga stand against the Liche-Priest, whose rise was foretold by the Norns. Those who favor the "flaming" title insist it was a gift from Kenaz, who foresaw the Blizzard War and provided it to mortals to help balance the odds.

Its powers similarly vary by deity. One legend says it could emit a blinding light capable of destroying shades (often rendered as undead in modern stories). Another says it brought forth searing flames and warded the land from the effects of harsh winters so long as the king remained true and just.

One obscure legend gives the necklace no showy powers and attributes its creation to both Kenaz and Sigel. Perhaps sensing their future fate, the necklace was given to mortals as a means of liberating the deities from whatever fate awaited them. A variant story holds that the gods placed part of their core essence in the necklace, entrusting mortals to guard it. Thus, while Kenaz and Sigel's current forms *might* be slain, the essences contained in Brisingamen ensure they are not truly dead.

Unfortunately, the Anari invasion meant Brisingamen was never wielded in battle against either the Liche-Priest or the Hellfrost army. What became of it is a mystery and the subject of much speculation. Some say it was stolen by the Anari and taken back to Alantaris Isle as a trophy, whereupon it was lost when Imperial City was razed. Others insist the Brisinga buried in somewhere in the vicinity of their capital, planning on recovering it later.

Brisingaton, which translates simply as "the enclosure of the Brisinga," was the tribe's capital. It exists today only as faint marks in the grasslands of northeast Royalmark. A single standing stone, raised by the Royalmarkers when the first high king was elected, marks the supposed site of the Brisinga kings' palace.

EALDSTANAR

Population: 254
Ruler: Ridder Heremund Edheahsunu

The buildings of the small farming community of Ealdstanar ("Ancient Stones" in Auld Saxa) encircle a large, flat-topped conical hill. Standing atop the mound is a crude circle made up of 13 standing stones. Despite the stones predating the founding of the Marklands by untold centuries, the locals hold rites to Thunor in the circle. There are plenty of tales concerning the stones moving of their own volition and even talking, but very few eyewitnesses—mostly these happened to some ancestor or another.

Druids, mainly from Dreamwood, visit regularly, conducting their own rites by moonlight. The villagers don't particularly approve of "their" circle being used in this manner, but they aren't prepared to interfere or complain too loudly, especially as the High King is trying to court the elves.

EAST AND WEST OCKSTER

Population: 210 (East) and 256 (West)
Ruler: Ridder Edlaf Sigewaldsunu (East) and Riddera Botswith Godwigsdohtor (West)

Feuds are nothing new to the Saxa. While most die out within a generation or two, the feud that wracks East and West Ockster has lasted over a century. Formerly one village, the land was divided between two sons, the ancestors of the current rulers. Their father neglected to assign one long, thin field that lay between the two estates. For 115 years the two families have rowed over its ownership.

While they did nothing to resolve the dispute permanently, wiser heads prevailed 50 years ago. Each year in late winter, two teams gather on their side of the field to play knattleikr. Whichever side wins has the right to plant and harvest the field for the coming year. The game is invariably violent and cheating is commonplace. The only strict rule is that either side may field no more than two outsiders—a rule introduced after West Ockster hired the best players in Royalmark one year. The irony is the field is not the most productive. Ownership, albeit temporarily, has become a matter of pride.

Aside from the annual dispute, which in all honesty has devolved into an excuse for a public holiday and to blow off steam during the cold, dark months, there is no animosity among the commoners. The field is barely 15 yards wide, and while it separates the villages geographically it does nothing to prevent the local mingling socially or intermarrying.

The two noble families, however, have not spoken to each other

Royalmark



Population: 119,547 (84% Saxa, 10% Anari, 4% hearth elves, 1% engro, 1% frostborn)
Ruler: High Cyning Eyolf Melnirsunu
Religion: Sigel, Tiw, Hothar, Eostre, Scaetha
Imports: Gold, mead, pipeleaf, silver
Exports: Artwork, beer, cheese, jewelry

Witchered lands
Royalmark
Vieluno
Blood Mire
Black Heath
Mead Hall of the Damned
Workshop of Damnation
Black Towers
Necropolis of the Princes
Deathwatch
The Temple of Bound Plague
Deathspider Hall
Darkwood Forest
Lower Guard
Sanctuary
The Pinnacle
Spyre
Dale
Beorgton
Egmund's Stead
Salnorr
East & West Ockster
Temmelos
Lesser Hills
Tintinhaile
Ravensburg
Sun Spire Temple
Border Crossing
Moot Hill
Mounds of Heroes Gone
Offering Stone
Hearth Range
Purple Hills
Heroes Rest
Tiw's Spring
Tiw's Ridge
Internment Camp
Hearth Bridge
Seolfor Cemetery
Tintvoll
R. Hearthrun
Seolfor Hills
Shade Marsh



in decades. Given the blood of their ancestors has thinned somewhat after five generations, it would (in theory) be simple enough for them to join together through marriage, return Ockster to having one lord, and settle the dispute forever.

EGMUND'S STEAD

Until a month ago Egmund's Stead was a small farming community. A neighbor, visiting to trade fresh milk for winter beets, discovered the entire stead had vanished, swallowed into a deep hole which had opened directly beneath the farmstead. The High Cyning ordered an immediate investigation. Huscarls descended into the gaping earth-wound and reported finding smashed timbers and mangled bodies, as well as a number of passages leading off into darkness.

Too afraid to explore further, for such passageways invariably lead to Ertha's Realm, the haunted underworld where Sigel is powerless, they recovered the bodies for burial and searched no further. Eyolf, though, is keen to know whether this is an isolated incident, for Ertha often shakes the ground when angry at something, an omen of things to come.

GNATMARSH

Until recently the denizens of Gnatmarsh kept to themselves. Small numbers of marsh trolls would occasionally stumble from the mire, but the local militia is well versed in dealing with them.

Recently though, something has stirred up the disparate tribes of bufomi. Rumors are a band of pirate hunters crossed over from the Crystalflow Confederacy and slew an entire tribe of the toad men. Individually the tribes were no more than a nuisance to Royalmark, but word is they are gathering under a slime lord. Angered at the intrusion into their dank domain, the bufomi have made several audacious attacks against caravans and isolated steads in Royalmark. Captives and livestock have been taken and homes burned to the ground.

Jarl Aethelgeat, the local noble, has no desire to send his huscarls into Gnatmarsh. Instead, he is seeking mercenaries (read adventurers) to end the problem before it gets out of hand.

GULLVEIG'S MEADOW

In the northern foothills of the Hearth Range, a day's ride from the royal capital of Ravensburg, is a meadow sacred to Gullveig, god of brewing and mead-thane to the gods. Wild flowers grow here in abundance. Wild bees, both normal sized and giant, can still be found here drinking the sweet nectar. Brewers, healers, and herbalists especially prize their honey.

Spirit Name: The resident spirit is known as Mead-Thane to followers of Gullveig, Queen Bee to servants of Eostre, and Lord of Stings to those of Vali.

Ambience: The meadow is awash with colorful flowers, instilling feelings of calm. Lurking behind this veneer is one of menace, for while the bees allow travelers to walk the meadow unmolested, they quickly turn violent if their hives are disturbed.

Deity: Gullveig. The god of brewers is associated with Eostre (both aspects) and Vali.

Senses: Mead-Thane sees and hears through the bees inhabiting the meadow. If one of them happens to leave the confines of the meadow, an area of some 12 acres, the connection is lost until the bee returns.

Communication: When Mead-Thane deigns to speak, something he does only rarely, bees form Auld Saxa runes in the air.

Should the site be defiled or honey gathered, or visitors try to fend off the bees with fire, smoke, or cold, Mead-Thane calls forth either a Wild Card bee swarm filling a Large Burst Template, or several Wild Card giant bees to punish the transgressors. Each time his protector is slain, another is summoned in its place. The bees won't leave the boundary of the meadow unless attacked with ranged weapons.

Sacrifice: Mead-Thane is ever-thirsty for mead. A minimum of one pint must be poured onto the meadow if the character desires to gather honey. Failure to do so increases the Vigor (or Faith)

penalty to –4. A gallon of mead poured as a libation turns the –2 penalty into a +2 bonus. Using additional mead has no effect.

Powers: Honey gathered here has exceptional properties. When creating alchemical *greater healing*, *healing*, or *regeneration* devices, or antibacterial, antibiotic, antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, antitoxin, good substitute, healing, stimulant I, or stimulant IV herbal remedies have +2 to the appropriate creation roll for each pound of honey used. When used to brew mead, each pound grants +1 to Knowledge (Craft: Brewing).

Unfortunately, gathering the honey is no easy task, for the bees defend their hives with great ferocity. During each hour of honey gathering a hero must make a Vigor roll at –2. Worshippers of Eostre, Gullveig, or Vali may roll Faith instead of Vigor, using prayers and secret songs to calm the bees. With success, the character gains one pound of honey, two pounds with a raise. Failure causes a level of Fatigue as per Bumps and Bruises from multiple stings. A critical failure inflicts a wound. Due to the lengthening winters, honey can be gathered only in late summer.

Lay worshippers of Eostre and Vali are permitted to gather a maximum of 4 pounds of honey per year. Devoted followers may gather 6 pounds, clerics 8 pounds, and disciples 10 pounds. Those of Gullveig are allowed double the quantity. All others are limited to just two pounds per annum. Once the maximum limit is reached, any further attempts to garner more honey automatically result in a level of Fatigue, as if the Vigor roll were failed. Each pound of honey has a resale value of 50 gs per pound.

HEARTH RANGE

A number of steads bordering the Hearth Range have recently been attacked and destroyed, leaving no survivors. Many buildings and corpses appeared to have been struck by lightning, though no storms were reported in the vicinity at the estimated time of attack. Agitators are spreading rumors Thunor is angry at the lack of worship he receives in Royalmark, something High Cyning Eyolf, who is naturally superstitious for such was the old way, is slow to deny.

Someone searching for bears in the weathered peaks claims to have witnessed giants stomping through the mountains. As tall as frost giants, he swears they had light gray skin, jet-black hair, and eyes the color and intensity of lightning. The only historical records matching this description are songs dating date back many centuries. These old tales refer to the creatures as *styrmanjotunn*, or storm giants.

LAWSPEAKER HILL

Within the great hill fort of Moot Hill stands Lawspeaker Hill. The flat-topped hill measures some 60 yards in diameter and rises to a height of just 10 yards. The flat-topped summit is square and marked at the corners by man-sized posts carved to resemble Hothar, god of justice. Left unadorned when Lawspeaker Hill is not in use, the eyes of the statues are ritually covered with scarves by clerics of Hothar before any legal case is heard on the summit.

From here the High King dispenses justice and royal decrees at the annual moot. Other parties are free to use the site to conduct legal cases, though the remoteness of Moot Hill means it is used only in extraordinary circumstances or when the moot occurs.

Spirit Name: Tryggðvolva ("Truth-prophet").

Ambience: Lawspeaker Hill resonates heavy with an air of authority and truthfulness. Liars and criminals, such as those with the Wanted Hindrance, find the atmosphere cloying and oppressive.

Deity: Hothar.

Senses: Notice d4. Tryggðvolva emits a constant *detect truth* spell within the confines of the four marker posts.

Communication: Tryggðvolva speaks only on matters of law, and then only in response to specific questions concerning legal matters. It has Knowledge (Law) d12+2 and a d10 Wild Die, but its knowledge extends only to the laws of the Marklands. It has no interest in the interpretation of the law—that lies in the hands of mortals—and deals only in hard facts.

Sacrifice: Before a legal case can be heard on the hill all participants, whether plaintiff, defendant, judge, jury, or legal representative, must swear an oath to uphold the word of the law. A drop of blood must then be smeared on each of the four marker posts. Anyone who refuses to carry out the ritual loses their right to speak during the legal case.

Powers: Whoever is judging a legal case heard on Lawspeaker Hill must make themselves known to Tryggðvolva through the ritual described above. For the duration of the case the judge receives three uses of *detect lie*. No casting roll is required. Should someone desire to *dispel* or *negate* the power, Tryggðvolva resists with a d12 arcane skill die and a d10 Wild Die.

Should the judge tell a lie during the case while within the confines of the site, he is struck deaf, dumb, and blind for a period of 24 hours.

LONGRASS MEADOW

Longrass Meadow (an ancient derivation of Long Grass) is an expanse of tall, wild grass bordering Nordmark. Many who enter never return, and local stead owners avoid the area. Suggestions as to the nature of the danger range from bandits, wolves, and orms to the less believable two-legged carnivorous lizards.

MOUNDS OF HEROES GONE

The entire ancestral Saxa burial ground is a sacred place, at least to those of Saxa blood. The Mounds have been used to bury honored Saxa for almost three and a half centuries. Given the widespread Saxa migrations after winning their freedom from the Anari, it is a rare living Saxa who does not have an ancestor entombed here.

Within the Mounds grows a pale white flower known as barrowbloom. It is found only on the tombs of the Saxa kings of old. When cut and properly prepared, it grants a +2 bonus to create *charismatic aura* alchemical devices. The Mounds feature heavily in adventure *H1 Sins of the Father*.

Spirit Name: Unlike many other sacred places, the Mounds have not one spirit but a whole host of spirits—the spirits of the heroes gone.

Ambience: Fear and dread. On nights of the Deorcmonan the entire Mounds is blanketed by a *fear* spell cast with a raise. Anyone stepping foot into the Mounds must make a Spirit roll at –2 or flee in terror. Intruders not of Saxa blood roll at an additional –2. This cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*.

So traumatized are those who fail the roll by the intense feelings of dread, the frightened interloper cannot even attempt to walk the Mounds again at night for a whole month. If he enters them in daylight during the month, he automatically suffers the effects of Fear (as per failing the roll) until he leaves.

Deity: As a burial ground, the site is sacred to Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: The shades of the long-dead heroes rise from their graves to converse with the supplicant. They speak only Saxa.

Sacrifice: None. On nights of the Deorcmonan, Saxa may try to enter the Mounds and petition their ancestors to help them. This requires a Persuasion roll at –6. A +1 bonus is earned for each whole 20 Glory (positive) of the petitioner and a –1 penalty is applied for each –20 Glory.

Powers: With success, the spirits will do one of the following—answer a question to the best of their ability (they are not omnipotent and know little of the present age), grant the petitioner a one-use spell appropriate to his request (always activated using Spirit), or grant the would-be hero access to a relic from one of the tombs (which must be returned within a year or the spirits will hunt down and slay the character). The GM decides which is most appropriate based on the Glory and Rank of the hero, and the nature of and reasons for his request.

Special: If the Mounds are disturbed, the spirits assume physical form and attack. Any type of undead can be used to represent the spirits' corporeal forms, though they are not considered servants of Hela in this instance. Slaying the physical form does not harm the spirit, which can only be removed by using *banish*. Such an affront would quickly be relayed to the Saxa clans—the perpetrator would have to spend the rest of his days running from reprisal.

The spirits can work together to produce a variety of spelllike



Ravensburg

1. Hartstead
2. The Armory
3. The Court
4. The Great Temple
5. Hall of the Kings
6. Not Ravensburg
7. Baracks

Population: 9750 Ruler: Count High Cyning Eyolf Melnirsunu

RING FORTS

Ring fortresses are of Saxa origin, although they take their basic shape from the old hill forts that dot the landscape. At its most basic a ring fort is a circular earth bank fronted by a wide ditch. Atop the bank is a palisade, behind which is a fighting platform. In most cases the bank is fronted by two rows of wooden stakes filled with rubble to prevent enemies from mining the walls.

The standard design has four gates, with two roads dividing the interior into quarters. Three of these divisions contain longhouses, used as barracks, while the fourth contains workshops, storerooms, a small temple, and the like.

Toughness: 30 (14); **Siege Bonus:** +2; **Defenders:** 200; **Supplies:** 12; **Cost:** 100,000 gs

effects if the feel they must defend their hallowed homes. Collectively, they have Spellcasting d12+2 and a d10 Wild Die. Suggested spells include *bladebreaker, bolt* (howling spirits)*, confusion, fear, fog cloud, negate arcana,* and *storm*. The spells, including targeted spells such as *bladebreaker, fear,* and *bolt*, cover the entire Mounds or affects everyone on the Mounds (as appropriate) simultaneously—only those the spirits wish to remain safe are unaffected.

Dispel is of no use due to the size of the Mounds. *Negate arcana* creates a small pocket of safety, assuming it is cast successfully.

THE PURPLE HILLS

Named for the heather that flowers in summer, the higher peaks of the Purple Hills are avoided by those who know their reputation. Folklore says the hills were once the haunt of Wulfgar Coal-Heart, a powerful and particularly cruel bandit lord who terrorized the land 120 years ago. Wulfgar was eventually hunted down and slain, his head placed on a pike outside the high king's hall as a warning to future bandits, but his ghost still haunts the hills. Many believe he guards his treasure, which was never found.

It is certainly true that explorers trying to locate the stash more often than not never return. One reason the locals fear to tread the hills is because the remains of those who perish here are more often than not found beheaded by the next adventurous treasure hunters to venture in the hills, their severed heads placed on sharp spikes.

RAVENSBURG

This entry expands on important locales within the capital of Royalmark.

The Armory: The main temple to Tiw, the Armory serves as an actual armory and a training ground for the Ravens. The forges are maintained by clerics of Kenaz. The clerics of Tiw serve their god first and Royalmark second, though all have taken vows never to fight against the High Cyning.

Any worshipper of Tiw can find hospitality here, though he must amuse the priests and paladins with tales of his exploits. The better the tale, the better the hospitality he receives. Some boasting is expected, but lies revealed as such are met in the traditional rebuke of Tiw's clergy—a thorough pummeling.

The Court: Since High Cyning Eyolf is the highest authority in the land, he holds his law court in the temple of Hothar, an imposing wooden edifice known simply as the Court. The temple's library is well-stocked with manuscripts covering all aspects of Saxa law and culture, though none dates more than 50 years after the founding of Royalmark. As manuscripts become fragile with age they are copied, double checked to ensure no new ideas or translations have crept in, and then destroyed as part of a ritual. The clerics also sell alchemical devices, but only to Royalmark nobles.

The Great Temple: The center of Eostre's cult, the Great Temple holds clerics of both aspects. Formerly just a single hall of worship, the temple has grown into a sprawling network of side halls and outbuildings containing granaries, barracks, stables, veterinary clinics, a midwifery, a smithy and farrier's workshop, and other such necessities. The cult of Eira maintains a small infirmary here.

Most of the clergy are Sowers and Husbanders of the Cultivator sect, though a few Reapers are stationed here for security purposes. The clerics manufacture and sell a range of alchemical charms and herbal brews to anyone with the money. Many citizens living nearby get married by a priest of Hothar, but come to the Great Temple for Eostre's blessing. The service isn't free, but it is popular with couples who want children.

Every year the clerics hold a great feast two weeks after Reaping Day. Food is parceled out to the citizens of Ravensburg, each receiving the exact same amount regardless of rank or status. Traditionally, the nobility are expected to refuse their share, ensuring that those more in need are catered for.

Hall of the Kings: This magnificent mead hall, easily as grand as the royal palace with regard the workmanship used in its construction, is protected day and night by a detachment of the high cyning's bodyguard and clerics of Scaetha.

Without exception and on penalty of immediate execution, entrance to the opulently decorated interior is forbidden to all persons save the high cyning, and he enters only on the eve of First Death Day. It is said that on this night, Scaetha permits the spirits of the high kings of old to return to the mortal realm to council the incumbent monarch. During his annual visit, security is increased to an entire company of elite huscarls, while the clerics sing dirges in honor of the dead.

It is rumored the interior is dominated by a vast table carved from a single tree trunk. Engraved around it in Auld Saxa runes are the names of every high king since the foundation of the Marklands. That of the current high king never appears while he lives, and a throne carved to resemble a storm dragon marks his position. No carpenter has admitted setting foot inside, and stories abound that when a high king dies his name magically appears on the table's polished surface.

Not-Ravensburg: Many non-Saxa living in Ravensburg set up home in an area known as Not-Ravensburg. It is not fenced off from the main city, though its borders are obvious by the marked change in the style of houses. Foreign customs may be practiced openly here, so long as they do not slander Royalmark or involve sedition. Most visitors prefer to seek hospitality here, something the native Royalmarkers are only too happy to oblige.

REEDFOLDA

Population: 206

Ruler: Thegn Egfrid Bercthunsunu

The inhabitants of Reedfolda believe the name comes from "reed field," a clear reference to the nearby swathes of tall reeds which line the banks of several slow-flowing, shallow rivers. The network of rivers flows lazily across Royalmark, following the line of the road to Moot Hill before they join with the turbulent waters of the upper Crystalflow.

In truth, the name has nothing to do with reeds. It is a corruption of "read," which means red in the Saxa language. Reedfolda sits on the edge of the Mounds of Heroes Gone, barely a mile from the site where an Anari army was massacred. Originally constructed as a fort, the village's purpose has altered over the centuries. Now it is a farming village, albeit a heavily defended one.

A circular wall measuring eight yards thick surrounds Reedfolda. The front is covered in four-yard high oak timbers, sharpened to a point at the top. The topmost yard forms a palisade, from behind which defenders can snipe at attackers. Behind the palisade is the wide fighting platform. Logs cover the flat surface, preventing the rains from turning the area into a quagmire. The interior facing of the rampart is covered in wooden planks to prevent the compacted earth from slipping. Whereas the exterior facing rises vertically, the interior slopes at just over 60 degrees. Numerous sets of wooden steps cut into the ramp provide access onto the fighting platform.

Built into the rampart are a number of stone-lined chambers. The width varies, but none are deeper than five yards. For the most part these are cattle and sheep sheds, though some serve as storerooms and as quarters for the thralls. Entrance to each chamber is through a heavy wooden door, each sturdy enough to keep cattle from escaping.

Although raiders are rare (the nearby mountains containing only a handful of small goblin tribes of cowardly nature), the village has never expanded beyond its impressive ramparts. To the south are the Mounds, to the west the foothills of the Hearth Range, and to the north and east are open fields and pastures.

Reedfolda's houses are typically Saxa. Constructed with two timber walls packed with earth for insulation, the houses are roofed with thatch from the nearby reed beds, rather than turf as is common elsewhere. Only the hall of the local noble, Thegn Egfrid Bercthunsunu, has shingle roofing.

The village boasts two temples. The largest is dedicated to Eostre in both her aspects. The second honors Hothar. While Eostre's temple is the larger, it is the newer of the two. Hothar's temple was erected during the days when the village was a military camp as a symbol to mark the end of hostilities against the Anari. It is still in use today—the thegn holds his court here. Shrines to Eira, Rigr, Tiw, and Thunor stand in the village square. All take the form of standing stones.

Reedfolda is explored in greater detail in *H1 Sins of the Fathers*.

THE SOUTHERN WALL

Although Royalmark has yet to send troops to help Vestmark, it takes the threat of Orcmark very seriously. Should the Saxa realm fall, the military commanders of Royalmark have few doubts the Vale and the western Crystalflow Confederacy will be overrun within months. That would give the orcs a long border with Royalmark. To combat the threat, High King Eyolf has ordered the construction of fortifications along the southern border.

While work has begun in the far west, construction beginning on a length of fortifications stretching from the foothills of the Hearth Range around the back of Shade Marsh, territory the high king is quite prepared to lose, the full extent of the barrier is still being negotiated.

A staunch conservative faction wants the wall to extend along the entire border as far north as Gnatmarsh. A length of 300 miles, its construction would require masses amount of labor and material, but its supporters see it as the only guarantee of safety.

A less conservative faction wants the high king to enter negotiations with the Confederacy. They believe the wall should extend to the center of the bulge on the southern border, whereupon the Confederacy would erect a section running just to the south of Drakeport. Although this would mean sacrificing Rushton and its environs, they hope the merchant-princes will see sense in the plan. The alternative is either for the Confederacy to fortify its long border itself, or risk the orcs marching to the banks of the great river, building a navy, and setting sail into the heart of the realm.

The question of what to do about Jarl Wulfmund has yet to be raised. A man with few friends, many suspect he supports the plan (though with the addition of an annual tribute made to recompense him for the loss of valuable farmland) purely for his own ends. That he is erecting a palisade on his northern border is no secret. Once the wall is completed, his lands will be encircled with an impressive defensive line. Some suspect he will take advantage to this to declare himself independent of the high king.

Although work is under way in the southwest corner, progress is being hampered. Building material is going missing, the wage caravans sent to pay the laborers are being attacked by the mysterious bandits that plague Jarl Wulfmund's lands, and tools are broken. The cause of these problems is open to much speculation, with everything from angry ancestors to Confederacy saboteurs being blamed.

SUN SPIRE TEMPLE

Unusual for its design as well as its location, Sun Spire Temple is the most important center of Sigel worship in Royalmark. It lies in the middle of northeast Royalmark, and surrounded by a small village rather than a town, as is common of Sigel's halls. Constructed entirely of wood shortly after the Saxa liberated their lands from the Anari, it takes its name from the towering, slender spire that rises from its center. Covered in beaten gold, it shines like a fiery beacon, changing color as Sigel's Hearth traverses the heavens. Much of the interior of the spacious main hall is also covered in gold veneer.

The cult maintains a force of 50 paladins and 20 priests. Partly they serve to protect the valuable furnishings. While the wider cult is now focused on defeating the denizens of the Hellfrost, Sun Spire Temple remains focused on the cult's original purpose—combating the forces of darkness. In Royalmark, that means fighting back incursions from the Withered Lands. A small, sparsely furnished wing is set aside for visiting clerics of Scaetha, for the two cults often cooperate.

The cult sells alchemical devices. Most of their customers are huscarls, nobles, and mercenaries, for few others need the protection of Sigel in their daily lives.

TEMPLES OF EOSTRE

Outside of Aspiria, Royalmark has the strongest cult of Eostre in Rassilon. Although she ranks fourth on the list of gods worshipped, the difference in worshipper numbers between her cult and that of Sigel is measured in thousands rather than tens of thousands.

Much of Royalmark's boggy ground has been reclaimed through a network of drainage ditches and, while not an agricultural giant, the domain produces enough to comfortably feed its citizens. Most steads contain a shrine to one of Eostre's aspects, and the majority of villages have at least a small temple, though it often serves a secondary purpose, such as a threshing barn or milking shed. The great temple in Ravensburg, a structure dedicated solely to worship rather than work, is the center of cult activity.

Ancient rites give the cult the authority to set its own tithing, which has risen in recent years to 15% of the crop or livestock yield. Some of this is used to feed the poorest members of society, but the majority is donated to Vestmark to aid in the war effort. Unfortunately, the shipments encounter many obstacles.

Shipments sent via Coglelund are charged import duty on entering the realm and export duty on crossing into Vestmark. Caravans sent south often go missing. Jarl Wulfmund, whose lands sit at the southern end of Royalmark, blames bandits, orcs, and deserters from Vestmark for the losses, but many in the cult suspect foul play closer to home.

Plans are afoot to investigate the situation. Meanwhile, negotiators are trying to strike a low taxation deal with the Crystalflow Confederacy and the Vale to allow emergency supplies to use the trade network at reduced taxation levels.

TINTINHAILE

Population: 470
Ruler: Hauld Beorhtric Edmundsunu

Located in the northern foothills of the Hearth Range, a mere ten miles from the trade road, Tintinhaile's unusual name literally means "the one hundred hill." This refers to the large hill on the outskirts on the settlement, which serves as the moot for one hundred steads and households in the region.

The village is famous for its immense sheep herds, which roam the high hills and lower mountains from spring to fall before brought down to lower pastures as winter draws near. Sheep form the core the region's economy, with everything from the wool to milk being exported to passing traders.

Every year in mid to late Fogmonan, on a date chosen by the high priest of Eostre, the cleric judges the best ram from the herders' flocks. The competition is fiercely fought, and sabotage and bribery are commonplace. The winning beast then impregnates the temple's sheep flock. His work done, he spends the winter months inside the temple, bedecked in a woolen cloak covered in gold coins. Here he is lovingly pampered. On Birthing Day, when the first of his brood is born, the ram is ritually slaughtered and eaten. Its heart and testicles are burnt as offerings to Eostre.

Positioned above the temple roof is a colossal skull. From a distance it appears to be that of a huge ram, with immense spiral horns. Closer inspection reveals it is actually a mammoth skull, and the horns are man-made decorations.

The village has no inn. Visitors are offered hospitality in one of

the temple's large outbuildings or, if they have kith and kin here, in their homes.

The fertility of their rams is important to the villagers. Every year on Courtship Day, the young men compete to catch the eye of a girl, either a local or one of the many drawn here by the great market. The market, which serves as a major social gathering for the entire region, formally begins on Marketdaeg (the day after Courtship Day) and runs until the end of the week.

Dressed in sheepskin cloaks (complete with wool) and wearing headdresses fashioned from ram skulls, the men strut around the village. When two males wish to woo the same girl, they engage in a contest of running head butts. Victory goes to the last one standing, though it does not necessarily mean the girl will be impressed. Local folklore claims that the more citizens who marry on this day, the more fertile the rams will be.

PERSONS OF NOTE

While the heroes are unlikely to deal with the High Cyning personally, as they grow in prestige they may come to the attention of Royalmark's jarls. Not all the attention they receive may be benevolent, however.

JARL AETHELGEAT CENTWINESUNU

Jarl Aethelgeat has his holdings in the southern central belt, between the Mounds and Gnatmarsh. While no enemy of the High Cyning, either the man or the title, he opposes any plans to grant the cyning more power, believing that he should be a figurehead, with the jarls running the realm.

He argues the king should give up command of the army, save for his beloved Ravens, allowing the jarls to aid their allies as they see fit. Naturally, High Cyning Eyolf has no intention of handing over the bulk of his forces, for he knows the jarls' petty squabbles could quickly spill over into civil war.

JARL EALHSIGE EGHERESUNU

Jarl Ealhsige governs bordering Coglelund and the trade road. Ealhsige's traditional views have been eroded by the constant presence of the trade caravans laden with expensive foreign goods passing his borders. Nicknamed "the Peacock," he is a regular figure at court, strutting around in the robes of a Magocratic nobleman, completely oblivious to the titters and snide comments made behind his back.

Many think him a simpleton, for he is easily pleased by pretty things, but Ealhsige is a cunning manipulator, getting others to do his dirty work for him with a sly comment here and a throw away remark there. Those who underestimate him can quickly find themselves at a political disadvantage.

JARL GUNNBJORN OLADSUNU

Jarl Gunnbjorn, whose main hall is located in Salnorr, holds lands in northwest Royalmark. Cruelly nicknamed "Wife-Killer" by the pople, the jarl is a heavy drinker and a former shadow of the warrior of his youth. Many believe he is god-cursed, though few ever give a reason as to what sin he may have committed, referring only to his unfortunate life.

He has had six wives, all of whom died in childbirth. He did manage to sire three sons and a daughter, but fate has robbed him of them as well. All three of his sons died in battle, two against the orcs in Vestmark and one against the undead of the Withered Lands. His daughter died of red pox when only an infant.

With the black shadow of death seemingly ever present, Gunnbjorn took to the bottle on receiving news of the last son's death. That was a year ago and he has not stopped drinking since. On the rare occasions he is sober he rants at the unfairness of life, though he stops short of cursing the gods for his fate. Normally he is in a drunken stupor, leaving his closest ally, Hauld Regmund Wulfwigsunu to run his estates.

JARL JORMUNREK HRAFNSUNU

Jarl Jormunrek rules the lands across the Crystalflow, and is responsible for the security of Moot Hill. Jormunrek watched as Nordmark tore itself apart through civil war and then again two years later as the young pretender's army tore through the land. At first the jarl had considered siding with one of Nordmark's jarls, hoping to earn favor and gain land in the realm. But the bravery, strategic skill, leadership, and audacity of young Geirmund stayed his hand.

Tired of the impotence of the High Cyning, Jormunrek is seriously considering breaking his oath of allegiance and throwing his lot in with the young king. Only two things hold him in check. First, half the troops in his domain are loyal to the High Cyning. Second, by breaking his oath of allegiance his loyalty to Geirmund would automatically be suspect. The former he can deal with, but the second requires carefully political maneuvering.

JARLA OSWITH COELBALDSDOHTOR

Although Royalmark tradition frowns heavily on women achieving positions of power, no law prevents a female for holding an active noble title (as opposed by being a good wife and holding a passive title). When Oswith's father died she fought off two brothers and a cousin to seize the jarldom. Knowing that as a woman every decision she made would be subject to close scrutiny and twisted by her rivals, she has ruled cautiously but wisely. Fanatically loyal to the High Cyning and an ultra-conservative Saxa, she currently has the hearts and minds of her people, something other claimants to the seat cannot abide much longer.

JARL THORGEIR SKUMASUNU

Jarl Thorgeir's lands are in the northeast corner of Royalmark, bordering much of Darkwood and its border with the Freelands.

Wisely considered an untrustworthy weasel by his peers, Thorgeir is rumored to have poisoned his father and arranged the assassination of other claimants to the vacant seat. The High Cyning is well aware of the stories, and it is no coincidence the garrison of Hereford comprises men loyal to the king rather than the jarl.

JARL WULFMUND ANGARSUNU

Jarl Wulfmund rules the south of the country, his borders stretching from the border with Vestmark along those of the Vale and along part of the Crystalflow Confederacy.

A tyrant and bully, Wulfmund openly scorns the authority of the king, although he has taken no overt actions against his liege. With only a narrow gap between the end of the Hearth Range and the border with the Confederacy (an opening rapidly being blocked off by a long palisade) granting access to his realm, Wulfmund rules as an autocratic tyrant. Refugees from Vestmark seeking sanctuary were welcomed with open arms, then forced into servitude as thralls, their possessions sold to pay for their room and board. A worshipper of Hothar, Wulfmund takes the faith to its strictest meaning, favoring harsh punishments for petty infractions of the law and crushing dissension in his mailed fist.

NO BLAME

A priest of the Unknowable One, No Blame (the only name he has gone by since he was a toddler) is a mischief maker of the highest order. He brazenly commits minor crimes and social *faux pas*, then, using his sly tongue, quick wit, and miracles, quickly shifts the blame onto a nearby innocent, who must now deal with the consequences. On rare occasions he commits a more serious crime, but never one that involves bloodshed, force, or which would leave the victim susceptible to immediate harm or have the blamed soul executed or outlawed. At worst, a heavy fine or flogging may be imposed.

As a devoted trickster, he is fully aware that sooner or later his pranks will backfire and land him in hot water, but until the Unknowable One deems fit to teach him a lesson he continues to make a nuance of himself.

SEITHRBY

A realm of scattered Saxa tribes and their Anari slaves, Seithrby sits at the crossroads between the High and Low Winterlands. Conquered a generation ago, Seithrby appears tranquil and stable, yet beneath the surface is a land of competing nobles, raiding undead, and outmoded attitudes. And lurking deep beneath its rolling hills and fertile plains are dark secrets, terrible secrets of yesteryear that refuse to die.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Seithrby.

* **Mage Lover:** All mages, regardless of their tradition, receive a +2 Charisma bonus when dealing personally with Aethling Cuthwulf.

* **Nobility:** Unless he is the child of a thegn or granted the title by the aethling for exceptionally loyal service, the highest rank a player character can achieve is hauld.

* **Racist Attitudes:** A small minority hold the Anari as an underclass fit only to live as slaves. When dealing with much of the senior nobility, any Anari heroes suffer a –2 penalty to Charisma.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Seithrby is governed in accordance to ancient Saxa custom, or at least the aethling's interpretation of it. The realm is very much centered on the warrior culture, rather than personal wealth or social influence. The only exception to this is magicians, for Cuthwulf has a fascination with the magical arts.

Aethling Cuthwulf sits at the top of the social ladder. He is the highest authority in the land and his word is absolute. The only area he has no control over is the decisions of the regional moots, which govern civil crime and local problems. Under Saxa custom, no noble can interfere with the moot or override their decisions. Cuthwulf's word is absolute, though he does not take major decisions without consulting his councilors.

The royal council comprises the four thegns, the realm's high priests of Eostre, Tiw, Neorthe, and Scaetha (though the latter rarely attends unless business concerns the Liche Lands), and a cleric of Hothar (whoever is free at the time attends). The court meets in full session only four times a year, though the aethling may summon it at his pleasure. Cuthwulf is not bound by honor or law to accept his council's recommendations. They are merely an advisory body. However, like the Saxa kings of old, he listens to what they have to say, if only to give the illusion the nobles have any sway. In truth, Cuthwulf's power is like that of any Saxa ruler—it extends as far as the will behind the command will allow. In Cuthwulf's case, that does not extend to the entire realm.

Since Cuthwulf is only an aethling, he has not allowed the title of jarl to be used by his senior nobles. Instead, the four senior noblemen of the realm are thegns. Between them, the prince and the thegns own all the land, making everyone else their subjects. This is not to imply any form of slavery—most citizens own their own land, but do so at the cost of allegiance to the nobleman in whose domain their land falls.

Every thegn is entitled to appoint haulds, lendmenn, and ridders as he sees fit, but any land he grants them must come from his personal fief. The more nobles a thegn creates, the less personal land he has to generate income. Many huscarls hold the rank of ridder.

Seithrby does not divide the non-nobles by class, but rather judges them by status.

Immediately beneath the nobility are the clerics of Tiw and the non-titled huscarls, followed closely by master weaponsmiths and armorers and then lesser craftsmen of the same ilk. The high priest of Tiw is always given the title hauld out of respect for his office, though it does not pass to his offspring.

Next come the clerics of the other gods. Every high priest, the highest ranking member of a cult in Seithrby as appointed by his peers, carries the title lendmann at minimum, making them noblemen of the realm.

Below these are the master craftsmen and rich merchants, followed by members of the profession. Stead owners who own their own land, rather than being tenants of the nobility, rich tenant farmers and shepherds, fishermen, and finally the common laborers who perform menial tasks for others yet are still free men.

Beholden to the old ways, the ruler of Seithrby has legalized slavery. Many Anari families were taken as thralls shortly after the invasion. A few have been freed, but most remain enslaved. Most perform menial labor, such as dung and fagot collecting, shepherding, or plowing, sowing, and reaping the fields.

THE SEITHRBY MOOTS

Seithrby has two types of moot. The smallest moot, the hundred, is so named because its jurisdiction encompasses just one hundred families. Despite the name, the moot rarely has exactly the required number of families—families move and merge over time. The boundaries were set down shortly after the invasion, when Cuthwulf ordered a census to be taken. Twenty years on, there are no plans to move them. There is one regional moot in each of the domains of the aethling and his four thegns.

The hundred governs all civil cases, while the regional moots handle criminal cases. While any free man may attend, only those who live within the jurisdiction of the moot may speak, unless called to do so as a witness.

The moots gather at the start of each season on Raestdaeg at a predetermined spot. Traditionally the moot must always be held on a hill. Because the realms are quite large and the population widely spread, the exact location of the regional moot changes each year so no one has to keep traveling long distances. Hundred moots are always held at the same place.

Each year, ten men at each moot are elected by their peers as doomsmen ("judgment men"). These men are judge and jury, listening to cases before passing judgment according to the ancient laws. While elections are open to anyone, it tends to be the same families represented time and time again.

Nobles are not permitted to be doomsmen or interfere with the moot, nor may they take cases before it. If they have an issue with a commoner or another noble, they must take the matter to their feudal superior. Aethling Cuthwulf, who has no feudal superiors, is not totally above the law—should he be accused of a civil offense, his council judge him.

Unlike in other realms, those accused in a civil case or who wish to bring one cannot be tried by the court of Hothar or the nobility. The moot is their only recourse. Conversely, the nobility or cult of Hothar has no authority to overturn a decision made by the moot.

The appropriate temple always judges those who break religious law—the courts and nobility have no power to try citizens for crimes which are neither civil nor criminal breaches of the law. The local noble always hears criminal cases. There are no grounds for appeal in any trial—all sentences are final and punishments are quickly meted out.

EDUCATION

Education is the responsibility of parents, not formal establishments, though temples are permitted to provide instruction in accordance with the god's teachings, and skalds, magical or mundane, may teach about the glory days of the Saxa. Children are expected to learn basic literacy and numeracy, the laws of the land, history as written by the invading Saxa clan (which depicts Cuthwulf to be a liberating hero rather than a conquering warlord), the names of the powerful nobles and their standards, the geography of the realm, and folklore concerning old heroes.

Since Cuthwulf took control Saxa culture has been stamped on Seithrby. The teaching of anything concerning the Anari is forbidden, except that they once enslaved the Saxa and stole their lands. Singing Anari songs or telling their stories is a civil offense.

Cuthwulf's dislike of the Anari is based on personal bias. He wishes to promote Saxa culture as superior, and is trying to rekindle old hatreds. Unfortunately, most of the native population (those who did not come with the invading clan) let bygones be bygones a century or more ago. They see their Anari neighbors, now enslaved, as unjust victims of a crusade that ended with peace long ago. Those who took Anari slaves did so to save them from the new masters. Thus, while the law decries Anari culture as something forbidden, the vast majority of the population shuns the law as draconian and unjust. Since the old families are the majority, cases that reach the moot are quickly dismissed with a token fine of 1 gold scield—justice must be seen to be done, after all.

More advanced education is possible, but only at a temple or via a skald. Knowledge of other realms is not only permitted it is actively encouraged, but only so long as the Saxa are cast in a positive light and the Anari relegated to a violent footnote in history. Many huscarls are skilled in the art of battle strategy and tactics.

RELIGION

The citizens of Seithrby hold four major gods—Eostre, Tiw, Neorthe, and Scaetha—as more important than the others, though most gods receive some worship.

Although Seithrby exports a little meat and vegetables to its neighbors, they do not contribute much toward its economy. Still, the land is fertile, there is a noticeable if short growing season, and the people are self-sufficient for basic foods. Were the population to expand, allowing more productivity, Seithrby might well become a major exporter.

Both aspects of Eostre are popular, though the twin cults do not hold equal power in all communities. In Murton, for example, Eostre Animalmother is dominant, whereas Eostre Plantmother is more popular in Seaton. Elsewhere, there is often a single temple shared between the two branches of the cult.

Aethling Cuthwulf is a man fascinated by the Saxa's warrior past. His family tree, drawn up by skalds, ties him to many heroes of the Saxa rebellion against the Anari, though such claims are virtually impossible to prove, or disprove, after so many generations. Although not a competent warrior by any definition of the word, the prince likes to think he is. As such, he has made Tiw his nation's patron deity. While the Saxa honor Tiw accordingly, if only to appease their master, Anari are seldom found attending ceremonies.

Neorthe is popular, but only in the west and north. Many small fishing villages line the edge of White Lake and the banks of the river that separates Seithrby from Shattered Moor. The ice covering White Lake is thick enough to support ships fitted with ice riggers, but there are no major settlements worth visiting.

Conversely, Scaetha's cult is strong in the east. Seithrby has the unenviable position of having the longest border with the Liche Lands of any civilized realm. While undead have not yet crossed the border in any strength, the citizens are taking no chances with their eternal souls.

Of the other gods, Eostre and Kenaz are popular in the town of Seithrby, the realm's industrial heartland. Metalworking and pottery are two key industries, though only the latter is for export. With no mines, quarries, or clay pits of any great note, the cult of Ertha has yet to spread far.

Freo has shrines in the major settlements, though his cult cannot truly be called popular. Seithrby is a large realm with a small, scattered population. With long-distance travel a requirement for those wishing to attend market or visit neighbors, honoring Freo before a journey begins is merely an act of prudence.

Cuthwulf considers himself a just and honorable man. The cult of Hothar is honored, but only as a token gesture. Outside of the capital it has few adherents, the god being invoked only at the regional moots.

While Maera has few worshippers, Cuthwulf has spent a fortune constructing a small but lavishly decorated temple to the goddess of magic. With its name supposedly translating as the "town of magic," the prince truly believes his realm is blessed by Maera. Clerics of the goddess and all mages are especially welcomed here.

Many Saxa consider Thunor one of their patrons, but in Seithrby it is the Anari who hold him in greatest esteem. Although Cuthwulf is not a tyrant, he is still a conqueror and an enslaver. Many native Saxa quote Thunor's holy texts as a safe way of speaking out against the enslavement of the Anari, for Cuthwulf dare not punish them from repeating the word of a god.

The cult of Var is growing in popularity in the capital, but struggles elsewhere due to the lack of major population centers. Most worshippers are simply passing through, members of caravans heading to or from Shattered Moor.

Amid the isolated steads of the central and eastern reaches the cult of Hela is slowly on the rise. Many believe the Liche-Priest will return, and Seithrby is too weak to resist his onslaught. Better to be a sheep than the sacrificial lamb. Most cultists pay lip service, but a small few fanatics are beginning to delve into the darker practices of her insane cult.

MILITARY

Seithrby has professional soldiers, but it has no true standing army. Every thegn maintains a small number huscarls and the aethling has his own guard of huscarls. These warriors constitute the only professional military in the realm. In accordance with the old laws, the thegns are expected to be leaders in battle as well as in peace.

The number of warriors by region and the combat prowess of the rulers is given below.

Murton: 15 veteran and 27 typical huscarls. Thegn Analf is a Saxa noble in the style of his distant ancestors—courageous and ready for battle. With the community centered on livestock rather than farming, Murton and its steads always have spare men for war.

Ryhoepe: 15 veteran and 40 typical huscarls. Thegn Osric is a tried and tested warrior, with a stout heart. Unfortunately, Osric is more interested in harming his cousin than truly helping against any invaders.

Seaton: 3 veteran and 29 typical huscarls. Thegn Whitburh is an old and skilled warrior. Unfortunately, his people are inclined to avoid the call to arms.

Seithrby: 25 veteran and 65 typical huscarls. The prince also has an unruly mob of 10 berserkers at his disposal. Aethling Cuthwulf is infatuated with the old tales of Saxa heroes, but lacks the drive and skill to become one. Any battle led by him would likely be an unmitigated disaster.

Wulfcestre: 8 veteran and 30 typical huscarls. Cenwalch is a craven coward. He is quick to send warriors to help his lord, but slow to attend in person.

Around half of the huscarls are permanent warriors—the rest are stead owners, ready to don their armor and carry their weapons to war whenever it is required of them but spending most of their time engaged in other pursuits. Of the full-time soldiers, around half are usually stationed at their master's hall—the other half patrol the borders on horseback. Most huscarls hold the title of ridder as a mark of their office. Regardless of whether or not they serve full-time, the huscarls gather at the lord's hall every Raestdaeg to feast, be entertained, and renew their oaths of allegiance.

Only Cuthwulf and his thegns have the legal right to summon the *fyrd*, a body of poorly armed and trained which numbers, in

theory, all men of fighting age. Although the major settlements are little more than villages, the reach of the thegns extends far beyond the gates of their domains. Typically a call to arms sees around 205 of the male population answer, less during harvest or lambing. The militia knows how to form a shield wall, how to sing Tiw's war chants, and how to follow orders, but they are a weak fighting force. Without the huscarls to guide them, they would shatter and run far more easily than Cuthwulf cares to admit.

Cuthwulf is head of the realm, but under the old Saxa laws he instituted he can only ask his nobles to send warriors when the need arises. In olden days, kings and aethlings wielded sufficient authority to command obedience, but Cuthwulf is weak and only half his thegns hold him any true loyalty. When the army musters in any strength, it does so under the banner of the aethling. However, each thegn's contingent sub-musters under his banner, resulting in a sizeable army, yet one not used to fighting with any cohesion.

Only huscarls have the resources and need to invest in heavy armor and good quality weapons. Chain hauberks and shirts, full helms, battle axes and long swords, and decorated medium shields are the norm. For the militia, standard battle gear is a metal cap, a leather shirt, a small shield, and a simple spear. About half the militia is trained as archers and also carry short bows.

While the Saxa are not great cavalrymen by nature, the Anari have long been renowned as masters of the art. The aethling maintains a 40 strong company of heavy cavalry. While they dress the part, they are not brilliant fighters. Treat them as common mercenary cavalry but equipped as veteran mercenary cavalry.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Two important trade roads pass through Seithrby, though only at its western and eastern extreme. These are part of a great loop that runs from Heligioland up the east coast of Seithrby, across Shattered Moor, and then back through western Seithrby to rejoin the great trade network in the south. Locals refer to these simply as the Coast Road and the Forest Road. The latter, which runs close to the border with the Liche Lands, is sometimes known as the Ghost Run, as it is in Heligioland.

The aethling has plans to open a trade road across his nation, but he is undecided what route it should take. One option is to link the roads via Seaton, an important farming community. The other option is to cut through the center and then up to Murton, a major sheep rearing settlement.

Since taking control, Cuthwulf has promoted pottery exports as a means of usurping Brae's dominance of the trade in the Winterlands. Whereas before pottery traders from Heligioland would journey north through Seithrby, today they are turned back at the western border. Seithrby's potters have plentiful access to regular clay, but Cuthwulf has ordered them to specialize in green clay, which is found only in the western hills of Heligioland.

To say Seithrby imports green clay is a gross injustice. Cuthwulf, having been tricked by Thegn Osric, has declared it legal to steal clay from the Greenpot Hills. However, he has not legalized murder in the course of retrieving clay. Unfortunately, any Heligiolanders seeking compensation are likely to be treated with contempt.

Iron is imported from distant Nordmark at great expense to fuel the growing number of smithies. Cuthwulf hopes eventually to be able to sell excess arms and armor, but for now he is content to build up Seithrby's stockpiles of weapons in case of war.

As well as pottery, Seithrby exports smoked and salted fish to Shattered Moor and, thanks to the Heligioland trade roads, to places as far afield as Cul. Timber, harvested from Feywood, is a lucrative export, with markets as far away at the Icedale Freeholds purchasing great quantities of rough hewn timber for firewood.

Although the Saxa and engro of Seithrby are free men, they are still subject to taxation. There are both local and royal taxes to pay.

Duties: Imports are taxed at 3%, and exports at 2%.

Income Tax: Citizens must pay 20% of their income to the aethling and 10% to their local nobleman. Note that all tiers of society save for the prince are subject to this tax. Magicians registered with the aethling and sworn to serve him pay half these rates, much to the disgust of the nobility and clergy.

Warrior Tax: All citizens are required to pay 5% of their annual income to the temple of Tiw.

ARCHITECTURE

Before Cuthwulf came the land was dotted with Saxa longhouses and the squarer Anari dwellings. Once the land was subjugated, the Anari settlements were confiscated, handed to the new nobility, and the houses burned to remove the taint of Anari architecture from the land.

Saxa longhouses are now the only type of dwelling. Most make do with simple affairs made of wattle-and-daub over a wicker frame. The rich fortify their homes using entire logs coated with wattle-and-daub for wind and waterproofing. With timber plentiful, wooden shingles are used to cover the roofs.

Internally, larger houses have a byre for animals at one end of the structure. Smaller ones typically forgo this, though poorer families make do as best they can. In the living quarters most families sleep around the hearth, with only the owner having private quarters.

Telling the abodes of the invaders and old settlers apart is relatively easily, at least in most instances. Whereas the original inhabitants prefer modest decoration, the newcomers decorate their front doors with images of Saxa heroes and mythical beasts. Inside, the more aggressive newcomers, or those who wish to be seen as loyal subjects, hang shields on the walls.

Most large settlements are defended by a stone wall or wooden palisade and ditch. Smaller communities and lone steads often forgo such fortifications, though there may be low walls to prevent livestock escaping. Currently there are no major fortifications in Seithrby, though Cuthwulf has ordered construction to begin. He plans to erect a motte-and-bailey at the southern end of each trade road so as to better control trade. Once those are complete, he desires a royal compound outside Seithrby.

MAJOR LOCALES

Seithrby is a realm of small villages and lone steads spread out over a wide area. Outside these oases of civilization the land is wild and untamed.

BARROW

Population: 175
Ruler: Ridder Haelric Ealhfreasunu

The citizens of Seithrby have long lived in dread of the Liche-Priest and his undead minions, and wisely so. Despite this, the citizens of this small community long ago chose to make their homes inside enormous, stone-lined long barrows. The tombs are arranged in neat rows along a wide central avenue. Each barrow is home to as many as 30 people.

Local folklore claims they were constructed for giant chieftains, though by the time the first humans arrived they had been stripped bare of bones and grave goods. None of them contain any inscriptions. The only signs the barrows are inhabited are wooden doors firmly attached over the openings and holes for hearth smoke.

The locals still fear the undead. However, they believe that no undead would look for living prey inside a barrow. More mundanely, it was also easier to occupy the barrows, which had weathered many centuries of storms, than build and maintain wooden homes. Despite their apparent bravado at living in tombs, most of the villagers have chosen to follow Scaetha.

THE BLACK STONE

Strange events are occurring on the edge of Feywood. After hearing no reports from a logging camp, the local noble sent his huscarls to investigate the lack of communication. All the warriors

seithrby



Population: 19,086 (68% Saxa, 30% Anari, 2% engro)
Ruler: Aethling Cuthwulf Eodricsunu
Religion: Eostre, Tiw, Neorthe, Scaetha
Imports: Clay, iron
Exports: Fish, pottery, timber

Alfwodeton
Aelfmeet
N
W
E
S
king's ba
barrowd
Temple of Watchful
Wulfcestre
Fey Feasting Hall
Forest of Omens
Monastry of the Anchorites
Cynewynn's Stead
Seaton
Fernbury Hills
Muckletarn
Murton
Vale of Statues
Hudaby
The Black Stone
The Great River
Bjornwold
Feywood
The Fey Market
Seithrby
Ryhoepe
100
50
25
10
0
ce Market
er Only)
Barrow
Seithrby
Border Wood
Barrow-fog Vale
Sprangaton
Brae
Barrow-fog Vale
Three-Gates
Apple
Slithering Stone
Veth's Teeth
Greenpot Hills
White Ram Hill
heligiolan

found were the discarded axes of the loggers and a strange back slab which had seemingly been uncovered recently, when the forest had been hewn back. Fearing faeries were involved, the huscarls withdrew and reported their findings. The nobleman promptly informed Aethling Cuthwulf.

The prince sent a second logging team to the area to show the fey that the Saxa could not be easily intimidated. The party lasted a week before fleeing in terror into the night. When questioned, they slowly revealed how unearthly wails, cries of anguish and misery, had been heard once the sun set. As the Deorcmonan neared, the cries became louder and more intense. Finally they could take it no longer.

Cuthwulf then dispatched a visiting magician, a heahwisard, to investigate the strange stone. After several days he returned, shaken and white, He could not say what the stone's purpose was, but he was convinced it was old and likely of faerie nature. He too confirmed the presence of disembodied voices. Despite several attempts, he could open no communication with them.

All his studies revealed were handprints in the stone, perhaps ritual carvings made by whoever erected the monument. What he failed to spot was the handprints were not formed as if someone were pressing on the surface—their shape was that of someone pressing outward from inside the black slab. The heahwisard returned to the site two weeks ago to study the slab further. He has not been seen since.

The slab is not of faerie origin. Indeed, even the Unseelie fey give it a wide berth, for while it is not as old as they it is far more evil. It originates back in the time of the Demongate War. When demons walked the mortal realm, Seithrby was one of their major strongholds. Seithrby's name, which is usually translated as "the town of magic," actually means "the town of black magic."

In those dark and evil days the slab served as a sacrificial altar. Insane priests clad in bloodstained midnight blue robes offered up scores of innocents to appease their hellish masters' fell appetites. The magic of the stone took more than their lives, though—the souls of those slain atop the altar of death were imprisoned in the slab.

Over the centuries the imprisoned souls have gone mad. During the nights of the Deorcmonan, the boundary between the mortal realm and the unholy prison weakens. While the sprits cannot escape, they can draw mortals who touch the stone into their unearthly tomb.

BJORNWOLD

Population: 1 (plus 12 bears)
Ruler: Bjorn Bear-Shirt

The western trade road crosses the unimaginatively named Great River at a wide ford. Situated squarely in the center of the ford, atop a natural rock outcropping, is a motte-and-bailey fort. All traffic wishing to cross the river must pass through the lower defenses.

The twin gates are never barred, even at night, and several longhouses and stables on the lower level are always well-stocked with food, mead, and blankets. A sign written in Trader asks that visitors refrain from trying venture into the upper fortification for their own safety, hunt no bears they may see in the vicinity, and say a prayer to Eostre before they leave.

The fort is owned by one Bjorn Bear-Shirt, a priest of Eostre Animalmother who has occupied the land as long as anyone can remember. No one is sure if the Bjorn their grandparents speak of is a family member or the same person. The cleric certainly appears youthful, no more than 40, though if the stories are true he must be at least 80 years old, if not older.

Bjorn's only companions are a dozen black bears, one of whom, Grim-Mane, is his animal companion. The bears are tame enough around their friend and master, but this is misleading, for they are very much dangerous wild animals. Bjorn has the appearance of a bear. He stands seven feet in his socks, is well-muscled, and is exceptionally hairy. His nickname comes from his body hair. He never wears a shirt, even in the coldest winter.

Bjorn is a reclusive host, rarely venturing from the small stead that sits in the upper part of the fortification. Occasionally he and one his bears sit with guests, listen to their stories, and share a meal, but he makes no attempt at small talk and tells nothing of his life. The only folk he ever talks with are engro, and they are notoriously tight-lipped about what passes between guest and host.

Aethling Cuthwulf has visited the site in person several times, but Bjorn has not once attended him. The priest has similarly refused to appear at the royal court, despite several invitations. Since the strange recluse provides welcome shelter for travelers and causes no trouble, the aethling has taken no steps to oust him from his lofty perch. Truth be told, Cuthwulf greatly fears the silent, hulking, shaggy man.

CYNEWYNN'S STEAD

Population: 66
Ruler: Cynewynn Eadredsdohtor

This large stead lies on the trade road, and is a frequent stop for merchants who require farrier or veterinary services. Cynewynn, a widow, is the latest in a long line of master horse breeders and trainers. She is also a priestess of Epona, the minor deity of horses, a goddess rarely worshipped outside of eastern Veermark. She is an expert rider, as are her young four children, and a talented veterinarian.

Cynewynn sells riding and war horses for the standard prices. She also has specially trained horses for sale, though these cost considerably more. The prices below are in addition to the basic cost of the horse. These options can be combined into a single mount. Assume that if the heroes have the money, Cynewynn has a mount to suit their requirements. Under no circumstances will she train a horse she has not raised from birth.

Combat Trained: riding horses only. The horse is trained to fight in combat and has Fighting d6 and Parry 5 (+200 gs); *Responsive:* the rider has +1 to Riding rolls (+300 gs); *Spirited:* the horse has the Combat Reflexes Edge (+400 gs); *Strong Back:* the horse has the Brawny Edge (+150 gs); *Swift:* the horse adds +2 to its Pace and rolls a d12 running die (+200 gs).

THE FEY MARKET

The fey market is widely regarded as a myth, a cautionary tale to be careful what you wish for. Many inhabitants of Seithrby know the story, but it is always passed on as a place visited by a friend three or more times removed, never the storyteller.

So the stories go, deep within Feywood is a large clearing with lines of colored flowers marking out small rectangular areas not dissimilar to stall pitches in human markets. By the light of the moon on nights sacred to either aspect of Eostre, fey gather here to trade and socialize. Elves, or at least fey that resemble elves, are sometimes said to be present.

The trade goods are an eclectic mix. Drinking vessels made of large, hollowed nuts not native to the forest; waterskins made from leaves stitched together; brooches that on closer inspection are living beetles or butterflies; spools of colored spider silk thread for sewing clothes; lanterns containing glowing bugs; brittle candy that is actually live insects; living centipede and millipede torcs and rings; spider amulets; spears of woven grass that pierce wood better than any steel; and gossamer cloaks so thin it seems a gentle breeze would tear it.

Gathered around the stalls are fey of all shapes, sizes, and demeanors, with Seelie and Unseelie mixing in harmony. Security is provided by wood warriors loyal to whatever fey noble claims dominion at the time the market is held.

Having no currency, fey trade goods, favors, and services for the wares they desire. It is this that makes the fey market deadly to outsiders. While some fey admire and even crave human goods, most prefer to trade for service or seemingly innocuous things, like the color from your eyes, two of your fingers, the sound of your voice, and the breath from your body.

Inevitably, paying these strange prices leads to a curse—color blindness, the loss of thumbs (–2 penalty to all rolls involving handling objects), becoming mute, and a permanent one die loss in Vigor as you're left short of breath. Terms of service vary from

a single favor (which may take minutes or decades to complete) to a lifetime of servitude in the fey realm. Those who agree to the latter do not age, but on their return to the mortal realm they are invariably changed for the worse.

The Knowledge (Fey) skill and an understanding of the fey language is essential to surviving the fey market, though neither guarantees one will escape entirely unscathed.

HUÐABY

Population: 137
Ruler: Ridder Ulrik Hapnirsunu

The inhabitants of Seithrby have long held that a mysterious Saxa village exists within the depths of Feywood. Every decade, on the eve of the spring Summer and Winter Court Day, a lone stranger emerges from the forest. Invariably confused, the stranger speaks only Auld Saxa, carries coins minted in the final days of the Anari Empire, is ignorant of events after –7, and is able to discuss the final days of the war against the Liche-Priest with remarkable clarity. Naturally superstitious and wary of all things fey, the inhabitants of Seithrby are unsure whether these strangers are madmen, ghosts, or changelings, and so give them a wide berth.

While the confused strangers speak of their settlement as Ulriksgarth ("Ulrik's farm"), named after the nobleman who supposedly rules there, the denizens of Seithrby refer to it as Huðaby, "the hidden village."

Following the defeat of the Liche-Priest, Saxa warriors beholden to the Anari Empire were given their freedom and assigned land in the realm that would later become Seithrby. A few years after the steads and villages were founded the Hellfrost horde began its relentless advance south. Believing no mortal agency could protect them, the inhabitants of one village, Ulriksgarth, approached the Seelie ruler of Feywood and asked for shelter for one day and one night, long enough for the rampaging army to pass them by. At the appointed hour, as orcs and frost giants gathered on the near horizon, Ulriksgarth disappeared, swallowed by the trees of Feywood.

The fey kept their bargain, but with typical capriciousness. The citizens of Huðaby have remained in Feywood for over 500 years, condemned to repeat the same day and night over and over again. At dawn, time is rewound 24 hours, undoing memories and actions. Once each decade, for reasons of their own, the fey allow a single citizen to venture into a world that has changed beyond recognition.

While the citizens are caught in an endless loop, the rare visitors who find the settlement are not. Each day, visitors are seen as complete strangers. This can lead to awkward and confusing social problems—the locals may welcome strangers into their homes (there is no inn), only to lose all memory of this the next morning.

MONASTERY OF THE ANCHORITES

Many fell relics were recovered after the Demongate War ended. Try as they might, the mightiest wizards and clerics of the age were unable to destroy the accursed artifacts, for they had been forged in the Abyss by the demon princes using ancient charms beyond the ken of mortals. The gods could not aid their followers, for the Compact bound them. Fearing that surviving cultists might try to repossess the relics, it was decided the artifacts would be hidden away forever.

A complex of tunnels and chambers was cut into Fernbury Hills. In the darkest recesses, protected by deadly wards no creature of darkness could overcome and lethal traps designed to slay their mortal minions, the terrible relics were laid. To ensure their continued safety, anchorites of Sigel were placed in charge of the site. It was hoped the anchorites' constant prayers to the god of light would eventually weaken the dark enchantments, allowing the relics to be destroyed, while simultaneously keeping at bay any hellish creatures who came hunting for them. To ensure secrecy, the anchorites would recruit new members as required from the cult of Sigel, never revealing their existence to the world at large.

Were it not for the rise of the Liche-Priest the plan might have worked. As darkness covered the land, the anchorites sealed their secret home with holy wards, preparing to wait out the storm while continuing their sacred duty. The Liche-Priest was no demon, but he surely possessed the dark will required to wield the relics. If they were to fall into his hands the flame of civilization might well be extinguished forever. But in cutting themselves off from Sigel's gaze, the clerics had inadvertently sinned. The demonic souls that infested the relics at last had the opportunity they had been seeking. Slowly they chipped away at the clerics' faith and willpower through insidious whisperings and sly insinuations.

By the time the Liche-Priest's reign was ended, the location of the complex had been forgotten and its entrance was overgrown. Inside, the former priests had transformed into twisted shades, neither undead nor demon, but some fell, undying creature of utter darkness. Unable to penetrate the powerful wards protecting the relics and the exit they waited for fate to play its part.

During Cuthwulf's invasion, the Anari sought refuge in the old hill fort in the hills, little realizing that beneath it lay the entrance to the anchorites' tomb. The victorious Saxa's claim the hill fort is haunted is true, but it is not by the souls of the massacred Anari. Before the end came, the defenders had unwittingly breached the ancient entrance while excavating new fortifications. Freed at last, the demon-priests hatched a plan.

While they are unable to recover the artifacts, they knew that ones not touched by darkness could do so. Unfortunately, their plans to lure Seithrby's natives to the hill fort have repeatedly failed, the stories of ghosts being too ingrained in their psyche. But outsiders, ones who know nothing of the spirits said to haunt the site or who do not put faith in such tales, could perhaps be tricked into removing the relics from the protective wards. All the demons need now is some unwitting fools. And when they get them, the hungry demons will feast on their souls while mortal followers of the demon princes claim the relics. With such power at their disposal, the lords of the Abyss will have their revenge as Rassilon burns beneath a sheath of crackling balefire.

MUCKLETARN

This small lake (its name means "Little Lake" in Auld Saxa) is fed by the Fern Run, a sluggish river that flows from the eastern Fernbury Hills almost to Seaton before doubling back and joining with the river north of Ryhoepe.

Its crystal clear waters are rarely fished. According to one legend anyone who catches a fish, even if they throw it back, is destined to drown if they ever return to the lake. Another says the lake is inhabited by an Unseelie fey, who lures people to their deaths with illusions or be taking control of their minds and forcing them to swim to the middle, whereupon it drags them down to a watery death. Some claim the stories are fabricated by those who live nearby, who want to keep the fish to themselves.

VALE OF STATUES

In a remote valley in the Fernbury Hills stands an eclectic assortment of stone statues. They date from many different eras, the oldest dating back to before the Heligi and Selari held power and the newest to the age of the Anari conquerors. Basilisks might be to blame, at least according to some explorers who have visited the site, but that does not explain the grouping of the statues. Had trespassers been petrified, one would expect the statues to be grouped roughly by era.

Instead, someone or something has placed the statues to be aesthetically pleasing, jumbling together statues of many different eras to recreate fictitious scenes frozen in time. Ancient maidens in flowing Selari dress stand idly by as scholars from an unidentified culture appear to be reciting some wisdom, while nearby an Anari cavalryman locks swords with a Heligi prince. Furthermore, the stone is not of the same type—some are marble, others limestone or sandstone.

Some of the statues once had engravings, but these have been carefully chiseled or scratched away, leaving no clue to their origin.

SHATTERED MOOR

The most northern of the Low Winterlands realms, Shattered Moor is a distant outpost of civilization among a sea of barbaric Vendahl and crazed frostreavers. A bleak landscape of broken moors, frozen marshes, steep hills, jagged valleys, and the upland of Fell Plateau, only the hardiest souls can survive here.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Shattered Moor.

* **Distrusted:** Berserkers and worshippers of Dargar and Hildolfr are viewed with great distrust in the civilized settlements. They suffer a –2 Charisma penalty.

* **High or Low:** The hills and plateau are part of the High Winterlands. Technically the southern plains are in the Low Winterlands. However, the presence of Frostwater Lake and the Forest of Dreams can thwart the warm southerly winds, while in winter, harsh, icy winds often sink down from the Fell Plateau or the Frozen Forest.

At the start of each month the heroes are outside the uplands a card is drawn from the action deck. On a red suit, treat the temperature as being as per the Low Winterlands. A black card means the temperature is as for the High Winterlands. On a Joker, it stays the same as the previous month (default Low Winterlands).

WHO WERE THE SELARI?

Old and stagnant long before the young and vibrant Anari Empire blossomed onto the scene, the Kingdom of the Selari spanned much of what is now the High Winterlands, its northern borders extending into the Hellfrost. Although scholars tend to speak of a single kingdom, by their end the Selari had divided into two rival houses, their lands torn by political strife and open warfare. The original kingdom's heartland lay in what is now Shadowvale, in the Unclaimed Lands, while the splinter kingdom held sway from a mighty city atop the Fell Plateau.

Modern hypotheses have placed this division at the feet of Thrym's machinations, for the sun-priests and solar mages of the Selari could, perhaps, have thwarted the Blizzard War, but little firm evidence exists to support these claims. The Selari, it seems, were merely plagued by the same problems every large kingdom or empire suffers eventually.

Sages are universally agreed the Selari honored a dualist pantheon, promoting just two deities of equal but opposing powers. Sigel, the sun god (known to the Selari as Virotutis), was the center of worship, and viewed as the god of light and law, and father of creation. Opposing him was Niht (named Cyhyraeth in Selari texts), the mother of darkness and chaos, and of all evil in the world. While the other deities did not receive direct worship, nor indeed were they even named in texts, their presence was felt nonetheless. Aspects of Sigel, for instance, were attributed the powers of Eira and Eostre, among others, while Niht gained aspects of Dargar, Hela, Thrym, and Vali.

Before the Blizzard War, the Selari Kingdom (and later the two kingdoms) dominated a land subjected to long summer days and short winter ones. The equinoxes and solstices played an important part in Selari rituals, and their astronomers were masters at predicting solar events. Despite their scientific knowledge, the endless battle between light and darkness, summer and winter, was viewed as a divine struggle between Sigel and Niht. Although winter is, of course, cold, this was seen as being caused by Sigel's weaker state, not the work of Niht.

While much is known of the Selari's religious practices, very little remains regarding the lives of normal citizens. Statues and engravings typically depict nobles, mages, and priests in ceremonial garb, or show them performing acts of magic or religious devotion, leaving vast gaps in knowledge concerning the average citizen's style of dress, customs, games, and so on. Likewise, surviving texts tend to be focused on religion or magical study. For now, the mundane aspects of the Selari culture remain a mystery.

On the matter of their origins, it seems the Selari were historically separate from the four remaining human cultures. The main distinguishing feature was their hair, which varied from dark red-brown through fiery red to a dull orange-ginger color.

Religious texts speak of a holy island far to the west, where Sigel molded the first Selari people in his image, imbuing in them a tiny mote of his everlasting light and purity. The Selari lived here peacefully for many generations, but were eventually exiled after being tricked into sinning by Niht. Some Anari scholars believe this mythical creation story may in fact relate to an actual exodus. With so many records lost during the Selari defense of their realm against the Liche-Priest and the later Blizzard War, it is unlikely the truth will ever be known.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in Shattered Moor, many others exist. This section expands on the existing sites and delves into some of the other interesting locales of the remote realm.

Note that Shattered Moor refers to the realm, whereas the Shattered Moor relates to the extensive upland dominating the north of the country.

AELFMEET

Population: 527
Ruler: Profiteer Leaze ap-Acostant
Religion: Var, Eostre Animalmother, Kenaz
Imports: Trade
Exports: Trade, wool, mutton

Located on the border between Shattered Moor, Nerenel, and Seithrby, Aelfmeet was founded to handle trade with Nerenel. The taiga elves were reluctant to allow traders into their forest, and their habit of moving camp every season made finding them arduous and incurred costly delays. An agreement was struck 74 years ago to have a fixed point for mercantile activities. Several villages competed, but Aelfmeet (formerly Urkstead) was chosen. The village has grown dramatically since then.

The old governmental system of an elected mayor was replaced at the same time. These days a cleric of Var rules the village. Each cleric serves a four-year period, in which time he is expected to increase profits year after year. Should he fail, he is replaced by one of his peers.

The village survives on trade and wool exports. Local merchants purchase goods from Shattered Moor settlements and Nerenel, selling them at marked up prices to merchants traveling up the eastern trade road through Heligioland and Seithrby. In return, they buy goods from the visiting merchants, then sell them at local markets. Extensive sheep flocks are kept for their wool, which is traded with Nerenel, and meat, which is consumed locally or dried and exported.

Although a small settlement, Aelfmeet boasts a temple to Var. A converted barn, it has been refurbished and expanded to include fixed market stalls, accommodation for merchants, and stables

shattered moor



Population: 12,075 (50% Anari, 40% Saxa, 9% frostborn, 1% others)
Ruler: Independent villages and towns

for their beasts of burden (also pygmy mammoths), as well as a treasury and actual place of worship. Security is provided by local soldiers for a modest fee.

The success of the local Iron Guild operation in Shattered Moor is hampering the village's profits. With the roads now safer, merchants are willing to travel further into Shattered Moor, selling directly to consumers and buying direct from manufacturers.

Nerenel Embassy: A name given by the local inhabitants, the "embassy" is actually just a taiga elf tent. Living here is a single merchant, Glitterbright, and four bladedancers. Glitterbright handles all trade between Nerenel and Shattered Moor.

BANDELBURY

Population: 495
Ruler: Mayor Lanval ap-Thosa
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Ullr, Kenaz
Imports: Cloth, pottery
Exports: Cheese, hide, horn, meat, wool

Located in the far west of the realm, Bandelbury is renowned for its hardy semi-domesticated goats, on which its entire economy depends. As well as hide, horn, and wool, the village sells a particularly rich cheese and smoked meat.

Despite its remote location and the proximity of the Shattered Moor and its dread inhabitants, Bandelbury has no defenses, nor does it have a militia. Ever since it was founded, Bandelbury has been under the protection of a mysterious and obvious powerful supernatural entity. Any creature that tries to harm one of the citizens while within the village boundary meets a grisly end. This is no superstition of folk belief—most everyone in the village has seen a frostreaver or Vendahl picked up as if caught in a whirlwind and torn to ribbons by unseen claws before their eyes.

Unfortunately, whatever guards the village can be very zealous in its duties—even fisticuffs between drunk villagers resulted in a swift and terrible death. As a result, the inhabitants have become confirmed pacifists to the extent that no weapons are permitted inside the village (daggers are an exception, as these are everyday tools rather than true weapons).

Not everyone is comfortable with Bandelbury's unseen guardian. It has never communicated with the villagers and thus has made no demands for payment. Those of a suspicious nature know that nothing in life is free. The only problem is, they haven't worked out what the guardian might want in return for its services. A small few suspect that no good will come from relying on unearthly entities for protection.

THE BEACON

On clear nights during the short summer months, a beam of intense yellow-white light can be seen emanating from atop the Fell Plateau. As brilliant as the sun and illuminating the land under its path like daylight, it strikes westward in the general direction of Hrimthyr Isle. The beam travels no more than a few hundred miles, not even reaching Rimeholm, before rapidly fading.

Speculation is rife across Shattered Moor as to its origins. One popular theory is that Sigel is trying to strike at the frost giants, but is too weak to do so. Naturally, Sigel's clerics deny this slur on their deity's prowess. Other theories include a lost Selari sect trying to make contact with the outside world, perhaps hoping against hope their kingdom in the east still stands; a colossal sun dragon is trying to burn down Rimeholm (a weak theory, but at least it points the danger away from local communities); and a malfunctioning relic of awesome power.

The origin of the beam is actually a sun dragon, though not a live one. Within the ruins of the old Selari city stands a towering statue of Sigel in his sun dragon guise. During the long, dark winter it charges up, absorbing what pitiful sunlight falls on the plateau, and releases its beam each night for a single month in the summer. Unfortunately, the sun is too weak to charge it to full capacity. Weighing several dozen tons, it is impossible to move to a sunnier clime.

The dragon's beam is aimed at a particular location west of its position, but is not on Hrimthyr Isle.

CAVE OF DANCING LIGHTS

Although there have been no reports of injury befalling anyone seeing the Cave of Dancing Lights, few care to visit. It takes its name from the balls of dancing light that flit around the entrance. They are popularly said to be the souls of Selari who perished when their realm was destroyed. Trapped in the realm of the living, they seek to lure the unwary into the cave, and into certain death—or so folklore claims.

The lights are, in fact, the last remnants of powerful Selari magic and are nothing more than animated lanterns. The cave mouth formed when the land buckled and cracked. Although a natural feature, it leads what remains of the lower levels of a Selari fortress. Save for some jumbled stones, nothing of this structure remains on the hill above the cave, and no one has yet explored the interior.

No doubt there is treasure (knowledge or coin) to be found within, but there is also danger. While the lights are perfectly benign—they follow anyone entering the cave, providing them with light—the subterranean warren of passageways and chambers is now home to many fell creatures.

THE CAVE OF SHADOWS

Legends regarding the Cave of Shadows have circulated around the higher central Winterlands for centuries. Many believe it is a myth, but tales of terrifying wraiths and specters continue to spread. Few explorers return without a horrific tale.

The cave is very much a real place, but the denizens supposedly haunting it are not. In the days of the Selari, a carving on the lintel read, "Conquer the shadows within your heart and you shall be rewarded." Today only the words "Conquer the shadows within" and "shall be rewarded" remain legible.

Considered an unholy place, sacred to Niht, the only denizens in the gloomy tunnels and caverns are what an explorer brings with him. Here the character's doubts, fears, and sins manifest as spectral entities, creatures that can be defeated not by combat, but by facing the emotions and memories that spawned them. Those devoid of negative feelings have nothing to fear, but few mortals can claim to be so pure, at least before they intrude into the Cave of Shadows. Unfortunately, the cave has an insidious effect on the mind, dredging up any negativity and feeding it.

Selari clerics of Sigel would venture into the cave to test their purity, face their fears and sins made manifest, and emerge purer of soul and one step closer to enlightenment, the greatest treasure known to the Selari.

FAR REACH

Far Reach served as a major Selari outpost, a fortified town protecting the copper mines. When the Blizzard War began, the majority of the Selari occupants fled north to their great cities, abandoning the workers and slaves to their fate. Had they remained here, they might have survived, for Far Reach suffered damage only to its suburbs when the formation of the Shattered Moor destroyed the eastern Selari kingdom and exterminated its population.

On Heah Sumor Daeg eve, as the sun finally begins to set, the locals hurriedly say their prayers to Sigel and close their doors, barring them tightly until sunrise. As the light wanes, translucent spectral forms gather outside the old wall, moaning and wailing in the Selari tongue, begging to be allowed into the town. Locals believe these are the souls of the former Selari occupants slain during the formation of the Shattered Moor, denied access to the Afterlife for their collective sins and condemned to remain forever bound to the mortal realm. While some over the ages have proposed welcoming the ghosts into the town, an act they argue will finally grant them peace, the matter is quickly ended when someone inevitably pipes up that Sigel has cursed them for a reason.

The great stone piers that once stretched into Frostwater Lake are naught but piles of rubble. No merchant ships berth here these days, for the lakes are unnavigable much of the time due to ice floes. A modest fishing fleet makes its home in Far Reach, their catches supplementing the locals' diet. Surplus fish are smoked and sold to

ARMIES OF THE MOOR

In general, each settlement has a small but permanent watch comprising 0.5 to 2 percent of its population. The commander of each watch carries a title, though this varies from community to community. Some use lofty titles, such as Lord Protector or Captain of the Guard, while others prefer the more modest Constable, Watch Commander, or Sergeant-at-Arms. Occitan, for example, boasts only a Constable and four permanent watches, whereas Far Reach has 49 permanent soldiers at its disposal. Led by a Guard Commander, the watch is broken down into a day watch and night watch, each comprising 24 soldiers. These are further divided into four tower patrols and two town patrols of four men apiece.

In addition, every settlement can call upon around 10 percent of the population to gather arms should an attack occur. Treat the latter as militia.

Every settlement is protected by a ditch and wooden palisade, though only Far Reach boasts more than a single watchtower.

passing merchants traveling the Northern Loop, the trade network that goes from Far Reach south to Ryhoepe, Seithrby, and Brae, east to Icewatch Fort, back north to Velhem Fort via Wulfcestre, and thence back to Far Reach.

Medyr ap-Bicne, owner of the mammoth stables, is a priest of Skaði, minor goddess of magic (see *Matters of Faith*).

THE FEY FEASTING HALL

On the northern fringe of the Forest Omens, just visible amid the vegetation, is a large circular mound. Surrounding it is a high retaining wall of gleaming white chalk cobbles. The entire structure measures 74 yards across and 16 yards high. The rectangular entrance is flanked by two standing stones, one carved with animals and plants corresponding to spring and summer and the other with their fall and winter counterparts.

Regardless of the season, Seelie fey journey here from Alfheim during the hours of daylight to feast, dance, and sing. At night, their Unseelie cousins take up occupancy. Fey living in the forest drop by to participate in the festivities according to their court. Passing mortals, usually attracted by the sounds of music and singing, are invited to join the revelry, though few have the courage to dally once they learn of the occupants' nature.

At certain times of year, the entrance serves as a gateway to Alfheim, though to which specific realm is left for the individual GM to determine. One possible location is the Realm of Silver Threads (see p. xxx). Pass between the standing stones in spring and summer while the sun is breaking or sinking beneath the horizon and one will find oneself in the hall of the Seelie ruler. Passing betwixt them in fall and winter while the moon crosses the horizon and one is transported to the hall of the Unseelie ruler. At all other times the entrance leads only to the hall's interior (which measures 30 yards across).

THE FOREST OF OMENS

Although hunters have permission to kill game here from the local taiga elf clan, few will spend the night beneath the leafy boughs. The forest is aptly named, for it is said anyone who sleeps here risks dreaming of the future. While men have a natural curiosity concerning the future, the omens typically relate to death, and few wish to learn of their fate ahead of time.

Many fey dwell in the forest. Not answerable to the elves (although they are generally friendly with them), the fey judge hunters by their merits. Those who respect the forest find hunting easy, while those who take too much or hunt purely for sport find the wood to be a dark place. According to the elves, the supreme fey ruler of the forest is the Crimson King, an Unseelie. Hunters wishing to enter the forest are expected to sacrifice a pint of their blood at the start of each hunting season, letting the hot liquid soak into the snow-covered soil.

LAST CHANCE

Population: 67
Ruler: Profiteer Adelmar ap-Ridbald
Religion: Var, Kenaz
Imports: Adventuring gear
Exports: None

Located on the old trade road to Karad Khan, Last Chance is the last settlement before the Icedale Freeholds. It is little more than a walled market. Every citizen is an employee. Fifty of them man the various small shops and workshops. The rest are mercenaries led by Uthwald Keen-Eyes, a paladin of Var. They are paid to protect the outpost against raiders and thieves.

Last Chance is owned and operated by Adelmar ap-Ridbald, a priest of Var. It sells all manner of adventuring gear necessary for surviving in the wastes. No mounts are available, but there is a farrier and wheelwright. For parties who have forgotten some important piece of equipment, or need spares, it is their last chance to make a purchase.

Adelmar knows this full well and he exploits that need to the full—the greedy cleric charges five times the normal prices (before mark-ups for Town and City goods). His avarice is so great that he even charges 5 gs to enter the small shrine to Kenaz, which he erected purely as a money making venture. Access to the shrine of Var is a mere 1 gs.

ROOT

Population: 1,074
Ruler: Mayor Quinley
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Kenaz, Sigel, Var
Imports: Meat, pottery, textiles
Exports: Root vegetables, vegetable wine

More properly known as Hedewic, Root takes its nickname from the surrounding root crop fields. It lies at the junction between the trade road for Occitan and the road from Far Reach to Velhem Fort.

Grown in raised beds packed deep with manure, the villagers successfully cultivate beetroot, carrots, onions, parsnips, turnips, and radishes, with cabbage and spinach grown to supplement the diet. If the weather holds, these hardy crops can be grown throughout spring, summer, and fall, allowing the village to export its surplus. Root also ferments several varieties of vegetable wine, including the locally famous Angry Mule Carrot Wine, a brew renowned for its alcoholic kick.

The villagers operate as a collective, with everyone helping grow, harvest, and sell the crops. The harder one works, the higher share of the harvest and profit they receive. The village collectively owns six pygmy mammoths trained to pull plows. Their manure is a vital part of the villagers' agricultural success, and the settlement boasts both a paladin and priest of Brúni, god of dung.

Originally the village elected its mayor based on no set criteria, but in recent decades the post has always been held by a cleric of Eostre Plantmother. The incumbent mayor is Quinley, an engro priest. Quinley is currently seeking funds to build a temple to Eostre, promising investors a cut of the village's annual profits in return.

With pipeleaf an expensive luxury this far north, the mayor devotes a great deal of his spare time trying to breed a cold resistant species. Should he be successful, Root's communal coffers will swell with an influx of gold scields. One person's success is often tempered with jealousy, though, and Quinley's horticultural experiments have reached the ears of major pipeleaf producers in Ostmark and the Vale. Neither realm wishes to see their profits cut. What steps they may take to ensure Quinley fails are yet to be decided.

Like many agricultural settlements, Root is plagued by fungals. Day or night, snow or sun, armed patrols walk the fields, constantly standing vigilant against fungal crop raiders.

SNAKE MARSH

The creation of Shattered Moor did more than destroy the Selari kingdom—it inadvertently altered the surrounding landscape. Rain-

water that once soaked into the grassy plain now trickles from the western slopes of the Shattered Moor, combining with snow melt to form myriad narrow, winding rivulets. Over the centuries, those that cut through the soft soil between Far Reach and the mouth of the Moorfrost River formed a bog. The dark water is knee deep for the most part, though there are solid tufts of ground and deeper hollows. Denizens of Shattered Moor know this quagmire as Snake Marsh.

Local legends claim the snakes found here in great numbers are not natural creatures. In the years immediately before the Blizzard War, an army intent on sacking the prosperous Selari kingdom that dominated the region landed on what is now the bog. Before they could muster their strength, Selari wizards unleashed a powerful spell, turning the warriors into writhing serpents. The curse continues to this day, for the kingdom ceased to exist before it could be lifted.

The snakes are certainly unusual—their scales are the dull gray of steel armor and they are especially aggressive. Their venom attacks the soul rather than the flesh. The poison has two effects. First, it devours all that is good in the person's soul, leaving only evil in their wake. Second, it severs the tie between the soul and the gods, condemning those who die from it to haunt the mortal realm as ghosts.

THE TEMPLE OF MADNESS

The walls of this accursed place have stood since before the rise of the Selari. In their day it was already regarded as cursed, and even the cult of Niht forsook its gloomy interior. Even the elves and frost dwarves, whose records stretch back far into antiquity, speak ill of the site.

Much of the surface is ruined, broken down by the ravages of time, the weather, and the Hellfrost army (who promptly fled from its vicinity). All that is left on the surface are a few crumbling walls, and they speak little of the reason why the place is so shunned.

In the dark tunnels that run beneath the ruins are grotesque statues; slithering, formless horrors whose appearance rends the mind and induce insanity; fear and madness demons drift lazily through the darkness, patiently awaiting souls to torment; and amorphous blobs with myriad mouths that scream dire blasphemies and fell curses. To come here is to risk madness and death, but that does not deter explorers.

Those who come in search of mundane treasure inevitably never return. Those who come in search of the ill that pervades the site may be rewarded. Some cannot take the horror and lose their minds, leaving them hollow shells completely devoted to the evil they sought to harness. Others emerge stronger of spirit, yet without any new learning and unwilling to speak of what they have witnessed.

The temple was originally dedicated to Glapsviðr, the exiled god of fear and insanity. Long ago, when the world was darker, a king succumbed to madness. Visited in his insanity by Glapsviðr, he constructed the temple to honor his new deity. As his excesses grew, his people rose up against him. Unwilling to stay in the presence of the fell edifice, and too fearful to assault it, they abandoned their ancestral homeland. One of Glapsviðr's heralds, summoned here long ago, remains in the bowels of the temple, master of a realm of madness.

TOMB OF THE GOLDEN KINGS

Atop the Fell Plateau is the necropolis of the Selari kings. Once covered in beaten gold, the vast dome is now cracked and bare, stripped of its precious coating through damage, robbers, and the ravages of weather and time. Two monumental doors carved with images of sun dragons open automatically at dawn and close at dusk. Once in position, no force can alter their state.

A single corridor leads into a circular chamber at the center of the dome. From here corridors branch off to royal and noble crypts, winding upward to different tiers around the inner face of the dome. Encased in stone tombs are the ancient dead, each supposedly clad in solid gold armor (from where the tomb takes it name). Aside from mundane treasure, it is commonly held the lords were interred with relics and holy texts relating to Sigel. Given that relics were never common, it is unlikely there are that many to be claimed. Dozens of gargoyle-like sun dragon heads are placed at odd angles.

A magical crystal lens at the top of the dome stores sunlight. At random times it releases a surge of energy, which in turn generates intense and deadly beams of light through some of the many sun dragon statues. Although weaker than they once were, the beams remain a potent deterrent to thieves, being capable of searing through armor, flesh, and bone.

THE TOWER OF LIGHT'S LIBRARY

Arkhwisard Damasc, a renowned traveler, started the collection, and each incumbent caretaker has added to the material. The collection covers the realms of Rassilon in varying detail.

Location: Far Reach, Shattered Moor.

Admission: Elementalists and clerics of Maera are permitted access to the entire library. Lorekeepers and other visitors wishing to use the library may only reference the geography section except by permission of the current caretaker.

Specialties: Arcane matters, the Convocation, elementalism, geography.

Investigation Rolls: +1 for specialties only. The library contains no manuscripts outside its specialties. Thus, generic Investigation rolls cannot be made here.

THE VALLEY OF BEARS

Amid the jumbled depressions and hills of the Shattered Moor is the Valley of Bears, so named because of the weathered stone statues that line the trail. Each statue is clad in the skin of an actual bear. Vendahl roam the surrounding hills at will, though they, despite being servants of Ursarix, are reluctant to trespass.

Hunters claim to have seen bears prowling amid the statues and on more than one occasion they have been observed talking in a guttural tongue. Those who know of hamhleypas suspect they are shapechangers and sensibly give the place a wide berth.

The big debate is why the Vendahl do not come here, for it is likely the two share the same deity. Perhaps, as some Hearth Knights suggest, the Vendahl practice corrupted worship of Ursarix and have alienated the werebears. Others are of the opinion the Vendahl mentality leads them to hunt the hamhleypas for their fur, for despite worshipping Ursarix the Vendahl kill many bears.

A few Sword and Lance Knights have penetrated deep into the valley. According to their reports, which are kept at Velhem Fort, at the far end is a cave mouth flanked by two colossal bear statues. Since bears are not high on the Hearth Knight's list of priorities, they have made little effort to investigate further.

KEY PLAYERS

Some of Shattered Moor's notable personages are briefly described in the Hellfrost Gazetteer. One is given an expanded entry here, along with three new NPCs.

GREENLORD WHITEHEART

The ruling noble in the part of the Forest of Omens contained in Shattered Moor, Whiteheart maintains cool but friendly relations with the other races. He allows hunters to kill boar, reindeer, and small game, but forbids the felling of trees. Those who break his decree are dealt with swiftly and permanently.

A vassal of Nerenel, Whiteheart accepts it his duty to aid his feudal lord when called upon, but he does not support Nerenel's agreement with the Hearth Knights, believing the Knights call on the elves far more often than they return the favor. He has heard of the undead reawakening in the Liche Lands of Old, and openly questions whether the Hearth Knights will die for the taiga elves when Nerenel is assaulted.

Whiteheart leaves his forest home only once a year, traveling to Far Reach with his bladedancer bodyguards and a mysterious female elf clad in gray robes to renew the agreement he has with the town.

GUILDMISTRESS VENTRIX

Ventrix, the black sheep of a minor Magocratic house and a worshipper of Var, would be stunningly beautiful, were it not for the three livid scars that run across her throat and up her left cheek, the result of a Vendahl's bear claw glove years ago.

While she survived the attack, Ventrix gave up the life of an adventurer afterward, taking on what was supposed to be a short-term commission with the Iron Guild to protect caravans running through Shattered Moor and Seithrby. Her devotion to her duties, her tactful nature at dealing with greedy merchants and nobles, her skill at arms, and her ability to smell an ambush quickly led to a full-time position, followed by rapid promotion from a lowly patrol guildsman to full guildmistress status.

Despite receiving frequent praise from her subordinates, peers, and customers, Ventrix has grown bored. While the trade road to Occitan is still dangerous, the Vendahl are slowly learning not to trouble caravans protected by the Iron Guild. Near-guaranteed safety for caravans has allowed Ventrix to expand business and increase fees, and hence the Guild's profits, but at the expense of providing her with any stimulus.

Requests for a transfer, complete with a reduction in rank, to a more active trouble spot have been denied—Guild profits in Shattered Moor are soaring, and many of her peers actually fear her as a threat to their positions.

Ventrix still loves the Guild and what it stands for, but her frustration is rising. In recent months, she has taken to leading small bands of her men into the Moor in search of adventure. So far she has been successful, but one error could lead to a weakening of Guild forces and a reduction in the effectiveness of caravan protection.

MAEGISTER YANIK TREVALLION

A hearth elf elementalist specializing in earth, fire, and air, Maegister Yanik was dispatched to the remote Tower of Light for daring to question the Council of Four regarding certain policies. Although still bitter at the Four for sending him to the ends of civilization, he has come to enjoy his posting. Largely left alone by the inhabitants of Far Reach, he is free to study at his leisure and engage in the occasional adventure.

While many members of the Convocation, especially senior ones, can be haughty and arrogant, Yanik is very much down-to-earth. Unusually for both a mage and a hearth elf, he frequents the Last Hearth Tavern most nights, quietly sitting in his favorite seat and listening to the current gossip.

Yanik has spent a great deal of time pondering the shade of Arkhwisard Damasc and its bizarre questioning of visiting elementalists. So far he has found no answers, but being an elf, and with little else to occupy him beyond tutoring the two apprentices entrusted into his care, he continues his quest.

Yanik's two apprentices are Davit Ash-Hands, a clumsy Anari fire mage whose nickname reflects his tendency to set fire to things by mistake, and Rogbert, an engro air elementalist who spends much of his time trying to produce magical beer. Yanik does his best to provide instruction, but he knows the pair was sent to annoy him because both are lost causes.

TALORC HAIRY-BACK

Arrogant, argumentative, crude, ill-mannered, stubborn, violent, and often drunk, Talorc has all the traits of a true Tuomi berserker and carries them to excess. If he has a single worthy trait it is his fastidious cleanliness, though this almost obsessive-compulsive disorder borders on vanity.

A common sight around the settlements of Shattered Moor, Talorc spends much of his time alone on the moors hunting bears, Vendahl, and frostreavers for profit. The bear pelts and Vendahl heads he sells to nearby settlements, while the Hearth Knights pay him a bounty for the frostreavers. Talorc is willing to join adventuring parties, so long as he receives an equal share of any spoils and gets to use his trusty battle axe ("Bear-Baiter"). As much a liability as an asset, he isn't really a team player, and his unruly behavior and inability to take orders can quickly lead to trouble.

WHY COME HERE?

Shattered Moor is, for all intents and purposes, the last civilized realm in the Low Winterlands before the endless snow of the High Winterlands begins. It is a land beset by barbaric Vendahl and insane frostreavers, of blasted heaths and moorland, and of ruins of bygone ages. Few people live here, so what might bring the heroes to this remote outpost of civilization?

* Orders. Characters with the Orders Hindrance will, at some time, be sent somewhere they don't want to go. The Hearth Knights have the greatest interest in Shattered Moor, for here lies their last major fort before the High Winterlands and distant Hellfrost. While the Thirteen Warriors rarely impose orders on members, the Shattered Moor is a major haunt, and thus members should be prepared to spend time here. Clerics of Sigel may receive instructions to explore Selari ruins for ancient texts or relics.

* Treasure. Five hundred years on, the Shattered Moor proper remains largely unexplored thanks to the presence of the Vendahl and frostreavers. All manner of ruins lie crumbled and toppled, some clinging to the upturned ground at odd angles, as if refusing to succumb to gravity by sheer willpower. Most of the obvious structures have been looted already, but an equal number of ruins lie beneath the snow-capped mounds and escarpment. Any cave might lead to the unexplored interior of a former city or castle. It may just as easily lead to a Vendahl outpost, though.

* Knowledge. Although knowledge is treasure to some individuals and organizations, it deserves a separate entry. The Selari were great sorcerers, wise in the ways of the arcane, though limited to just one area of expertise—solar magic (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*). Clerics of Hoenir and Sigel, Lorekeepers, and mages studying pre-Blizzard War magic may visit in search of texts or inscriptions revealing more about Selari culture, religion, or magic. While expeditions often produce some finds, the knowledge is fragmentary; a few sentences engraved on a statue here, or a word or two from a shattered column there.

* Combat. Characters looking to test their mettle in combat will find Vendahl and frostreavers in the north (ideal foes for Hearth Knights and clerics of Kenaz and Sigel), and giant spiders and goblins in the south. More dangerous denizens, such as cryohydras and frost giants may inhabit the Fell Plateau. However, unless adventurers are already in the vicinity, few are likely to travel to Shattered Moor just to fight the monstrous inhabitants unless ordered to do so.

* Passing through. Shattered Moor is the gateway to the eastern and central High Winterlands, as well as the safest route to the taiga elf realm of Rimeholm. In summer, adventurers may pass through while seeking a safe overland route between the borders of the Frozen Forest and Sunken Realm to the isolated Icedale Freeholds.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Several small villages, remote even by Shattered Moor standards, have been destroyed. With their forces currently engaged elsewhere, the Hearth Knights ask the heroes to investigate. The adventurers quickly learn the attacks were carried out by frostreavers. Unfortunately, the madmen have a new and powerful ally—a frost giant priest of Thrym.

* A priest of Sigel believes the beacon is a sign from his god and somehow provides a clue as to how to restore his strength. He seeks brave and trustworthy adventurers to accompany him to the top of the Fell Plateau, a trip few have made and even fewer have survived.

* GMs looking to keep the heroes in Shattered Moor for a longer spell can have a cleric (ideally of Sigel, but others work as well) or Hearth Knight be assigned the task of starting a new community there. He must govern for two years and leave behind a stable and prosperous settlement before he can consider his duty fulfilled.

* A badly wounded trapper staggers into whatever community the heroes are visiting. With his last breath he warns them of a new peril, a gigantic polar bear of human intelligence armed with claws of steel. Is this merely a rogue polar bear, or has Ursarix unleashed some celestial servant? The possibility exists that the polar bear is quite mundane, its unnatural size the exaggeration of a dying man.

SUNKEN REALM

The Sunken Realm was once a populous land, though one whose inhabitants remain shrouded in mystery. Today, it is a god-cursed realm of sundered earth and shattered cities, a devastated wasteland populated only by ferocious orcs and giants, and insane frostreavers and Vendahl. Few have cause to walk the vast basin, and most who enter never return.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Sunken Realm.

* **Constant Scrapes:** The uneven terrain, which is often slick with ice or snow, makes for treacherous footing. At the end of each day of travel, the characters must make an Agility roll. Penalties for darkness and inclement weather from the Overland Pace table apply. Failure causes a level of Fatigue as from Bumps and Bruises. A critical failure causes two levels of Fatigue.

* **Depressing Realm:** The relentless cold, chilling mist, desolation of the landscape, lack of food, endless horizons of broken terrain, and frequent slips and falls quickly lead to despair. Each morning a character is within the Sunken Realm he must make a Spirit or Faith roll or suffer a –1 penalty to Spirit and Spirit-linked skill rolls for the remainder of the day. The penalty from this malaise never increases above –1, no matter how many rolls are failed.

* **Few Animals:** While water can be gathered easily from ice and snow, there is precious little animal life and few edible plants. Survival rolls to find food suffer a –2 penalty.

* **Few Plants:** Aside from lichens and mosses, some of which are edible, there is very little plant life. Rolls to find plants for herbal remedies suffer a –2 penalty. This is in addition to penalties for rarity and season.

* **Nothing to Buy:** Aside from a very few trappers from the Icedale Freeholds, there is no civilized life in the Sunken Realms. Characters cannot purchase or sell equipment here.

* **Rough Going:** Very little flat ground exists anywhere in the Sunken Realm. The tactical terrain is almost always difficult ground. The overland pace terrain is difficult ground with no trail or path.

* **Temperature:** Cold air sinks into the basin, keeping the temperatures well below freezing. Although this is little felt in the day, the nights are exceptionally cold. Treat the nighttime temperature as two steps lower.

WHAT CAUSED THE SINKING?

This question has perplexed historians and philosophers down the centuries. Many theories abound, but none has been proven to any satisfaction. One theory claims that a boulder launched during the endless dispute between Haptsönir and Jarngrímr smashed into the land, creating a gigantic crater. Another tells that the denizens of the realm were so wicked that the gods collectively voted to break the Compact and eradicate them from existence. A few insist Ertha accidentally dug too close to the surface, causing a cave in of titanic proportions. A handful of racists point the finger of blame at the frost dwarves, accusing them of creating so many tunnels beneath the land that it collapsed. Wilder theories also exist.

A related question is when did the sinking occur? A few surviving Heligi and Selari texts indicate the Sunken Realm existed long before their time, placing its destruction as several thousand years ago. Even the frost dwarves, whose capital at Karad Khan has stood for millennia, record the Sunken Realm as being in existence when they carved the first tunnel of the great city. This pushes its origins back to some 3,000 years before the Ice Rise.

Tied into the how and why is the matter of who lived there before the disaster. Again, the only records come from the Heligi and Selari, who speak of a densely populated landscape. Alas, the veracity of such records is impossible to confirm, since they make reference to older texts now lost to the civilized races. What architecture survives paints a jumbled picture. In some cases there is clear evidence of an advanced artistic and scholastic culture, men who created magnificent statues and raised immense cities. Yet other ruins point toward an extremely militaristic society. Some sages have argued that the ruins date from different periods. Perhaps the first cities were those of a warlike bent, but over time they turned away from war and toward peaceful endeavors.

Despite the various suggestions that seek to answer how, when, and who, the Sunken Realm remains an enigma, a relic of a bygone age that bears little relevance to those struggling to survive an age of increasing winters and rampaging orcs.

ATMOSPHERE & TERRAIN

The Sunken Realm is a depressing place. Even frost dwarves, at home in rugged conditions, find it an unwelcoming place.

The jumbled landscape of jagged rocks, sheer cliffs, deep crevasses makes navigation difficult and slow. Adventurers are often forced to take lengthy detours to reach places within line of sight, and it is easy to lose one's bearings. The landscape seems hostile, as if it desires blood and pain. Rocks seem to shift of their own volition, causing explorers to unexpectedly lose their footing. Often slippery with ice and snow, the rough landscape leads to frequent slips and tumbles that tear and bruise flesh and bones. Sharp cries of pain and amplified as echoes, returning to their originator's ears as mocking laughter.

Mile after endless mile of rubble and ruins awaits those seeking to explore the accursed realm. Although the landscape is varied, the constant signs of devastation in a seemingly lifeless landscape saps the will. A state of constant vigil is required, for many dangers lie in wait for the unwary. Here, a broken ankle can mean death, and behind any cover ahead might lurk a hunting part of orcs, frostreavers, or Vendahl.

Noises echo eerily off cliffs and hills, strangely amplified as if the landscape longs to hear signs of life. Yet the echoes are also perversely muffled, and explorers can never be entirely sure whether the footsteps and voices they hear are their own or some fell menace stalking them.

Cold mist forms in the lower lying regions, blanketing the landscape for days on end, stealthily penetrating cloaks and winter gear to suck the warmth from travelers. At night the temperature plummets, its bone-numbing intensity rivaling that of the Hellfrost. Near the cliff walls, the cold air can be seen flowing into the basin from the higher ground like the wispy waters of a titanic, ghostly river. Explorers refer to this phenomenon as Thrym's breath, though less polite bodily exhalations are sometimes mentioned.

ENTERING THE REALM

Although travel through the Sunken Realm is arduous, unless one lives in the Icedale Freeholds the journey there is almost as difficult. The Frozen Forest and Liche Lands of Old surround the region to the west and southwest, haunted realms that act as natural barriers against idle curiosity.

For the most part, the walls of the vast basin are sheer cliffs ranging in height from a few hundred feet to as much as quarter of a

mile. A few natural trails exist, zigzagging down the vertical rock face, but explorers must be cautious, for orcs, frostreavers, and Vendahl dwell near these points of entrance. Only in the central Low Hills does the ground slope gently downward, providing easy ingress for plucky explorers.

A comparatively easy place to reach for those who want to stare into the Sunken Realm is in the east, where it borders the ocean. Here, a narrow strip of land only a few yards above sea level lines the sheer cliffs that fall sharply away to the west. Mariners must be cautious in summer, for the coastline is littered with submerged rocks, some of which are actually the remains of buildings. During harsh winters, sea ice covers the rocks, though that poses its own problems.

The narrowness of the strip means that storms and high tides can send water crashing down into the Sunken Realm before vanishing into the myriad of crevasses that lead to subterranean vaults far beneath the surface.

DENIZENS

While trappers sometimes venture into the Sunken Realms in search of unusual animals, there are just two permanent residents belonging to the civilized races. The only other humanoid races denizens are orc, frostreaver, and Vendahl tribes, and a few cliff and frost giants.

The Vendahl live predominantly in the east and north, where they hunt polar bears. Raids into the Icedale Freeholds are infrequent, but not unknown.

Frostreavers dominate the northwest corner, close to the Frozen Forest. These insane worshippers of Thrym also pillage the Freeholds on occasion, but much of their time is spent battling their Vendahl neighbors and foraying into the Frozen Forest. Their reasons for the latter are unknown, but it might simply be they are seeking a safe passage through to the Icewall and beyond to the frigid wastes of the Hellfrost.

Orc frequent the west and south, save for one tribe which lives in frostreaver territory. No account of how many tribes exist, but correlated reports indicate there are at least five unique tribes making their home here. Of these, three favor Thrym, one worships Dargar, and one honors Hela. It is widely believed the orcs are in the Realm because it offers a refuge. Here they can build up their strength relatively unmolested, though for what cause remains to be seen.

Frost giants sometimes enter via the Icedale Freeholds or Frozen Sea, while cliff giants dwell on the eastern fringe, hunting seals and hrossval for food.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in the Sunken Realm, many others exist. This section delves into some of the other shattered locales of the wasteland. These should be considered active adventuring sites, ones your heroes can explore without fear of breaking any canon.

BERGRISARHEIM

When storytellers living far from the actual location hear names like Bergrisarheim ("Home of the Mountain Giants" in Saxa), they conjure up images of massive fortresses inhabited by hundreds of ferocious giants for their audiences. Adventurers seeking such a location based on its poetic description will be sorely disappointed, for Bergrisarheim is nothing more than a collection of crude drystone huts surrounded by an equally crude drystone wall, albeit one of impressive dimensions. The settlement is home to just 16 cliff giants led by a brutal chieftain.

Few explorers have ever stumbled across it, for it lies far to the east. From here, the cliff giants climb up crude steps to the Frozen Sea, where they hunt hrossval and seals. Only in the short summer months when their preferred prey is scarce, or when they have heard rumors of tasty adventurers entering the Sunken Lands, do they venture into the western reaches.

THE BITTER WELL

Away from the Cascade River, the only fresh water sources commonly known about are found in the form of frozen puddles of rainwater. Mixed with dust and mud, it is quite filthy and foul tasting. Save for Kenaz's Breath, the only other potable fresh water is the Bitter Well. Actually little more than a small pond, the water is, as the name suggests, bitter on the tongue, but imbibing it causes no ill effects.

A few brave explorers have plumbed its depth—in the Sunken Realm, almost any opening can lead to some concealed ruin. Their reports tell how the well is a natural crack descending many hundreds of feet into the bowels of the earth. However, the crack cuts through a series of artificial passageways. Many of these are flooded, but on one level there are steep stairs that ascend into a dry chamber. The last group that set out to explore this area never returned.

CASCADE RIVER

Although most maps show the Cascade as a single river, a branch of the Highwater that flows away from the main river, it is in fact two separate watercourses. The first, the Western Cascade, flows into the Highwater, making it a tributary. Barely five miles east a second spring gushes to the surface, its icy water tumbling down the Low Hills, across the Sunken Realm, and into the great pit that is the Sunken Land. Rich in rock salts, it rarely freezes. It is not potable.

For much of its lower length it is navigable by rafts, though natural fords and rocks mean travelers must sometimes haul their rafts across land for many miles before finding another stretch of free flowing water.

At the bottom of the Sunken Land it crashes into the rocks, its spray mixing with the ever-present mist. The numerous streams carved into the landscape flow east, before disappearing into great rents in the ground on the outskirts of Tumbledown City.

THE GHOST PLACE

Only the gods know how many people died in the catastrophe that created the Sunken Realm. Given the land sank millennia ago, when the weather was more temperate and population levels much higher, sages put the figure in the hundreds of thousands at a minimum. The spirits of some of those who perished remain locked to the landscape, unable or unwillingly to depart the mortal realm. In the northwest corner, just below the Frozen Forest, is a haunted, mist swathed area known as the Ghost Place. Lighting levels are one level worse than the ambient conditions outside the area.

Here the senses are assailed night and day by the sight of shadowy figures in the mist and unintelligible voices whispering as if standing right next to the listener. Explorers must make a Spirit roll each morning they are in the Ghost Place or suffer the effects of Fear for the next 24 hours or until the leave the region, whichever comes first. Combined with the general weariness brought on by the Sunken Realm, this makes the Ghost Place a terrifying and exhausting place to venture, both physically and mentally.

In the center of the Ghost Place is an altar of black stone, its weathered and pitted surface inscribed with fell runes of necromancy and stained with the blood of innumerable sacrifices. The altar was erected by the Liche-Priest's minions during his reign, but is today the spiritual home of an orc tribe known as the Ghost Riders.

The Ghost Riders are a tribe of grave wolf riding orcs who worship Hela. All members of the tribe save for runts have Riding equal to their Fighting die and are Fearless.

Their priests' typical powers are: *Armor* (bones), *bolt* (screaming skulls), *deflection* (swirling spirits), *fear* (fell spirits), *enhance undead* (runes), *strength of the undead* (runes appear on flesh), *zombie*.

KENAZ'S BREATH

Deep within the Sunken Realm is a place of fire and heat, a rarity in the freezing Winterlands. Fires burn continually, seeming to

spring from the living rock; pools of water bubble noisily, the liquid heated to boiling; and the rocks are hot enough to burn flesh. Although it attracts few visitors, it is widely regarded as a site sacred to Kenaz. Markings on the burning stones, left here by worshippers of the god of fire over the generations, attest to that belief.

Various legends exist. One claims that a temple once stood nearby, but that it was sacked by orcs. As punishment, Kenaz breathed on the horde, incinerating them and setting the ground alight. Another tells that the area is above Ertha's forge or kitchen, and that caves nearby lead deep into Erthaheim. Although the sinking predates the Blizzard War by many centuries, some scholars claim Kenaz is imprisoned beneath the surface, the ground heated by his celestial presence. Other stories include a fiery relic buried when the earth sank, the still-burning forges of whatever culture once resided here, and the ground concealing the lair of a sun dragon or clan of fire giants driven into hiding by the Hellfrost army.

Regardless of its origin, the center of the site is an elemental locus. The temperature in and around the site is the same as a Hearthlands' summer all year round. Snow does not settle here, and frost does not form on the ground.

THE LAST LIBRARY

Standing in a wide valley in the Low Hills is a single house. A windowless longhouse built with drystone walls and roofed in turf, it is the only building in the Sunken Realm permanently inhabited by members of the civilized races. Technically it stands outside the true sunken area, but that is mere semantics to its two occupants.

Situated between the shattered wasteland and the haunted Liche Lands, the Last Library is home to two scholars of very different natures. Gray Sage Sinrilli Broadleaf, a hearth elf cleric of Hoenir, is a quiet, contemplative scholar prone to staring into space while he thinks, while his companion, Daffodil (known affectionately as Daffy) is an extrovert engro Lorekeeper of seemingly limitless enthusiasm and energy. Whereas it is difficult to get the elf to speak, it is almost impossible to shut the engro up. They live here with just a small herd of hardy mountain sheep for company.

The odd couple met in a temple library several decades ago while they were seeking information on the Sunken Lands—both were searching for the same archaic text. Despite scholastic differences, which they retain to this day, they struck up an enduring friendship that has weathered its fair share of hardship.

Realizing that book study was no substitute for fieldwork, the pair vowed to explore the Sunken Realm in more detail. They moved here 20 years ago, braving the Liche Lands, eking a meager life in the desolate hills ever since. Much of their time has been spent meticulously recording just one ruin, a jumble of stones located at the foot of the Low Hills.

They have little to offer adventuring parties save for a warm place to sleep and their wisdom, but they are happy to share what little they have in return for news of the outside world. They maintain some communication with Icewatch Fort, Icedale, and Nerenel through *voice on the wind* spells, passing back information on the activities of the barbarous races that dwell nearby.

Their library, such as it is, contains a few copied extracts from older texts, works on the cult of Ertha, and dozens of pages filled with their own findings.

Admission: Open to any member of the civilized races who comes in peace.

Specialties: The Sunken Realm, cult of Ertha.

Investigation Rolls: -2 for specialties only.

LITTER BONE CAVE

This large cave cuts into the base of the Low Hills. It takes its name from the thousands of disarticulated skeletons that litter the floor. Many of the bones are from animals, but scattered among them are human, elf, dwarf, orc, and even giant bones. No animals live in the cave, and even if they did, the remnants of their meals would show signs of gnawing. All the bones in the cave have had the flesh carefully sliced off.

The extent of the cavern has never been fully mapped, but stories abound there is an entrance to Ertha's Realm somewhere inside—an entrance that leads to a cave system populated by carnivorous humanoids, or so it is claimed.

MAERA'S GRAVE

Also known to explorers as the Void and the Empty Loom, this region of the southern basin is utterly devoid of magical threads. The terrain appears no different to other regions, and no markers delineate the start of the non-magic zone. The only indication that one has stumbled into Maera's Grave is when a magician finds himself unable to work magic.

No arcane spells work here, though miracles are unaffected. Relics function, though at reduced effectiveness. Those that require an arcane skill roll suffer a –2 penalty. Relics providing a static bonus, such as magical weapons and armor, have their bonus reduced by one. For instance, a +1 magic sword provides no bonus to its wielder, though it still counts as a magical weapon for other purposes.

Close to the center of the Grave are the ruins of a city, now home to countless orcs. Although its location is known, the civilized races have never explored it. A few scholars believe the lack of magic is somehow tied to the city. To some, Maera cursed the inhabitants, for they "obviously" perverted her gift, performing fell magic of some indescribable nature. To others, the inhabitants brought about the loss of magic through arcane means, perhaps creating a powerful relic that either backfired or works to contain magical threads.

THE MUSHROOM FOREST

Between Deepmarsh and the Sunken Land stand many ruins. Perhaps once they were colonies of or supporting settlements for Tumbledown City. Given the colossal devastation wrought upon the land, many are in remarkably good condition.

The ruins stand within a dense forest of mushrooms. The ground is thick, spongy, and dank, the thin soil sheltered from sunlight by towering mushrooms. The lighting is one level worse than the ambient conditions outside the forest.

Little of the fungus is edible, at least to the civilized races, producing nausea and vomiting is ingested. A few specimens produce intense, horrific hallucinations, while others are lethal if eaten. The carpet of mushrooms comprises harmless varieties as well ones which emit choking spores if disturbed.

The forest is inhabited by a particularly vicious colony of fungals. The constant presence of orcs has made the fungus race extremely vicious. All outsiders, regardless of species, are viewed as crop raiding pests to be destroyed, an ironic viewpoint given that is how farmers in the Hearthlands see fungals. Several mushroom encrusted holes in the ground lead into an interconnected cave system the fungals call home.

THE SUNKEN LANDS

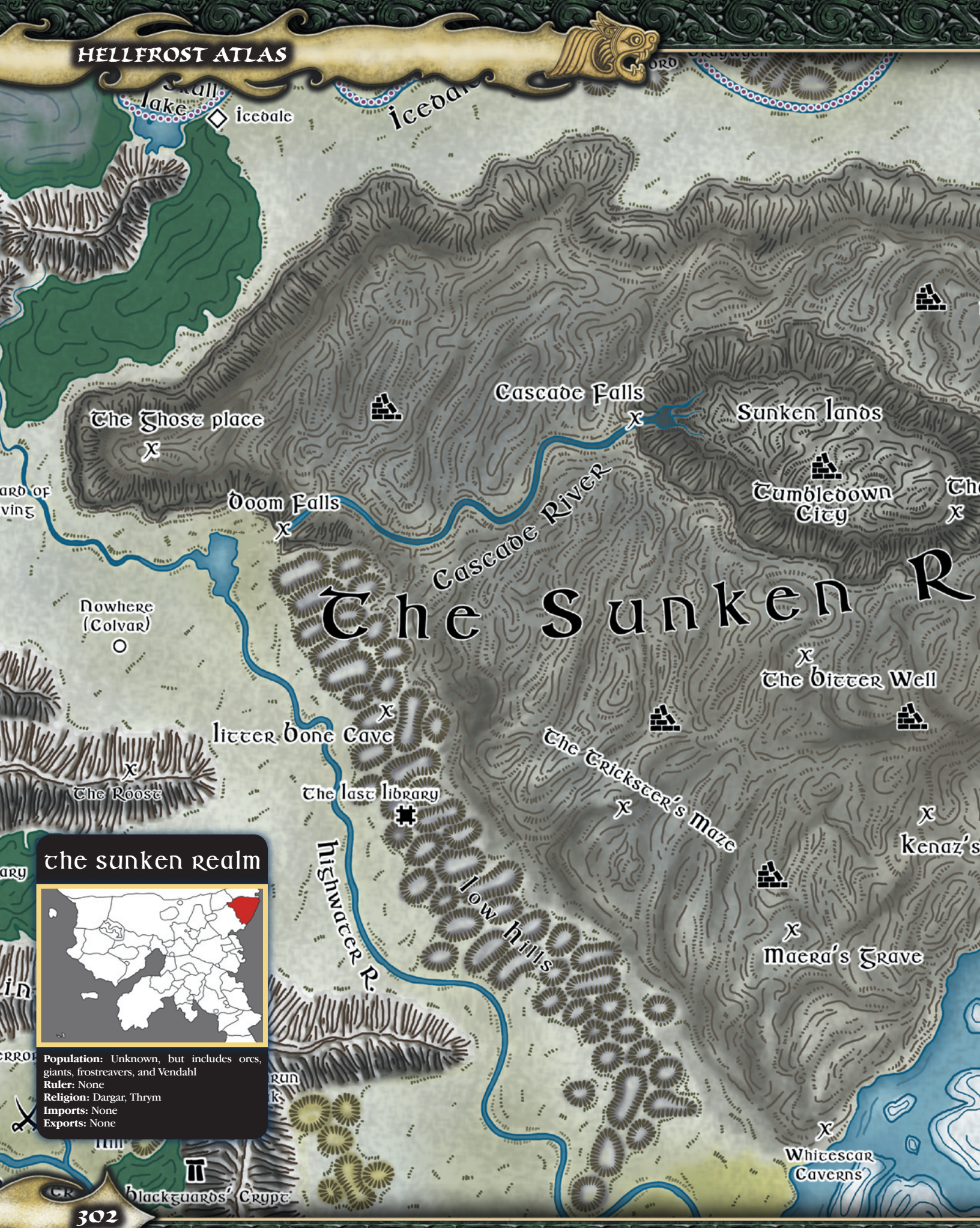
The heart of the Sunken Realm is the Sunken Lands, a huge depression within the basin. Measuring approximately 180 miles by 100 miles at its widest points, the great depression is a full half-mile deeper than the surrounding landscape.

Mist perpetually fills the bottom, obscuring Tumbledown City, which lies within the great hole, from view from above. Most sages agree that the Sunken Land marks the epicenter of whatever fate befell the region. Although reports vary as to its exact location, it is widely agreed that the city ruins are not situated in the exact center of the pit.

Many cave entrances break the cliff walls. Those nearer the surface are the remains of sewers and basements of cities, their buildings dragged into the chasm. Further down are natural caves whose passages connect to cavern system within Erthaheim.

THE TRICKSTER'S MAZE

The shortest route as the raven flies between the Low Hills and the core of the realm is actually a treacherous labyrinth of sharp ridges and narrow canyons. One legend concerning the area tells



the sunken realm

Population: Unknown, but includes orcs, giants, frostreavers, and Vendahl
Ruler: None
Religion: Dargar, Thrym
Imports: None
Exports: None



that the Unknowable One grew tired of Freo's boasts that there was nowhere his clerics could not navigate. In order to teach the god of travel humility, the Unknowable One created the Trickster's Maze.

No explorer who has entered the labyrinth has ever boasted of navigating its winding tracks. Most admit giving up after several exhausting days, their bodies weak from starvation and thirst, for nothing grows and no water flows in this accursed place (Survival rolls to find food and water are made at –6), and having penetrated only a handful of miles.

To the last they claim that while the Maze is a complex labyrinth, passage is made more difficult by the walls, which shift position to cut off retreats or open new trails visible only if adventurers backtrack.

Explorers who have never ventured into the warren scoff at these tales as figments of over active imaginations. More likely, they say, the closure of passages is caused by minor earth tremors and strong winds that topple unstable rock formations. Veteran explorers, especially those accustomed to the rigors of Erthaheim, know from experience that some passageways are hard to detect from certain angles, their existence only becoming apparent when the viewer walks toward them from a different direction.

While there is some element of truth to these natural theories, most of the stories of changing landscapes are true. At the heart of the maze lies a powerful earth locus. Such is its potency that it periodically warps the surrounding landscape, silently reshaping it into new formations. The rent in the fabric of reality also allows earth elementals to travel between the Elemental Realm of Earth and the mundane world.

WHITESCAR CAVERNS

In the deathly pale limestone cliffs north of Deadman's Marsh is a natural cave. It leads to a sprawling network of passages and caverns known to explorers as Whitescar Caverns. Hardy adventurers have only explored the outer caves, for those who seek to penetrate the cold, dark interior are never seen again.

During the Liche-Priest's reign his unhallowed agents ventured into the Sunken Realm in search of relics of power, their undead nature making them immune to the depressing aura permeating the land. Whether they found anything of magical potency is unknown. During their investigations they did discover the cave system, though it was of little concern to them at the time.

As the Liche-Priest's armies were pushed back by the Army of Light, the undead lord did as he had done elsewhere—he ordered one of his lieutenants, a creature known as Dorvargr, "Dark Wolf" (though as discussed in the Orcmark entry, vargr has more evil connotations than a mundane wolf), to seek refuge in the caverns with a number of undead soldiers.

Yet while the dark shadows of undeath slipped unseen into caverns, they did not remain there—something more fell, something more wicked of soul than even the Liche-Priest's lieutenant, slaughtered them. That unknown, unnamed horror, still lurks in the deep caves, absolute master of its sunless realm.

NEW HAZARDS

Aside from its vicious inhabitants, the Sunken Realm has a few hazards rarely found elsewhere. Two of the more notable ones are detailed below. Other common hazards include avalanches near the cliffs that form the borders and hidden crevasses.

EARTHQUAKE

Commonly known as "Ertha's tremors" or "Ertha's dances," earthquakes are not uncommon in the Sunken Realm. An earthquake has nothing to do with seismic forces or tectonic activity—it is an indication Ertha, goddess of the earth, is restless, moving around her subterranean home or excavating new chambers in her realm.

Outside and away from any objects that might collapse, the characters need only make an Agility roll to remain standing. A critical failure causes a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises.

Underground, indoors, or in other areas where falling rubble is a possibility, characters must make an Agility roll or suffer 2d6 damage, 3d6 on a critical failure. At the GM's discretion, the damage may be higher or a penalty to the Agility roll might be imposed if the surrounding terrain is deemed particularly unstable.

Characters who suffer a wound are buried in rubble. A single wound indicates partial burial (such as the hero's legs being pinned). The character may extricate himself with a Strength roll at –2. Each attempt takes 2d10+10 minutes of work. Multiple wounds mean the character is buried deep beneath debris and cannot dig himself out. Freeing the entombed character requires a Strength roll at –4. Each attempt requires 1d3 hours of careful digging and lifting to avoid causing damage.

The excavators can reduce the time to a single hour per roll, but such frenzied activity comes with inherent risks. If the modified Strength roll is 1 or less, the rubble collapses further, inflicting 2d6 damage on the trapped character. A critical failure indicates a major collapse and causes 4d6 damage.

WEAK GROUND

In some areas the ground beneath a character's feet is not as solid as it seems. The thin surface layer may crack to reveal a shallow hole, in which the character risks a twisted or broken ankle at worst, or send him plummeting into a deep chasm or cave. Unlike a crevasse, it is impossible to spot weak ground until it is too late.

Use the rules for Thin Ice (*Hellfrost Player's Guide*) to see if a character falls through weak ground. For shallow holes, failure means the character must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises. Critical failure causes a wound. Falling through weak ground over a deeper hole means a tragic fall. The depth of the crack is 1d10 x 10". Extricating an incapacitated character is likely to be a tricky and time-consuming process.

WHY COME HERE?

Thousands of square miles of desolate terrain that tears at exposed skin, freezing cold temperatures, hostile inhabitants, scant edible material, and little hope of receiving any outside support await those who enter the Sunken Realm. Given the more readily accessible adventuring sites in other lands, what possible reasons do the party have for coming here?

* Orders. The only organizations with any real interest in the Sunken Realm are the Lorekeepers, cult of Hoenir, and the Reliquary. The former two crave knowledge, while the latter is keen to ensure the ancient ruins contain nothing that could fall into the wrong hands.

The cult of Kenaz *might* order a cleric to take war to the frostreaver or Vendahl tribes dwelling in the remote ruins, but in all honesty these tribes rarely bother anyone and there are more important enemies to defeat. Similarly, the cult of Ertha has a passing interest in the Sunken Lands for its unusual origins.

Of course, the GM can arrange for any character with the Orders Hindrance to explore the realm, but such orders are likely to be issued only once in a character's life time, and then only if he is exceptionally talented, unlucky, or out of favor with his patron.

* Duty. Whereas orders are issued by a third party, duty is something a character must undertake of his own volition. Sword Knights aspiring for promotion and Lance Knights might choose to come here in search of Hellfrost beasts to slay, but as mentioned above there are richer pickings elsewhere. A cleric of Freo might feel compelled to enter the forbidding realm simply because it is rarely visited. A Lorekeeper or cleric of Hoenir may feel it is his duty to explore the land, even is his superiors have no specific missions in mind.

* Treasure. Many ruins dot the Sunken Realm. Due to the hostile inhabitants, biting cold, and shattered landscape, few of them have been thoroughly explored. The thought of abandoned treasuries brimming with gold and perhaps even a relic or two are often lure enough to bring adventurers to this forsaken and desolate realm.

* Exploration. While treasure seekers are naturally explorers as well, this reason for visiting refers specifically to the quest for knowledge. That knowledge might be the location of orc nests or Vendahl lairs, but it could just as well be to map the landscape or study the ruins in a bid to unlock the story of the desolation. The Lorekeepers and cult of Hoenir would pay well for reliable information on the former inhabitants, and even seemingly worthless trinkets like potsherds, fragments (or detailed drawings) of carvings or murals are worth a small reward.

* Hired. Aside from searching for something worth looting, the most likely reason the party will come here is because someone has paid them. This might tie into the quest for knowledge, but it might also involve tracking down and killing raiders plaguing the Freeholds or searching for a lost explorer or hunter.

* Passing Through. No sane person voluntarily passes through the Sunken Realm. The only neighboring civilized realm is the Icedale Freeholds, and anyone undertaking an overland voyage to that remote outpost of civilization via the Sunken Realm is usually desperate, for such a journey requires first passing through the haunted Liche Lands. It is possible the characters might be shipwrecked against the eastern cliffs, but in winter it is actually safer to risk walking the polar bear infested pack ice of the Frozen Sea to Iceport than brave the ruined, monster-infested landscape.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the adventure seeds contained in the main text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* A cleric of Scaetha believes many skeletons must lie amid or beneath the tumbled ruins. With the threat of the Liche-Priest's return hanging over Rassilon like a storm cloud waiting to break, the cleric wants to deny the undead lord access to an army. The party is hired for protection while the cleric scours the land and makes the bones unusable to necromancers. Aside from a 10% tithe to the cult, any treasure the party finds while exploring old ruins during the quest is theirs to keep.

This seed could easily form the basis of an entire mini-campaign set in the Sunken Realm involving the exploration of dozens of ruins, not to mention utilizing denizens from the Liche Lands hunting for a supply of skeletons for their imprisoned master to animate on his awakening.

* The Vendahl have begun raiding the Freeholds with brazen audacity and in growing numbers from a lair inside the Sunken Realm. A charismatic shaman or champion is believed to have united several disparate tribes into a cohesive army. The Freeholders offer a reward for the head of the troublemaker, for as the old saying goes, cut off the head and the body dies. If you've seen *The 13th Warrior*, you have all the details you need to run this adventure already mapped out.

* The dwarves of Karad Marn are desperately in need of hard currency. Ancient texts make vague reference to a small but prosperous dwarf city that was destroyed when "Ertha called the land to her bosom." A minor dwarf noble believes this refers to the Sunken Realm. While he doubts the upper city still exists, he hopes the deeper levels survived the disaster more or less intact. He seeks trustworthy adventurers of irreproachable integrity to help him and his 12 followers find the site and recover any treasures. If the city exists, it is likely inhabited by orcs or goblins (or something far worse of the GM's choosing).

* The adventurers are in the Freeholds when they are hired to track down a missing trapper who went into the Sunken Realm. The characters find his corpse, which appears to have been clawed by something big. Stuffed into the trapper's pack are dozens of gold coins stamped with the face of a regal-looking sphinx. Following the trail of the trapper's frozen blood, the characters are led to a dark opening in the side of a mound of rubble.

* A devoutly religious character suffers recurring dreams, in which he is standing outside a collapsed building marked with his deity's holy symbol. Investigation reveals the likely location of the site is in the Sunken Realm. But what do the dreams mean, and what will the hero discover if he acts on them? If he ignores them, the dreams begin to turn into vivid nightmares, leaving him unable to sleep. Sooner or late he must act on them to preserve his sanity.

SUTMARK

Once a prosperous realm, Sutmark has seen a rapid decline in fortunes. Political machinations in Ostmark strip it of its trade routes, while the massive lizardman army batters at the walls of Ostvik. If either trade or army fails, Sutmark will swiftly fall, overrun by hordes of scaly invaders and their thunderlizards. The fate of the nation hangs in the balance.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Sutmark.

* **Nobility:** In order to hold a noble title, a character must either be the child of a jarl or have been granted the award by the king for loyal service. No hero can rise in social status unless he is the firstborn of a jarl, in which case he becomes the next jarl on the titleholder's death, or he is awarded the title for services to the king (typically this should require a long and dangerous adventure). The latter has a limit of hauld (the king will not create new jarls, and thegn is restricted to royalty).

As noted in the text, a title does not automatically grant ownership of land. The GM may choose to disallow the Noble Edge from granting the Rich Edge benefit in his campaign. In return, the hero has no real responsibilities, such as caring for his people. Kind GMs, or those who ignore those responsibilities, may award one extra skill point for the loss of the Rich Edge if they so desire.

* **Temperature:** Sutmark is sheltered from the worst of the winter cold, but also from much of the summer warmth. As such, it enjoys a fairly constant temperature all year round. It gets a lot of rain in fall, due to the prevailing easterly wind (increase percentages for precipitation by 10%).

Treat summer, spring, and fall as Low Winterlands summer, and the winter as spring/fall for the Low Winterlands.

* **Trade:** The price of all weapons and armor with V availability is doubled. Prices for T availability arms and armor are quadrupled, and those with C availability increased tenfold.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

The nobles of Sutmark long ago dispensed with traditional practice of electing their kings, for the outcomes brought civil war to the kingdom too frequently. For the first three centuries, primogeniture, inheritance by the eldest son, was the norm. Until 127 years ago, women could only inherit if they had no brothers. That law was revoked after Cwene Cuthwynne War-Raven returned victorious from battle and named her daughter heir over her cowardly son, who had stayed behind in the palace.

Only the king's firstborn child (his heir) and his or her offspring take the title aethling. Thus, the king's firstborn would be a prince, as would his grandchildren and great-grandchildren in turn. Any other children the king may sire always hold the title of Jarl of Ostvik, regardless of how many there are. Their children are automatically thegns, regardless of their birth order. No other nobles may ever take the title thegn.

In order to govern the land more effectively, the ancient kings appointed jarls, senior officials but not true nobles, to act as stewards. Over the centuries, these positions have become hereditary and the highest rank of nobility (thegns being royalty and holding higher title, something peculiar to Sutmark). The children of jarls hold the title of ridder, out of respect for their parent's position.

All other noble titles are issued at the king's pleasure. Whether they are hereditary or not depends on the king's decree. Even if the title can be inherited, the noble's children receive no title until they take their parent's place. Traditionally, the king awards titles (but not land) to the children of jarls when they come of age, but any citizen who serves the monarch well may be granted a title. Such titles do not always come with a gift of land, and thus many of Sutmark's nobles are impoverished. In order to acquire land, it must be inherited from one's family, or purchased from the king. Such land automatically becomes hereditary. If the land falls in a jarl's territory, then he is considered a subject of the jarl. Otherwise, his feudal master is the king.

Together, the jarls, along with the highest-ranking clerics of Tiw, Ullr, Eostre Animalmother, Ertha, and Neorthe, form the king's advisory council. Although entitled to rule as an autocrat, it takes a powerful ruler to govern without at least listening to his noblemen.

Citizens who own land, no matter how poor they might be, are part of the traditional upper class. Like the jarls, they have the right to raise income by renting their land. By law, if mineral wealth is found on private land, it becomes the property of the landowner. This is one reason kings are loath to give away too much land except in dire circumstances.

There is a difference between traditional and accepted upper class, however. A poor farmer might well own a few acres, maybe even a few hundred acres, but in modern Sutmark money and influence are what really counts. Thus, the true upper class is formed of wealthy landowners, rich merchants, and high priests, for the most part. Popular skalds, the most common sorcerers, may also qualify.

Poor landowners are now considered middle class (except by their peers), alongside less well-to-do merchants, important clerics, and master craftsmen. At the bottom of the ladder are the craftsmen, fishermen, laborers, entertainers, and soldiers who make up the bulk of the population.

Huscarls fill an odd niche. They are given the same respect as a ridder, since they are servants of a nobleman, but hold no true titles.

THE DIVISION OF LAND

All of Sutmark is technically owned by the king (currently the aethling in his role as regent). The jarls may oversee entire districts, but their personal domains are quite small. In return for their support, they retain a portion of the taxes raised from the population under their authority and have the right to rent out parcels of their personal domain. This is what gives them their considerable wealth.

The rest of the land is either owned by the king directly, owned by hereditary landowners who bought the land long ago (such practices were common during wars, when the monarch needed to raise revenue), or rented from the landowner.

JUSTICE

In Sutmark, the nobility stay well clear of civil cases and petty disputes, leaving the regional moots to handle them. In such matters the moots' word is final. All citizens without a noble title are entitled to take cases to the moot. Nobles with a civil grievance may ask the moot's permission to bring the case before them, but acceptance is not guaranteed. This power has kept the nobility from becoming too autocratic. Sadly, with the aethling occupied, the moots are being bullied or bribed into accepting cases they would rather avoid.

The jarls are responsible for trying criminal cases in their jurisdiction. In the king's lands, an appointed judge handles justice. He is usually a cleric of Hothar.

EDUCATION

Sutmark is a traditional Saxa realm in terms of education, which means children are taught at home or by other members of the community. Ostvik once had a fine academy which educated children of wealthy citizens from Midmark and western Veermark, but it was closed when Ostvik was attacked.

Saxa culture is completely dominant. The hearth elves, who live in a single forest in the central foothills, rarely mix with the natives, and the engro and others are such minorities that maintaining their ancestral beliefs is a constant struggle. If they don't at least learn the Saxa language, they have little hope of communicating.

All human children learn Saxa as their primary language (children of non-humans take it as their second tongue). Trader is virtually unknown outside the major towns, and the second most common language is actually Auld Saxa. The exception is Dusthall, where children are taught Beduan, the language of the southern nomads.

Children learn the customs, lores, history, legends, religion, and geography of Sutmark as a matter of course. Most do not have access to knowledge regarding other realms or cultures, nor more esoteric subjects, such as arcane lore or siege weapons.

The war has not yet dragged on enough for wide scale military training to be implemented for children (as it is in Vestmark). However, all those aged 12 and above are expected to know how to handle a spear and shield for their future role in the fyrd.

RELIGION

Isolated by geography, the citizens of Sutmark always looked to themselves for the defense of their realm. The reluctance of the other Marklands to send reinforcements has only reinforced their belief that they stand alone. Tiw, always a popular deity, has risen to prominence. Warriors pray to him for strength, courage, and safety, while their womenfolk offer animal sacrifices in the hope the war god's appetite for death will be appeased and the war will end soon. Most settlements have suffered losses in the war, and shrines to Tiw have sprung up the length and breadth of the land.

Sutmark's hilly terrain is adequate for subsistence level farming and hardy sheep and goats, but little else. The livestock are bred for their wool, an important export, leaving hunting as the main source of meat. Ullr remains a popular deity, especially outside the major towns.

Eostre Animalmother ranks as the third most popular deity, in terms of worshippers. Her support in strongest in the hillside communities. Her Plantmother aspect is a minor deity, given token worship in return for the pitiful crops of root vegetables pulled from the soil each fall.

Neorthe's cult holds great sway along the east coast. While the fishing and whaling industries have declined, they are still a major source of employment and export.

The cult of Eira is rapidly growing in strength and political power. Three years of war has sapped the will of the people, and now all they want is peace. Her clerics propose a peace treaty with the lizardmen, offering them safe passage through Sutmark so long as they end hostilities. Unfortunately, the plan has met with little support from those in power, who fear the lizardmen wish only to raze their homeland to the ground. Despite their opposition to the conflict, many of Eira's clerics are stationed in Ostvik, tending to the steady flow of wounded soldiers. Though their presence is welcomed by the cult of Tiw, the latter does not tolerate the healers speaking of peace. Such talk, the warrior-clerics claim, drains morale.

The stench of death has attracted clerics of Scaetha. Undead have never been a problem here, and the clerics are present to ensure the dead receive proper burial rites. This has placed them in competition with the cult of Tiw, who sees the burial of fallen soldiers as part of their sacred duties.

Hothar is another deity enjoying a surge of popularity, though to a much lesser degree than Eira. With the aethling occupied, the land is rapidly becoming lawless. Unscrupulous nobles are raising unfair taxes and ensuring their will is obeyed with gangs of thugs. Men and women found guilty of even trifling offenses are sentenced to enlistment in the army.

Ertha and Kenaz have support in the communities of the Red Hills, the heart of the iron industry. As the war consumes more metal, metal meant for export, so the fortunes of these settlements are diminishing. Many whisper that Ertha and Kenaz have forsaken them.

Sigel's cult is trying to gain a foothold in Sutmark. So far their efforts have failed. While their holy texts have passages ideal for rallying folk facing demons and orcs, lizardmen have not traditionally been considered creatures of darkness. A change of plan is being considered. Instead of preaching against the invaders, they intend to ally with the cult of Hothar and preach against corruption among the nobility. Such actions will earn them few friends in high places, but what is the loss of a handful of nobles compared to gaining thousands of peasants?

Var's clerics can be found in the major towns, and even in Ostvik, where they have been hired to oversee logistics. Their services do not come cheap, but few others have the network of contacts necessary to keep supplies coming in to the beleaguered defenders.

Although the Vestmark-Orcmark war has raged far longer than the war at Ostvik, it has long since stagnated into small-scale conflicts. The bloodshed in Sutmark has attracted followers of Dargar. While they do not understand the motives behind the invasion, they see this as a classic struggle—whoever loses likely faces obliteration at the hands of their enemy. They favor neither side, seeing both as potential weaklings. Until one side gains dominance, they wage bloody carnage on both factions.

MILITARY

Unlike further west, where the war grinds on day after day, the campaign for Ostvik is seasonal. Once the spring thaw comes, the vast lizardman army emerges from the Great Swamp and crawls to the ruined city. Fighting takes place throughout the whole of summer, ending only when the first snow falls.

Vastly outnumbered, it is the lizardmen's unwillingness, or inability, to fight in the cold that gives Sutmark a fighting chance. As the army withdraws beyond the snow blocked pass (though never in its entirety, for a sizeable blocking force is left to prevent reinforcements coming from Veermark), the defenders brave the bitter cold and small-scale raids to hastily begin refortifying their positions. Next year, the lizardmen must waste valuable time retaking territory they held the previous summer while men die holding territory their comrades already shed blood defending.

Sutmark has three types of soldier at its disposal. The first, its native huscarls, is a meager force numbering only around 150 battle-weary veterans stationed at Ostvik and some 75 others under the control of the nobility.

The bulk of its army, some 6,000 men, are mercenaries drawn by the lure of glory and gold in equal measure. At present there are some 2,000 heavy infantry, 1,500 light infantry, 2,000 archers, and 500 artillery men at the prince's disposal. Tind has only a token force of cavalry, employed as messengers rather than warriors. The debris-choked city streets makes cavalry futile, and horses require a lot of food.

Aiding the army are some 100 clerics of Tiw, 400 clerics of other deities, and around 600 civilians. The latter includes healers, messengers, laborers, armorers, fletchers, bowyers, butchers, furriers, and so on. The hearth elves, who fear the destruction of their home, have sent nearly all their warriors to assist the Saxa prince. At present, some 500 remain.

Although Tind is the overall strategic commander, the mercenaries fight as companies under the tactical command of their captains. The current strength of the companies varies between 25 and

200. In general, the smaller the company, the more experienced the soldiers.

The third part of Sutmark's overall military strength is the fyrd, the local militia. Every settlement has a militia equating to around 10% of its adult population, though around 2% are on active service at any one time. With the huscarls gone to war, they are all that stands between the lizardmen and destruction should Ostvik fall.

Contrary to rumors, Aethling Tind has no plans to conscript the general populace. He knows from bitter experience that the war for the capital is brutal. Untrained warriors will be cut down or panic and flee, and tearing the menfolk from their families and animals will lead not only to massive resentment, but also to rebellion.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Three trade roads run through Sutmark. The Red Road, named for the iron ore it carries, runs from Vidlin to Ostvik. Now disused, the Main Road runs from Ostvik through the High Pass and eventually to distant Veermark. A second road, the Sand Road, goes from Ostvik to Dusthall, and then through the mountains to the expansive and mysterious desert realm of Al-Shirkuh. Many traders still use the Red Road, for supplies are essential to the war effort.

Sutmark imports gold and salt. Both are used to pay for the growing number of mercenaries needed to defend the realm. Unfortunately, with exports dwindling the country is rapidly building up vast debts. Even if the war is won tomorrow, it will take decades to pay off the debts and return the nation to its former prosperity.

While Ostmark imports whale oil from Sutmark, it is a competitor in the iron and fish trades. Several merchants have taken to spreading rumors that the war is a meat grinder in an attempt to scare off the mercenaries who embark in Sandvik. Without fresh mercenaries, Sutmark is doomed.

In terms of exports, Sutmark's most profitable venture is whale oil. Much of this heads by ship to Ostmark. Wool, another profitable venture, is largely destined for the lands further up the coast. Fleets of ships laden with great bales head for the Cairn Lands, Trond, and the Icedale Freeholds every spring. Its fish and ale exports are normally sold to merchants in Ostmark—fishing is a major industry along much of the east coast, and profits are minimal—or to the desert nomads, who consider it a great delicacy.

Iron exports, the majority of which previously went south with the desert nomads, vanished almost overnight. Knowing that the mercenaries he needed to win the war would come at a heavy price, Aethling Tind refused to fall into the trap of selling iron only to be forced to buy back weapons at inflated prices from greedy rivals. The entire iron industry was taken under his control, its output used to keep the troops armed and armored. As a result, much of the southern trade died.

Sutmark's citizens are burdened with heavy taxes to help fund the war. Although the numbers below are listed in coin, much of the taxes are collected in goods. The same is true of most realms. With Aethling Tind's court all but defunct, tax collection has been given over to the local nobles rather than royal tax collectors. Those of a corrupt nature have begun skimming off the top and doctoring the records to cover their crimes.

Typically, the citizens used to pay around 35% of their income in various taxes. Since the war began, this has steadily increased, and taxation now stands at around 50%. The prince recently signed a decree forcing citizens to pay a further 10% to the cult of Tiw. In return, the cult promises to lend more support to the war and help bring in mercenaries and clerics from other lands.

ARCHITECTURE

With the Saxa culture dominant, wooden longhouses are the standard abode for the great majority of the population. The only all-stone buildings are found in Ostvik, the capital of the realm. Although Sutmarkers claim their ancestors built the now ruined city, this is not true. Hints lie in the architecture. Doorways are slightly taller and wider than humans would typically build, and the precision of the construction far outstrips that capable by even the stone-loving Anari.

The city was raised long before the Saxa came to prominence by the once mighty gatorman empire. In ages past it was beautifully decorated with murals and engravings depicting gatormen and their many gods. For a short while it was a distant outpost of a now forgotten human civilization. By the time the Saxa migrated through the Great Marsh and across the towering mountains it had lain abandoned for many centuries. Today only Saxa art adorns the remaining walls and buildings. At least on the surface.

Below the streets run many tunnels, few of which have been properly excavated due to frequent collapses and blockages. Behind piles of debris and false walls lie a myriad of chambers untouched for millennia.

Sutmark's remote location has not saved it from attack. Orcs, goblins, and giants dwell in the mountains that leer around three sides of the country. Save for Ostvik and its great stone walls, communities close to the mountains surround their homes with sturdy wooden defenses. Those nearer the center make do with ditch and bank fortifications, if they bother at all.

MAJOR LOCALES

Sutmark's population is largely confined to the central hills and eastern coast. To the north, west, and south are mighty mountains, whose foothills hold many secrets, and many dangers.

IRONGUARD FORT

The iron in the Red Hills has long been a lure for raiding orcs. To deter the rapacious creatures, and to ensure the king's presence was felt, a large ring fort was erected on the southern bank of the Bloodrun.

Based on the hill forts carved from the landscape by the ancient cultures of the Hearthlands, the 300 foot diameter ring fort is surrounded by a circular rampart that rises over 35 feet into the air. The rampart comprises two circles of tall wooden posts filled with dirt and rock. Four strong gatehouses, one at each of the cardinal points, allow access into the interior. The northern gate has been barricaded shut.

Inside, the fort is divided into four equal quadrants by straight roads running between the gates. The two northern quadrants each contain eight longhouses arranged in two squares. These house the garrison. Capable of holding in excess of 1,600 huscarls, today they are home to just 50 huscarls and 300 mercenary heavy infantry. The northeast quadrant contains a small temple to Tiw, while the northwest quadrant contains a smithy. The southeast quadrant contains accommodation, stables, and storage areas for merchants. The southwest quadrant is home to 450 civilians. Some work at the fort, but most are miners working the nearby iron ore veins.

The current commander, Ridder Ulfgrim Skallasunu, an elderly huscarl, knows that a concerted orc attack would overwhelm the fort's meager garrison. They would pay a heavy blood price, but the chance to secure a major fortification so close to the mines, not to mention the stores of iron ore, is a price that he would happily pay. No help can be expected from Ostvik, and additional mercenaries are unaffordable. To that end, Ridder Ulfgrim is willing to pay good money for the heads of orc chieftains and priests. He knows the loss of their leaders won't deter the tribes altogether, but it will delay their plans. With any luck, Ostvik will be secure by the time a major attack is mounted.

THE LOST HOLD

Frost dwarves claim their people have never lived beyond the Sigel Peaks, yet on a bluff in the Sandwall Mountains stands a tower many claim displays dwarven architecture. The top of the tower is missing, having tumbled into the valley far below in centuries long passed. The tower is hollow, containing naught but a spiral stair that descends deep below the level of the bluff and into the core of the peak.

sutmark



Population: 47,076 (90% Saxa, 6% hearth elves, 3% engro, 1% other)
Ruler: Aethling Tind Beitisunu
Religion: Tiw, Ullr
Imports: Gold, salt
Exports: Ale, fish, oil, wool

Tapsby
Blood Falls
Mountains
Marshwatch
Zigzag Pass
Moon Mountain Temple
Zigzag Fort
Old City
City of Sun
Great Swamp
City of Blood
High Pass
Ruined City of Treasure
City of Death
City of Power
Slik'al'Ssla
City of Trade
Spiderweb Mtn.
Wubby
City of Hunter
The Great
City of Ghosts
Sisel Peaks
Sunblade Temple
Tomb of the Unkown Kings
The lost hold
Warmwar
Wall Moun

0 10 25 50 100 200


Ghost Wolf Valley
Eastern Dragonspine Mountains
Sandvik/Violin
Violin
R. bloodrun
Ironguard Fort
Red Hills
R. ishwash
Whitehall
Sutmark
lastwood
Dust Bay
Dusthall
N
W
E
S

The tunnel eventually ends in a vast hall supported by carved pillars. From here, countless passages and stairs lead in all directions. Few have penetrated below the first few levels, and they have reported nothing but goblins, orcs, and other fell creatures. Their presence indicates there are other entrances to the lost hold yet to be discovered by the civilized races.

Returning adventurers have reported the towering columns and vaulted arches are finely worked examples, but no inscriptions or statues give any indication as to who carved the seemingly endless passages. Little treasure has been reclaimed from the orcs. Some speculate that the orcs have yet to reach the richer levels of the complex, while some take it as a clear sign the hold has nothing of value to offer explorers. But deep in the lowest level is something of interest, if not intrinsic value. A vast stone door seemingly impervious to all magic blocks a wide passage. Carved on the door in archaic dwarven is a warning to proceed no further.

SUNBLADE TEMPLE

Far to the east, in the side of the high foothills where the Sigel Peaks and Sandwall Mountains converge, stands a pair of gigantic stone doors. The top portion of one door has been shattered, and the rest battered by millennia of wind and rain. Yet it is still possible to make out the remains of an engraving of Sigel's holy symbol. Skalds tell of how in ancient times the engraving was filled with pure gold that blazed like the sun.

According to Saxa mythology, in the age immediately after the creation of man, mortals were far more powerful, being closer to the divine spark that gave them life. A powerful hero, known today only as Sun-Thief, crept into the heavens at night (when Sigel sleeps) and stole several burning coals from Sigel's Hearth.

Back in the mortal realm, he used the magical coals to forge a blade of pure gold—the Sunblade. The blade proved a mighty weapon, but it has its problems. The blade absorbed light, storing it as magical energy. Unless the blade was kept in total darkness it continued to absorb light. Like a dam fed by a fast flowing river, the sword would eventually release its energy it a cataclysmic explosion. The only way it could be diminished was to slay creatures of darkness or unleash constant bolts of destructive sunbeams.

Rightly figuring that the weapon was as much a danger too mankind as a boon, Sigel took the weapon. The blade was not destroyed, for the Norns had told Sigel that times would come when mortals needed its tremendous power. So Sigel concealed the blade in a dark pit, leaving clues to its location which only the righteous could follow. As always, the Norns were right.

According to more than one legend, the Sunblade was recovered during the Demongate War. A sword radiating sunbeams and unleashing rays of destructive light can still be found in many crumbling texts and faded tapestries across Rassilon. When the war ended, the cult of Sigel wisely concealed it again. The last time it was seen was during the war against the Liche-Priest. One story has it the Sunblade was vital in creating the wards that seal the undead monarch's tomb.

By all accounts the blade was hidden somewhere in the Sigel Peaks after the Liche-Priest was imprisoned, in what has become known as Sunblade Temple. Here the known history ends.

In order to ensure it could not absorb light, it was decided its entire tomb would be shrouded in utter darkness. Clerics of Sigel were asked to make the ultimate sacrifice and become its eternal guardians. So was founded the Order of the Enlightened Blind, worshippers of the sun god who lived only in perpetual darkness. For additional security, the great doors were sealed with potent spells and the tomb protected by numerous magical and mundane traps.

Never again able to gaze upon Sigel, the clergy who volunteered for service became sinners, yet ones still beloved by their god, for their sacrifice was for the good of all the races. Barely had the great doors been closed when doom befell the temple.

The final part of the legend claims that at the dawn of the Blizzard War, when mankind needed the blade again, the temple guardians and those outsiders who knew of its resting place mysteriously vanished.

Did Sigel take the guardians to his bosom in return for their sacrifice, knowing their duties had reached a premature end? Perhaps Thrym slew them, for it is likely he fears the power of the Sunblade. Or maybe Hela discovered its location, slew the inhabitants, and turned them into undead as an act of revenge for the imprisonment of her most beloved servant. No stories regarding the strange disappearances exist.

The legend of the Sunblade is well known, but there is little hard evidence to support its existence. Images of blades emitting rays and radiating light are not conclusive, for many clerics of Sigel used their swords as the focus for their miracles in the dark times, perhaps remembering the story of the Sunblade. Maybe the Sunblade does reside deep within the hillside, patiently waiting for the time it will be unleashed against Thrym's horde. Or perhaps it is just a story.

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN KINGS

Carved into the mountains of the Sandwall is a labyrinthine tomb complex of great antiquity. The high altitude, freezing temperatures, and arduous climb required to reach the entrance have deterred all but a few hardy adventurers from exploring the site.

The handful who survived reported seeing sarcophagi of unusual design decorated with weird pictographs. Due to a lack of spellcasters, the meaning of symbols was never deciphered. Some treasure, mainly gold coins and objects, was looted, but over the centuries these have been lost or melted down. Perhaps at the bottom of a chest a Saxa family still has a remnant of these explorations. The survivors also spoke of animated crocodile-headed statues wielding razor-sharp halberds, swarms of flesh-eating insects in hard shells, and deadly traps.

The tomb might be that of ancient gatormen priests, for their empire once extended beyond the mountains. It might also be the final resting place of kings who ruled over the desert kingdom to the south, their earthly remains laid here to foil tomb robbers. Regardless of who lies here, there is likely to be much gold and knowledge yet to be discovered.

WUDBY

Population: 256
Ruler: Ridder Eswulf Ingolfsunu

Spiderfell Wood may be the best-known haunt of giant spiders, but it is not the only one. The forest that swathes the lower slopes of Spiderweb Mountain is home to many species of giant spiders.

Although the work is tiring and dangerous, the citizens of Wudby forsake their crops and flocks for one week each Werremonan and traipse up to the mountain armed with axes, spears, and vials of antitoxin. There they proceed to hack down and collect the sticky webs that span between the mighty trunks.

Once harvested, the silk is taken back to the village. Here it is treated to make it more pliable and spun into lengths of rope. Shorter strands are broken up and rolled into balls. These are used by healers, stuffed into wounds to help staunch bleeding and prevent infection. Both products form a major part of Wudby's exports, with most being sold to the aethling for use at Ostvik.

Slain spiders are dragged back to the village, roasted over a great pit, and eaten as part of a feast celebrating another web harvest. The blood is mixed with a minute amount of paralysis venom and brewed into Spiderbite, a potent ale that, in sufficient quantities, can cause temporary paralysis. Too much can leave one numb from head to toe, and excessive imbibing can lead to death from paralysis of the heart and lungs.

Governance of Wudby is non-hereditary, the ridder being appointed by the king (the aethling at present). Eswulf is a retired warrior, strong of heart but too long in the tooth to be of use in battle. His position is reward for his long and loyal service. While he would dearly love to die defending his land from the lizardmen, a warrior's end, he will not desert his post.

Fortunately, the warrior in him may yet see action once more. While the spiders invariably fight back, their attacks are a natural animal reaction rather than planned assaults. In recent years, though, their attacks have become gradually more coordinated, as if something is controlling their actions.

Taiga Elfhomes

In the frozen wastes of the Winterlands lie the forests of Rimeholm, Nerenel, and Tethilin, the last bastions of a dwindling race. Beset by enemies and reluctant to embrace the wider world, time is running short for the taiga elves.

Rules of the Realm

These setting rules apply in all taiga elfhomes.

* **Constant Temperature:** The temperature within the great taiga elfhomes is held at a constant due to the magic of the hearthstones. Regardless of the season or in which geographical area the realm lies, the temperature is always that of a Hearthlands winter, cool but comfortable for the elves.

* **Cool Houses:** While taiga elves are comfortable in temperatures as low as –7 °F (–21 °C), they keep their homes heated not much above freezing (the same temperature band as spring/fall in the Hearthlands). While other races can tolerate these temperatures without suffering the effects of the cold, they are far from comfortable over extended periods.

* **Many Spies:** It is virtually impossible to walk an elven forest without the elves knowing one's location. The animals and plants are quick to pass word of strangers to the nearest elf community.

Draw a card from the action deck every day. A red card means the elves' forest spies have discovered the location of the intruders. From now on, they will be watched wherever they go by seemingly innocuous animals. A party of elves begins tracking the characters, typically after 1d4+2 days (sooner of the GM rules the spy was a bird or fast moving animal).

* **Metal Objects:** Taiga elves do not generally produce great quantities of metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they sometimes trade for them. Except in Tethilin, the price for metal items in their realms, when they can be found, is increased five fold. When trying to sell the spoils of their adventures, the heroes' roll to find a buyer suffers a –4 penalty. In Tethilin, the prices are three times higher and the penalty is only –2.

* **Nobility:** Taiga elf characters can never rise above the title leaflord unless they become the head of a clan or tribe. Given leaders are expected to serve their community and be present to give advice, their adventuring time is heavily curtailed.

* **Trade:** Taiga elves are fully aware of coins, but they have no use for them within their realms. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in a taiga elfhome. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

Sundering of the Elves

This section concerns itself with the origins of the taiga elves. The origin of the elf race as a whole is detailed in the Angarion entry.

Both species of elf widely hold that the split between hearth and taiga elves was a mutual and amicable decision brought about by elves who held that they should spread their care of the natural world to all climes. This is a myth, one whose origins lie not in subterfuge but in the ability of time to erase the longest memories. After the First Fall, when the rogue celestial spirits became the fey, they divided into two equal but opposite camps known as the Summer Court and the Winter Court. Those who became enamored of the mortal world and would later become the elves were members of both courts.

While the elves of the Summer Court preferred the temperate lands and evolved into the hearth elves, their Winter Court cousins settled in colder climes and became the taiga elves. It should be noted that while the fey courts are now divided along lines more akin to good and evil (a crude generalization, but one most mortals accept), the elves' exile came before this delineation became entrenched. Hence, while taiga elves are often colder in demeanor than hearth elves, they are not inherently evil or prone to malicious acts. This is most evident in their religious beliefs, which focuses on the great cycle of the natural world not the winter—taiga elves may appease Thrym, but they rarely worship him openly.

Indeed, not long after the Second Fall, Thrym came to the taiga elves in secret (possibly in disguise or acting through agents) and offered them gifts to become his followers. The elves pondered his offer long and hard, but eventually refused, sensing great mischief in the god of winter.

Although labeled a winter race by humans, taiga elves are not adapted to deep winters. They can tolerate lower temperatures than men, but arctic conditions are still hostile to them. Indeed, most taiga elf forests existed not more than a few hundred miles north of the line now marked by the Icewall, and many were in the realms now encompassed by the High Winterlands. Such lands enjoyed cool to cold climates, rather than frigid ones. Indeed, the presence of the Hellfrost and the formation of the High Winterlands will prove highly detrimental to taiga elves.

Within their forests, the magic of the hearthstones has kept the temperature constant at just below freezing all year round. When the magic of the hearthstones finally fails, which may not be far away, the forests they have called home for millennia in some cases will be subject to much harsher winters. Temperatures will drop an average of 40 degrees F lower by day and 60 degrees F by night. While it is very probable the elves will adapt relatively quickly, there is no guarantee the plants and animals vital to the race's survival will be able to do so.

Social Hierarchy

As with their hearth elf cousins, taiga elves have royalty and nobility. At the top is the White King (or Queen—taiga elves practice sexual equality), so named for his grand palace. By tradition, the monarch must always be a druid, an occupation which encompasses the teachings of both Ullr and Eostre. The children of the monarch hold the title prince or princess.

Unlike hearth elves, lower levels of nobility are granted titles based on position, not the size of their domain. Each taiga elf realm outside Rimeholm is ruled by a forestlord. Clans, which are bound by familial ties to a common ancestor, are ruled by boughlords. Tribes, which are made up of clans voluntarily following a noble, are governed by greenlords. If a clan is split between two or more tribes, each branch has a boughlord. The children of the nobility take the title leaflord, regardless of their parents' status.

Noble titles are passed on through family lines, but not necessarily to the oldest offspring—any blood relative can be named successor. Each noble is responsible for naming his heir and ensuring they are groomed for the role. In the event a successor is not named before the titleholder's death, his advisory body (see below) has the authority to elect the new lord.

Although nobles are autocrats in theory, most maintain an advisory body made up of clerics, druids, and elementalists. The largest and most important of these is the White Lords, who serve the king. Every noble appoints his own councilors. The advisors can only offer opinions and suggestions, having no authority to veto their lord or impose new laws.

Ranking beneath the nobility are the clerics of Ullr and Eostre, and the druids. Clerics rank higher, for they communicate directly with their gods. Druids are believed to understand the secrets of the natural world, using the magic placed in the world by the Ullr and Eostre but not drawing power from them directly.

The next social stratum comprises elementalists and clerics of the other gods. Again, elementalism is seen as an alternate form of worship rather than a completely separate art.

Rangers are permanent soldiers, though because of taiga elf tactics they are also expert hunters. Not every elf community maintains rangers. In many, hunters are expected to donate time to patrolling the borders. Where rangers exist, they are lead by captains.

All other elves fill a single social stratum, though there are sub-levels. Master hunters and craftsmen are accorded more respect than typical hunters and craftsmen, for instance. Herbalists and healers are higher than potters, who are higher than firewood collectors, and so on.

EDUCATION

Taiga elves have no formal schools or academies. Teaching young children the skills they need to function as adults falls to the entire community. Although birthrates are very low among taiga elves, children are not mollycoddled. Accidents and injuries will occur as the child learns how to handle animals, plants, and weapons, but these are learning experiences vital to growth.

Very young elves learn how to light fires, erect gers, and build makeshift shelters, how to set traps and use every part of an animal, and what plants are edible, poisonous, or useful in herb lore, first by watching their elders and then through hands-on experience. As they reach the equivalent of their teenage years a young elf is taught how to use a bow.

Throughout his young life the elf is tutored on the laws, history, and myths of his people, as well as their religion. As the communities move through the forest he learns to identify signs marking the changing of the seasons, tracking, and where to find the best food.

Regardless of his chosen god, every elf must decide whether to become a child of Ullr (a hunter) or Eostre (a gatherer) before he becomes an adult. Elves have multiple words regarding gender. One set refers to physical gender, which is determined by the gods. Another refers to one's occupation, which is personal choice.

Thus, a male elf who practices healing is referred to using female pronouns, but only in the sense that his work is not aggressive. Likewise, females who become warriors have male occupations and are referred to by male pronouns. Outsiders are often unaware that when a taiga elf says someone is doing "woman's work," he is merely stating a fact based on occupation, not issuing an insult regarding gender. The nobility and those who practice druidism are genderless, for leaders and druids must be wise in the teachings of Ullr and Eostre.

RELIGION

Although taiga elves pay all the gods lip service as required and try to avoid offending them, just two deities are truly important to them as a race.

Ullr is the father of the gods and, in taiga elf mythology, husband of Eostre. As the god of hunting he is the great provider who taught the elves how to survive in the harsh environment they chose to call home. As the god of archery, he is the chief war god of the race, for taiga elves see little difference between combat and the hunt.

Until the Blizzard War, Ullr's cult was roughly equal in size and power to that of Eostre. He was the male part of nature, though the cult was, and remains, open to elves of either gender. But times have changed and the world is a harsher place, with many more enemies battering at the door. Today, every taiga elf is automatically inducted into the cult at birth, though whether they fully honor Ullr in adult life is personal choice.

Eostre represents the gather side of the taiga elf society. She is the great mother and healer, and represents the female aspect of the world. She also serves as goddess of the home and society, ensuring that the elves live in harmony with nature, rather than imposing their will on it.

The elves of Nerenel, whose home borders the Liche Lands, give praise to Sigel, god of light and defender against darkness. Elves are long-lived and change their minds only slowly. Thus, while the younger races worship Scaetha both as goddess of death and defender against undead, in taiga elf mythology she is seen as a minor deity, a sub-cult of Sigel.

The four elemental gods—Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor—are the children of Ullr and Eostre, each controlling one small but important part of creation. While they are duly honored at appropriate times of the year, the cult of Kenaz is growing in Rimeholm as the hearthstones fail. This worship is a blend of desperation and true piety, for if the stones' magic fails the realm will freeze, becoming unbearably cold even to the elves.

Although Ullr remains the main god of war, his son, Tiw, is beginning to receive worship in Rimeholm. The cult first rose to prominence during the Blizzard War, when the elves adopted a more aggressive stance. The cult dwindled but never totally died in the centuries after. It is now enjoying a slight resurgence due to the siege of Karad Marn, in which the elves are taking part.

Worship of the other gods is a matter of personal choice, but in the taiga elf pantheon all the gods, even the evil gods, who are seen a wayward scions, are children of Ullr and Eostre.

FUNERARY CUSTOMS

Taiga elves believe that everything in the natural world is connected and that death is vital if new life is to occur. When a taiga elf dies, its corpse is washed, dressed, and laid out on a funeral bier deep in the woods. Here it will decompose naturally or become food for carnivores. Many other races (except worshippers of Thunor, who practice similar beliefs) consider this practice strange at best and abhorrent at worst, but to the elves a corpse is merely flesh without the spirit.

This is not to say that elves are disrespectful toward physical remains. Far from it, in fact. As they make use of every part of an animal to appease its spirit, so they believe that every part of a corpse is Eostre's to use as she sees fit. Taiga elves detest undead not because they are mockeries of life inhabited by fell spirits, but because their bodies have been stolen from Eostre.

It is said the spirits of the departed can be heard in the wind if one knows how to listen. Elves hang wind chimes in the doorways of their gers. Depending on the noise a chime makes, the elves know whether the spirit outside the door is friendly or hostile. Taiga elves are very superstitious with regard the wind. Thunderstorms are a particularly bad omen, for it means the ancestral spirits are angry.

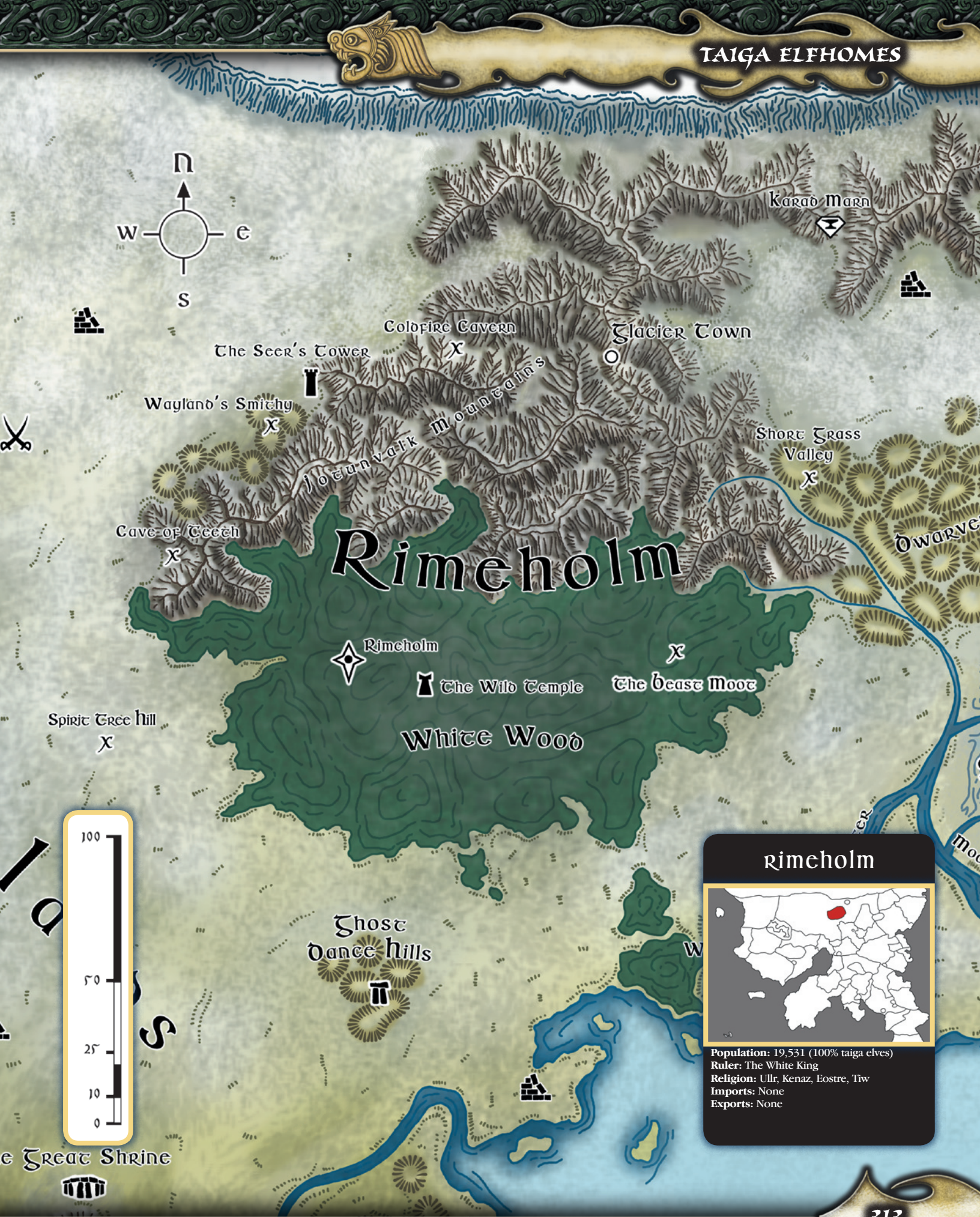
MILITARY

Taiga elves are highly aggressive in the defense of their homes. Whereas hearth elves may watch intruders to judge their intention, their colder cousins prefer to shoot first and ask questions later.

Military structure is very much down to individual rulers. Some, like Tethilin, use only hunters and druids working on a rota between other duties to ensure safety, having no true standing army. Others are protected by professional warriors (rangers) and warrior druids.

The size of military formations also varies by realm. Nerenel, for example, has a standing army but deploys them only in 20 strong units known as hunting parties or warbands. Most members are rangers, but each contains at least one druid or elementalist to provide magical support. When hunting parties must work together, the captains nominate an overall commander from their number. Politics plays little part in this, for survival is more important to the elves than personal honor or glory.

Rimeholm, by comparison has standing companies of 100



Rimeholm

Population: 19,531 (100% taiga elves)
Ruler: The White King
Religion: Ullr, Kenaz, Eostre, Tiw
Imports: None
Exports: None

soldiers, though these are sub-divided into warbands as above. A captain commands each company, and a sergeant each warband.

In all realms, it is the duty of every hunter and druid to muster if the realm is assaulted. Clerics and other spellcasters are usually quick to sign up as well, though they are not required to do so. Where there is a standing army, the militia are divided into companies or warbands led by a ranger. Elves have little compunction is sending the militia to the frontline, for as hunters they have all the skills necessary to fight.

Taiga elf tactics revolve around their strengths—mastery of the bow and stealth. Guerilla raids, sniper attacks, and ambushes are the norm, the elves unleashing a few volleys of arrows and magic before melding back into the forest. Often they employ just a handful of warriors, hoping to draw the enemy into following their retreat. Those foolish or arrogant enough to comply are led into a pre-planned ambush site.

With mobility and stealth being vital to their tactics, taiga elves shun metal armor in favor of leather. Only the White King's elite bodyguards, the Blizzard Guard, who blend steel with hrimwisardry, wear chain shirts as standard. Long bows and long swords are wielded in battle with equal skill.

Animals are used as messengers, scouts, and soldiers. Like the hearth elves, such assets are highly valued, not tools to be used and discarded. Harmless squirrels sit in trees, watching enemy formations go by before scurrying off to alert the nearest elves. Birds that cry out are not simply reacting to disturbances on the forest floor, but calling out troop strengths and directions of travel. Wolves harry cavalry and skirmishers, shieldwalls are broken by raging bears, and flocks of crows swoop down to distract spellcasters and archers.

The elves have brokered many deals with the fey over the millennia, performing and asking favors in a continual cycle of favors. As a result, they have fewer qualms about calling on the fey than the hearth elves.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Taiga elves are an insular race and rarely voluntarily mix with outsiders. As a nomadic culture making use of whatever goods are available season-by-season, scant resources can be spared for regular trade.

Rimeholm is too far from any trade route to engage in wide-ranging mercantile activities. Until Karad Marn fell there was sporadic trade with the dwarves, small quantities of metal imported in return for food. These days the elves willingly donate what they can spare to the war effort, knowing the dwarves will repay the debt in due course. Finnar nomads sometimes shelter within the outer forest, trading small items with the elves, but such trading is very small scale, involving families rather than entire communities.

The elves of Nerenel have made tentative steps to open trade but do so infrequently. They import ingots of gold and silver, but rarely wear jewelry and certainly do not export it. Exactly what they need with the precious metal is of interest to the cult of Var, who suspect some devious plan to hoard the metal and so raise prices throughout the land. Most of Nerenel's trade is conducted with the Saxa families inhabiting the plains claimed by the elves. In return for wool, which is woven into clothes, the taiga elves export furs.

Tethilin also sells fur. It imports gemstones (again, for no obvious reason) and iron. The latter is a vital import, as the small realm is surrounded by a hostile nation and has other enemies nearby. Although the elves intensely dislike mining, they are pragmatic enough to know the value of metal weapons.

Where trade occurs, it is almost always conducted at the borders of the forest. A notable exception is Aelfmeet in Shattered Moor. When a caravan arrives, it announces its presence by calling out to the elves and placing the goods it has to sell in a pile. It then withdraws several hundred yards away. Once satisfied no ambush is planned, the elves appraise the goods and leave trade goods in a second pile. After the elves have withdrawn the merchants return and either remove some of the goods they have offered (not being satisfied with the trade) or take the elves' goods and depart. This process can last for many days before sides are satisfied and depart with their goods.

Little cheating occurs. If the elves cheat, the merchants will simply take their wares elsewhere. If the merchants cheat, they had best not return if they value their lives.

Communities share resources freely among their members, and no form of taxation is imposed. However, elves are expected to contribute their fair share. There is little concept of personal property, though no one would think of borrowing items vital to another elf's trade or profession without first asking.

ARCHITECTURE

For the most part the nomadic taiga elves live in round tents known as gers. Made of felt coated in waterproof animal skin laid over a light wooden frame, they are well-insulated, quick to construct, and can be broken down into various component parts for easy transport. The walls are thick enough to provide protection against arrows and spears.

There are no internal partitions, elves being extremely communal, distrustful of those who seek privacy, and fully at ease with all natural body functions. The floor is lined in furs except in the center, where a stone hearth is constructed. Although the elves prefer cool temperatures, gers are heated just enough to prevent water from freezing. Taiga elves also cook their food. Wood is burnt, but only dead wood is collected—elves do fell timber, but never for firewood. Dried animal dung is also used for heating.

Despite the hearthstones' magic keeping the temperature constant, taiga elfhomes have seasons. The elves migrate once or twice a year, usually in spring and fall, so as not to overly deplete any one area of the forest. Every tribe knows its territory, these ancient hunting areas having been laid down many centuries ago. If a tribe finds its lands are depleted for no fault of its own, it must ask the ruling noble for permission to live elsewhere until its territory recovers. This is not uncommon, and large areas of the forest are set aside purely for this purpose. A tribe that has over hunted or gathered its territory must survive as best it can and learn from its mistakes.

While the elves do not construct palisades and walls, they prefer to settle in naturally defensible areas, such as atop hills. Many of these have a ditch excavated around the perimeter for defense. A small number of hunters are left to watch over these regular campsites while the tribe is elsewhere in the forest.

The only true permanent settlement is Rimeholm, the seat of the White King. Surrounding the majestic White Palace are the wooden homes of courtiers, craftsmen, and warriors who make up the royal court. The White King owns other lands, which are used to provide for the inhabitants of the capital.

MAJOR LOCALES

Each of the locales below is marked (N) Nerenel, (R) Rimeholm, or (T) Tethilin, representing in which of the major elfhomes it can be found. GMs can transfer the sites between realms with little effort.

ALFWODETON (N)

Population: 577
Ruler: Hauld Iduna Engersdohtor

Of the many Saxa steads and villages that border Nerenel, Alfwodeton ("The enclosure by the elf wood") is the largest. The village has stood behind its strong palisade for a mere twenty years, the first settlers being refugees from Seithrby. The current ruler is the daughter of the original founder.

The Saxa are subjects of Forestlord Elethenel, though they see taiga elves only once a year when the taxes are due. In return for the elves' protection, the Saxa pay a tithe of livestock, fish, and pottery. The elves allow the Saxa to fell a small number of trees each year for construction purposes, and stick pickers are allowed to gather dead branches for firewood.

Alfwodeton is 15 miles southwest of the forest, close to the border with Seithrby. Its palisade and ditch circles only half the settlement, for its other flank is protected by the river, on whose



Nerenel

Population: 12,569 (91% taiga elves, 9% Saxa)
Ruler: Forestlord Elethenel
Religion: Ullr, Sigel, Eostre
Imports: Gold, silver, wool
Exports: Furs

high banks it stands. The inhabitants raise sheep and goats, craft pots from local clay, fish the river's cold water, and plant hardy root vegetable crops, all the while keeping a wary eye to the south and east, where lie the Liche Lands of Old. It also serves as the main market for the outlying steads and villages, boasting a shrine to Var and a small temple to Eostre's dual aspects.

Hauld Iduna's father raised her to despise the conquerors of Seithrby, a sentiment now little felt by her kinsfolk. As far as they are concerned, Nerenel is their home. Even her three daughters ignore her frequent public rants. Heroes opposed to the rulers of Seithrby will find a warm welcome in her hall, while those who serve the usurpers are denied hospitality.

Alfwodeton boasts a permanent guard of ten huscarls, most of whom are middle-aged men more suited to farming than fighting, and 20 permanent militiamen. Most of Nerenel's enemies assault her northern and western borders, and until recently the citizens of Alfwodeton had no major problems.

A number of steads have been destroyed in recent months, the livestock stolen, the occupants slaughtered, and the inhabitants put to the sword. Unwilling to use his own troops to investigate, Elethenel has given Iduna free reign to handle the matter as she sees fit. Unfortunately, despite any evidence to correlate her beliefs, Iduna points the finger of blame firmly against Seithrby. But there are many hostile forces on Nerenel's border, any of whom might be behind the raids.

THE BEAST MOOT (R)

The White King has never claimed ownership of the forest he now calls home, referring to himself only as its steward. As with all elfhomes, the creatures that live within its borders have a say in matters that affects them.

The Beast Moot appears to be nothing more than an ordinary clearing, larger than most perhaps, but nothing unusual. No magical aura, no holy symbols of the gods, mark it as special or sacred. On the high holy days of Eostre, though, the clearing becomes a gathering point for the leaders of the forest animals. All share the odd distinction of being utterly white, regardless of the natural coloration of their species' fur, hair, or hide.

Arranging themselves in a circle, for all are equal in the eyes of the goddess, the beasts debate and discuss problems. Their language is that of common animals and thus is meaningless to most mortals. Only by using *speak language* can one understand the grunts, growls, barks, and other assorted noises. Not that the animals tolerate uninvited guests eavesdropping in on their moot. Rabbits and squirrels may not pose much threat, but the bears and wolves are only too willing to teach spies a lesson in manners. On the rare occasions non-animals are invited to attend, the beasts speak in fluent taiga elven.

Once matters are settled, a representative is despatched to take the animals' concerns to the White King.

THE DEAD GROVE (N)

Large swathes of Nerenel were destroyed during the reign of the Liche-Priest, but the elves held strong, becoming a perpetual thorn in the side of the dark lord.

Thirty years ago, an elf tribe whose migrations took them to a little visited section of the forest bordering the Liche Lands discovered a section of forest had died. The ground was like ash, the trees withered and twisted, and the animal life fled. Scouts who penetrated the area said it smelled of death and decay. Prayers were said and rebirth ceremonies conducted to no avail. Though the loss of the forest was mourned bitterly, worse was to come. Each year, the canker spread outward, laying waste to the surrounding vegetation.

After much heated debate, a decision was made to hack down a circle of trees a hundred yards wide surrounding the blight. Where possible plants were replanted elsewhere and animals moved to similar surroundings, but the loss of life was terrible to the elves. In a year long ritual in which several fey lords were called upon to lend power the cleared away was utterly laid barren. Eons might pass, but nothing would ever grow there again.

The tactic seems to have worked, for the death of the forest has been halted. But the dead vegetation remains, the black leaves and needles refusing to drop, the once withered bushes seeming to rejuvenate into twisted forms. That some fell magic of the Liche-Priest is behind the blight is clearly evident, but the elves refuse to enter the area, though they watch it from afar, ever vigilant in case the blight leaps the clearing.

Several theories as to the exact cause are given credence, but none are proven. The most popular one claims that before the end came, a powerful servant of the Liche-Priest hid away in the elf forest, perhaps burying himself deep beneath the soil to escape his pursuers. As the wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb weaken, so the lieutenant grows steadily stronger, his evil spirit warping the landscape.

THE GER ON RAVEN'S LEGS (R)

It is said the White King bows to but one mortal. The elves do not know her name, but she is politely referred to as Enminawen, which loosely translates into Trader as "Gentle Grandmother." Records dating back thousands of years making passing reference to her.

These same records speak of her as a seer and sorceress, an oracle whose words are to be heeded no matter how strange or fanciful they might seem. Some elves claim it was she who warned the old White King of the coming destruction to Morenelion.

Her movements are her own, and until recently she visited the court but once or twice a generation. In the past century she has made a dozen visits to the White King, inviting him into her hut (without his guards) to talk. What transpires is never revealed, but each time the White King emerges visibly shaken. Her last visit coincided with the discovery of the fading wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb, but scouts have reported seeing the hut bounding through the forest once more.

Some stories say she is an ancient taiga elf whose life has lasted millennia, others that she is actually a member of a line of strange hags. A few suggest that she is actually a fey lord. Similarly, descriptions of her vary from a young maiden of unearthly beauty to a hideous crone with teeth and nails of iron.

HILL OF THE NECROMANCER (T)

On the lower slopes of the Giant's Steps, which extend into Tethilin, stands a desolate hill atop which are the crumbling ruins of an ancient fortress. Legend has it that the fortress was raised during the Liche-Priest's brief foray east toward Aspiria and served as the headquarters of one of his generals.

For nigh on a millennium the elves have shunned the site, for nothing grows on its black rock and it radiates palpable evil strong enough to quail the stoutest heart. Even orcs and giants give it a wide berth, and so the elves rarely bother to patrol here. But a dark presence has taken control of the ruins and undead, creatures not seen since the Liche-Priest's armies were defeated, are abroad in the woods. The elves refer to the master of the hill only as the Necromancer, for that he wields power over the undead is the only known fact. If he is not stopped soon, his growing legions may prove too much for the elves to handle.

ICEFINGER'S GER (N)

Icefinger is a venerable taiga elf. Still hale and hearty after 360 years, he nevertheless prefers to stay in one place rather than migrate around the forest. Icefinger has dedicated his entire life to manufacturing bows, and he considered the last of the great masters of the craft.

Icefinger is very particular about his customers—he has no wish for his bows to be used by the wrong people or as simple tools of death. While he sells to all elves without question, non-elf customers must be followers of Ullr or proven friends of his people. He does not haggle over prices. Icefinger offers any party who can locate his granddaughter, Flurry, 2,000 gs in credit toward bows or longbows. The youth, desperate to prove herself a worthy warrior, entered the Liche Lands of Old two months ago and has not been seen since.

As well as standard bows and long bows, Icefinger can produce weapons with the following traits. Traits can be combined into a single weapon. All prices are cumulative.

High Tension: bow or longbow inflicts 2d8 damage but have a d8



tethilin

Population: 7,642 (100% taiga elves)
Ruler: Forestlord Icespear
Religion: Ullr, Eostre
Imports: Gems, iron
Exports: None

Minimum Strength requirement (+400 gs); *Improved Range:* bows have Range 15/30/60 and longbows 18/36/72 (+250 gs).

JOTUNVALK MOUNTAINS (R)

Until recently the southern Jotunvalk Mountains were largely clear of giants, orcs, and goblins. But with a quarter of their army now at Karad Marn, the elves have been unable to prevent their return. Caves and castles long abandoned have new lords as the fell races slowly reclaim their former holdings.

The Giants' Tomb: High in the mountains stands the broken remains of a statue. Its arms are crumbled to dust and its severed head lies to one side, gazing vacantly into space, but it still commands awe for its sheer size. Rising a full 50 feet above the landscape, the statue depicts a majestic frost giant jarl clad in chainmail.

The statue stands at the entrance to an immense stone cairn built of colossal boulders. Within lie the bones of a dozen frost giant jarls, laid to rest here after the Blizzard War. The elves visited the site long ago, clearing out a small orc tribe and removing all the treasures. They have never bothered returning.

Since their last visit things have changed. A decade ago an earthquake cracked the stone floor, revealing worked chambers far below. Only a full exploration will reveal whether these are an older part of the burial complex or part of another structure.

MAERA'S TOOTH (T)

Maera's Tooth is impossible to find while the sun is in the sky—it simply doesn't exist to any form of detection. When the sun sets, the glade materializes out of thin air. One legend says that when the sun is in the sky the Tooth exists only in Alfheim. No one has ever discovered it there, so the theory is unproven. What is fact is that anyone is the clearing when dawn breaks suddenly finds themselves in the deep forest, and very rarely in the spot where they entered the glade.

Standing in the center of a small clearing is a 30-foot high rainbow-hued stone of unknown type. Inscribed onto each of its faces is Maera's holy symbol. The infinity symbol in the center of the glyph glows, its brightness mirroring the moon. During the nights of Fulmonan, for instance, the light is very pale. During Deorcmonan, it bathes the entire glade in light. The overall effect is enough to treat lighting in the glade as daylight.

According to the taiga elves, the stone fell from the heavens during the God War. They believe it is actually one of Maera's teeth and was knocked out during the conflict. The stone is a sacred place.

Spirit Name: Maeratonn ("Maera's Tooth").

Ambience: Although it grants no benefit, wizards and clerics of Maera can sense the raw magic flowing through the stone. Other visitors feel the hair standing on end as if from static.

Deity: Maera.

Senses: Notice d12+2. Blessed with the gift of divination, the spirit knows what is going to happen before it actually occurs. This ability extends only to the edge of the clearing.

Communication: The spirit speaks only to acknowledge a sacrifice. Its voice is ephemeral and distant.

Anyone who performs the necessary sacrifice and receives a blessing is marked on their left palm. The image takes the form of the current phase of the moon. A full moon is a circle, a quarter moon a crescent, and so on. The new moon is a circle with a dot in the center. The mark is visible only to the receiver and through the use of *detect arcana*. When the blessing ends, the mark disappears.

Sacrifice: In order to receive a blessing, the supplicant must unlock the magic bound up in a relic (alchemical or permanent) by touching it to the stone. The magic is then siphoned off, rendering the object utterly mundane. This does not count as destroying the relic for the purposes of Maera's clergy and sinning. An individual may make only one sacrifice in any 40-day period. The spirit accepts multiple sacrifices from the same source, but it grants no reward.

Powers: A supplicant receives one of three blessings. When he performs the sacrifice, the spirit asks him which one he desires. The spirit reveals only the names of the gifts—it does not discuss specifics or impart game mechanic information.

Gift of Creation: The hero gains the Alchemy Edge for 40 days. The spirit does not impart knowledge of any spells, nor does it grant the Knowledge (Alchemy) skill.

Gift of Foresight: The character gains use of *precognition* once per day for 40 days. He uses Smarts as his arcane skill die, unless he is a cleric of Maera, in which case he uses Faith. The spell is subject to the Siphoning, even if the supplicant is a cleric. If the Siphoning results in a loss of arcane power, the hero loses this benefit. He suffers any physical effects as normal.

Gift of Knowledge: The character's Knowledge (Arcana) is increased by two dice (or by +1 if at d12 or higher) for the next 40 days. Heroes with no skill gain d6 instead. The bonus does not apply when taking Edges with a Knowledge (Arcana) requirement during the month—the hero must use his unmodified die rating.

THE STONE LABYRINTH (R)

Laid out on the ground in a small clearing is a labyrinth made of small stones. The name labyrinth is misleading—the route can be clearly seen and the sole path always leads one to the center.

Elves have frequently witnessed fey walking, hopping, skipping, or dancing the winding route, though to what end is unknown—the ways of the fey are beyond mortal comprehension. Elves with troubles on their mind sometimes walk the maze, finding it soothing and an aid to thought. By the time they have retraced thir steps, they have often hit upon a solution. The center point is, when the stars are right and the fey willing, a gateway to Alfheim. It is a route often used by druids and heralds of the White King who have need to converse with the unearthly creatures.

On occasion a foolish elf or ignorant outsider takes one of the stones as a souvenir. Most return it within a short time, for the stones are fey-cursed—anyone who takes a stone is stricken with bad luck. For player characters, this manifests as them drawing one less benny per session until the stone is returned to its rightful place and an apology to the fey for disturbing their labyrinth spoken aloud.

THE WILD TEMPLE (R)

More accurately translated as the "Temple of the Wilds," this sacred site has been the center of traditional worship since the foundation of Rimeholm. Non-taiga elves are not permitted inside the clearing, save at the behest of the high priests of Eostre or Ullr, or the White King. Permission is rarely granted, even to those who honor the gods of nature. The penalty for trespass is death.

The entrance to the great grove is a wide path lined with standing stones. The stones are totems. Each is inscribed with an image of one of the animals the elves hunt or the plants they harvest for food. Access from other sides is all but impossible—the surrounding forest is a mass of dense bramble bushes, tree men friendly to the White King patrol the perimeter, and there are many war trees that animate automatically when they detect non-elves approaching.

More standing stones mark the outer edge of the clearing. These are inscribed with the holy symbols of Eostre and Ullr, to whom the temple is dedicated. In the very center is the great altar, a massive stone stained dark with blood. No animal's blood is ever shed here—the blood offering is given freely by the elves, who slice their palms and place them on the altar to help replenish the forest and the creatures that dwell within.

Taiga elf ceremonies are not for the timid. Nature is untamed, and festivals and ceremonies are equally wild. Accompanied by the heavy beat of drums, the clash of cymbals, and the blaring of horns, the taiga elves honor their gods through frenetic dancing. Some revelers imbibe strong drink or hallucinogenic herbs to enter the right state of mind. The most devout have no need of such things.

The high priest of Ullr, who wears a deerskin cloak replete with majestic antlers, and the high priestess of Eostre, who wears a cloak of leaves and a garland of wild flowers, lead such festivals. On high holy days, animals come from the forest to join in the revelry, accepting the elves' prayers in advance for the lives that will be taken later.

TEN SEAS, THE

The sea, poetically known as the whale-road and Neorthe's roof, has long fascinated men. An invisible network of trade routes weave across its turbulent surface, carrying men and cargos from port to port, yet it is a realm more dangerous than any other. Ships face attack by terrible beasts and marauding pirates, orc galleys prowl in search of fresh victims, storms batter at fragile vessels and submerged rocks threaten to tear hulls to kindling.

Rules for ships, navigating the waves, and underwater explorations can be found in *Hellfrost Expansion 2*.

THE SEVEN SEAS

Traditionally, there are seven other seas in addition to the Frozen, Narfel, Inner, and White Seas. Exactly where each sea begins and ends is impossible to decide, for the ocean acknowledges no boundaries or lines on a map.

THE BURNING SEA

The Burning Sea is not technically in Rassilon, beginning just south of where the map ends. It divides Rassilon with the southern continent of Al-Shirkuh.

Mariners say Sigel's Hearth does strange things the further one sails south. Although it does not hang in the sky as long as in the Winterlands, it burns hotter. The sea begins to hiss and steam, and wooden decks begin to char unless continually dampened. Clerics of Kenaz and Sigel claim the Hearth is no more powerful than elsewhere in the world. What makes it hotter is the presence of Muspelheim, the fiery realm wherein live fire giants and sun dragons. To keep sailing south is to enter this infernal realm, where awaits only an agonizing, fiery death.

Strangely, merchants from Al-Shirkuh, regular visitors to Sethnor City, make no mention of any supernatural, fiery effects, claiming instead the sun, which they call Al-Yamun ("The Bright Eye") and believe to be the eye of a god named Shamash, Defender of the Faithful, grows weaker but hangs in the sky longer, while the water becomes solid.

THE FOAMING SEA

Traditionally the Foaming Sea begins at the edge of the ice-laden White Sea and stretches as far south as the coastline of Aspiria's Southern Marches. Also known as Dargar's Sea and the Berserker Sea, the water takes its name from the turbulent waters extending far out to the west. Legend has it Dargar, in one of his berserk rages, dripped drool into the sea, causing it to froth and foam. Clerics of Thunor, who know more about winds than even master mariners, claim the sea is a playground between Vestri, the god of the west wind whose realm lies far to the west, and Austri, the god of the east wind. Whatever the cause, the waters here are notoriously choppy all year round. In especially bad winters, ice floes drift as far south as the Aspirian coast.

THE GIANTS' SEA

The choppy waters south of Orcmark, today given wide berth because of the orc galleys that sail here in search of prey, were once prime fishing grounds, the warm currents of the Boiling Sea spawning vast shoals of fish.

The area is also renowned for the size of the aquatic creatures that call this place home. If mariners' tales are to be believed, there are lobsters the size of ships, crabs as big as houses, and eels as thick as a man's torso and longer than the grandest longhouse. Even the smallest fish is the same length as a grown man is tall.

Naturally, few fishermen have ever seen such colossal beasts firsthand, yet alone landed one—crabs and lobsters live on the seabed many hundreds of feet below the waves and eels and fish boasting those dimensions would likely drag a ship under if caught in nets. Perhaps, though, there is a kernel of truth to the stories, for sea giants have been sighted in the sea that bears their name.

THE MIST SEA

Generally detailed on maps as beginning at the same point as Sutmark's northern border, the Mist Sea extends far to the east, to the mysterious lands of the Jade Empire. No merchant from Rassilon has ever reached its shores and returned. Further south, its water crashes against the northern shore of Al-Shirkuh, a barren expanse of salt marsh and endless sands. Dense sea mists shroud the area, and the many sea serpents drawn on maps are no fantasy, for plenty lurk in the warm water.

Merchants from the southern realm claim that further east along the coast begins a powerful kingdom ruled by tyrannical sphinxes. If one can avoid their maritime patrols and follow the coastline as it curves south, there lies the wondrous port of Jadid, a city devoted entirely to trade and whose population exceeds that of Royalmark. With no corroborating evidence, both stories are considered myths, even by clerics of Var.

THE SERPENT SEA

Lying south of Blackwater Bay, between the Magocracy and Orcmark, the Serpent Sea takes its name from the blood eels that haunt the cool waters. Blood eels (see *Hellfrost Expansion*) are considered a delicacy in the Magocracy, but while a good haul fetches a high price, fishing for them comes with great risks. Longer than three men lying head to toe, these vicious predators have razor sharp teeth and a nasty temperament. Individual immature blood eels aren't quite so deadly, though many a fisherman in these waters sports less than his full allotment of fingers. Mariners who fall overboard face a painful death unless hauled out quickly.

THE WIND SEA

Far to the west, beyond Alantaris Isle, is the Wind Sea. Powerful gusts blow out of the west all year round, driving ships back to Rassilon's coast faster than their crews can row forward. Many stories claim there is an island far to the west, the Blessed Isle, where Sigel sleeps each night, recovering his strength before his next sojourn across the sky. Some scholars believe the Selari came to Rassilon out of the Wind Sea.

Maps within the Imperial Library on Alantaris Isle detail several islands beyond the known horizon, and patchy records seem to indicate they once conquered the inhabitants. Whatever route they took to avoid the winds has been long lost. Should it be recovered, mariners would pay a high price to possess the secret.

THE WOLF SEA

Situated south of Alantaris Isle and west of the Magocracy, the Wolf Sea is home to the Isles of the Seareavers and their marauding

TIME AND TIDE

Natural events in *Hellfrost* are the work of the gods. Heatwaves occur because Sigel's minions are busy pumping the bellows at his hearth. Earth's expansion of her subterranean home causes earthquakes. In order to discover why tides exist in Rassilon, one must again turn to mythology.

In days long past, Neorthe was renowned for always being late for gatherings. When this matter was brought up he complained that while the surface world had the light of Sigel and Maera to help determine the time, neither bothered to illuminate his aquatic realm. As a result, he was always unsure of the time.

Sigel refused to help, for if he shone so brightly as to illuminate the deepest depths, he would scorch the surface of the world. Maera said that if she turned up the lantern in her home she would go blind, and the world would be as brilliantly lit as if Sigel were in the sky. However, she proposed a solution.

She offered to fix the magical threads that touched large bodies of water to her window. As her hall moved through the sky, the threads would tug the water along behind them, raising and lowering the water level at regular intervals. While Neorthe begrudged losing some control over the ocean, he agreed that it was a workable solution.

That the strength of the tide varies from place to place and can be altered by the season is down to the Unknowable One, but that is another story for another day.

inhabitants. To the west lies the Wind Sea, while south the waters merge with those of the Burning Sea. Few ships have call to sail the deeper waters, preferring to stick to the Magocracy's coastline and pay handsomely for naval protection. Such measures are not guaranteed to thwart Seareaver attacks, though, and mariners sail here at their own risk. Although the Seareavers are a recent problem, the sea's name dates back a thousand years. In days of yore, when the Anari Empire stretched far from its capital on Alantaris Isle, pirates preyed on the heavily laden merchantmen bringing trade and tribute from the far reaches of the Empire.

MAJOR LOCALES

CITY OF THE SHARK GOD

Millennia ago, in what skalds call the Mythic Age, a great city stood on an island in the middle of the Inner Sea. Although skilled architects and technologically advanced, the city-dwellers were a cruel and barbaric people. Carcharas was their patron deity, and they honored him with human sacrifices. Over time, the inhabitants became more debauched, instigating cannibalism and raiding far and wide for captives as offerings to their deity.

The worshippers of Carcharas believed their god dwelt in the inner ocean, a watery realm deep below the surface of the world. Through ancient and powerful magic they bored a hole into this realm intent on summoning their god to the world of mortals as a true living deity. Affronted by this unholy act, the other races, backed perhaps by Neorthe, worked their own powerful magic.

The great and terrible city sank beneath the surface of the waters, though it suffered little structural damage. Carcharas sacrificed great personal power to warp large numbers of his followers into the kreana, changing them from air breathers into ferocious shark-men; for if they perished there would be none left to worship him and his very existence would be threatened. The newly created shark-men fled the city in fear of further retribution. The story of the disaster was told to subsequent generations, though the facts were slowly replaced by myth.

Many, many centuries later, the kreana moved back into the city, drawn to the abyssal trench they had created in their former lives. Alas, the gods had acted to seal the lowest depths with a magical ward, breaking the compact briefly to ensure Carcharas remained in his watery realm. The trench descends almost six miles into the crust and is inhabited by many strange aquatic creatures. At the very bottom is an arcane gateway, which connects to Carcharas' hellish domain.

Save for an honor guard and a few priests, the kreana do not permanently inhabit the drowned city. It is a place of special religious importance, visited only when major ceremonies are called for or when the disparate tribes wish to meet in peace, for the kreana are forbidden from drawing the blood of their own kind here. The city is detailed in adventure *H3: The Blood Tide*.

CRUSHING CLAW ISLAND

Seafood is eaten daily in coastal communities. Further inland, it is a delicacy. The wealthy citizens of Aspiria and Alantaris Isle greatly prize the meat of giant crabs (see adventure *S5: The Fey Tower & The Deadly Glade*). This is partly because of its taste and partly because of the high price for which it sells—they are nothing if not snobs.

Giant crabs can be found on many beaches, but the greatest numbers live in the waters around Crushing Claw Island, located some 350 miles east-northeast of Alantaris Isle. No job for ordinary fishermen, it falls to hardy seamen armed with long spears and mauls to kill and dress these huge crustaceans.

The dangers are many but the practice continues to attract young men, for a successful hunt can bring great reward—giant crab meat sells for around 10 gs a pound, and a single crab, properly prepared, can yield as much as 100 pounds of succulent flesh (15+1d10% of any specimen is edible).

THE DROWNED TOWER

Long ago, a tower of blue-green stone stood on a small island roughly halfway between Aspiria and Alantaris Isle. Here, it is said, Neorthe kept a relic of immense power, a head-sized pearl of absolute purity. Most stories agree the pearl gave its possessor dominion over the seas.

The Convocation, which had been founded only recently, arrogantly demanded to study the pearl, a "request" that was turned down by the relic's guardian, a man whose name is recorded as Atlantes. Refusing to take no for an answer, the Convocation dispatched a fleet, intending to take the relic by force. As their ships neared, Atlantes prayed to Neorthe, beseeching the god to take the tower into his embrace to stop the relic falling into unworthy hands. Neorthe agreed, but to stop cries of interference in mortal affairs he swore to release the tower for one day each generation.

Whether or not this tale has any historical veracity is open to debate, for no reliable records date back this far. What is true is that once in every generation, a tower rises from the water, appearing as the first ray of the sun breaks the horizon and submerging once again as the last ray sinks below the horizon. The tower keeps to no fixed schedule, though it is said that a calendar listing all the dates of its surfacing for centuries to come exists somewhere.

Some legends claim that Atlantes still guards the tower, his life being measured by the day he spends on the surface rather than the time spent in Neorthe's embrace. If this is true, then he has aged less than fifty days over the past millennium. Others are more pessimistic, believing that if Atlantes still rules the tower then he does so as a liche, having extended his life through fell rites.

According to some skalds, the name Alantaris has its roots in the high priest's name, the island either being mistaken for the wizard's former home and the name slowly corrupted over time, or named in honor of his sacrifice. While these make for interesting stories, there is absolutely no supporting evidence.

FINFOLKHEIM

Finfolkheim is the ancestral underwater home of finfolk. A vast undersea palace surrounded by gardens of brightly colored seaweed, clerics of Neorthe claim it lies somewhere between Alantaris Isle and the Magocracy. Minute phosphorescent sea creatures swim hither and thither amid the living coral pillars, illuminating the structure in a constant green glow. Whereas mortal lords hang tapestries on their walls, the inhabitants of Finfolkheim hang strands

of colored seaweed, which ripple and shift with the tide, and decorate their homes with shells.

FROSTHEIM

Frostheim is said to be a magical island, a gigantic iceberg on which dwell fearsome frost giants. According to many accounts, the island breaks free of its winter moorings in the western White Sea and maneuvers down the coast of the Borderlands and Aspiria, moving regardless of wind or tide, the giants launching raids as they go. Despite their fondness of such stories, many mariners and clerics of Neorthe believe Frostheim is the result of seeing mundane icebergs breaking free of the icy waters.

HEARTHGLOW ISLAND

Ships traveling the whale road between Sandvik and Iceport face a long and perilous journey. One of the few comforts on the voyage is the sight of Hearthglow Island. An active volcano rising from the sea some 85 miles northeast of Norvik, its fiery glow, which illuminates the distant horizon at night, is a short-lived but welcome companion.

The main island is barren and devoid of life, a landscape of hot springs, gaseous vents, and oozing lava. Nearby, though, are four larger islands. Though now choked under a thick layer of ash, it is evident they were once inhabited. Here and there, where the ash is thicker or has been blown clear by fierce storms, are the remains of stone structures.

The cult of Hoenir has conducted brief investigations, but the scant excavations have revealed no clues as to the identity of the builders. Perhaps they are a forgotten culture, consumed by the ash when the volcano first erupted. Maybe they abandoned their homes and fled to the shores of Rassilon. Then again, it might be nothing more than an Anari outpost of old, built to fulfill the emperor's claim that his reach extended to the ends of the world.

The Lorekeepers were the last people to dispatch an investigation. The expeditionary force, two dozen members in all, left six months ago. No word has been heard since their last *voice on the wind* message, which merely stated "Have found something wonderful." By now their food and water have long since ran out.

ISLE OF MAERA

Originally the site of an Anari mining outpost before the Blizzard War, the Anari quickly lost interest in their remote colonies following the devastating attack on Alantaris Isle. Within a century the location of the island was forgotten, its name recalled only in vague legends. It takes it name from the belief the Anari excavated Maerathril here. Mages believe the island is cursed, and that no arcane magic functions here.

Surrounded by a labyrinthine reef, the island is dominated by a single mountain. Dense forests cling to the lower slopes and outer hills. Skalds claim the island housed a large colony, so rich from their export they could afford to coat their houses in beaten silver and gold. This, and the prospect of finding Maerathril ingots, still leads adventurers to search for the fabled island.

Although the Anari are long gone, the island is not uninhabited. While prisoners sentenced to hard labor worked many Anari mines, the Maerathril mines were excavated by golems, loyal workers who needed no food or rest breaks. Giant spiders haunt the forests.

The great mystery surrounding the island is what happened to its Anari inhabitants, for it is widely believed all contact with the island was lost shortly before the Blizzard War.

ISLE OF THE STORM LORDS

Far out into the Narfel Sea lies an island surrounded by a perpetual storm of ferocious intensity. Towering waves, gale force winds, bolts of lightning, and hail the size of a child's fist dominate the area, destroying any ships that dare to breech the natural barrier.

Skalds sing of a mighty kingdom which ruled here long ago. Some say they held Thunor as supreme god, others that they knew magic now lost that allowed them to capture and harness the power of the wind. What fate befell the island depends on who recounts the tale. One myth holds that the inhabitants sought to conceal their island from a rival empire, summoning a terrible storm but losing control of its awesome power and dooming their nation. Another blames hubris, the inhabitants trying to rival Thunor's might and being doomed for their pride. Yet another claims the islanders forsook the storm god, and were cursed by the vengeful deity.

The fate of the islanders similarly varies. The three main endings are them dying, them being trapped for centuries yet continuing to survive, and them degenerating into wild savages. Most stories, though, center of the island's fabulous wealth, which awaits anyone brave enough to risk Thunor's rage.

LAIR OF THE SEA WITCH

Every coastline of Rassilon has a legend concerning a sea witch. A fearsome hag in some stories and a beautiful maiden in others, she is attributed tremendous power over the oceans, though whether she serves Neorthe or has some unique ability is open to interpretation. Many heroes of old are said to have visited a sea witch, receiving a blessing before embarking on some epic nautical quest. Many coastal settlements leave gifts on the beach for the sea witch, believing that if the waves snatch them she will bless their community in the year ahead. If the gifts remain after high tide, misery and woe await.

MARINERS' GRAVEYARD

Sailors speak of the Mariners' Graveyard is hushed tones, for it is a dread place. An expanse of dead water and Sargasso in which float the rotting hulks of countless ships, the Graveyard is said to lie somewhere in the Wolf Sea. Clerics of Neorthe warn it is where mariners who offend Neorthe go, a lifeless realm where the cursed spend eternity futilely trying to escape the thick, stinking weed, rowing endlessly yet getting nowhere. Although the Graveyard lies in the western ocean, those who sail the eastern waters are no less likely to be sent here for their sins. Maelstroms, it is said, spit out ships in this accursed realm.

NASTRAND

Also known as the Sea Strand of the Dead, Nastrand is a beach in the southern Mistlands. From a distance the waves appear to pound relentlessly onto a beach of white sand, bleached-white pebbles, and spindly driftwood. Only as one approaches closer does the true nature of the beach become clear—the sand is powdered bone, pebbles are skulls, and the driftwood femurs and ribs.

The most common legend places the creation of Nastrand at the time of the Liche-Priest. Here on this beach mortals and undead clashed in titanic struggle, both sides suffering catastrophic losses. Others insist the bones are washed here by the waves, Neorthe delivering those unworthy of being laid to rest in his realm back onto dry land. Many valuables lie just beneath the surface, but they are not easy pickings—ghosts and skeletons haunt Nastrand, making it no place for the living.

The name Nastrand means "Beach-of-the-dead," a fitting title. It is also the name of both Hela's celestial hall and her accursed realm. Rumors abound the Mistlands' beach is a crossing point between the land of the living and the land of the unholy dead. True or not, it is one more reason why few have dared to explore the area.

SUNKEN CITIES

In every port in the land mariners tell stories of sunken cities and mysterious, submerged ruins. Many sages believe these stories most likely relate to fanciful retellings of the attack on Alantaris Isle during the Blizzard War, when the great Imperial City was laid ruin. In fact, some of these stories are based on tales passed down for countless generations, the facts replaced by myth and hearsay. While curses and vengeful gods are often blamed for the cities' demise, the truth more often involved rising sea levels, powerful magic of bygone days, sinking landmasses, and earthquakes.

Sunken cities are rarely uninhabited, for they make ideal dens

for intelligent creatures such as kreana, and more mundane but no less dangerous beasts. Some may even be inhabited by barnacle encrusted undead.

TWO DRAGON ISLAND

Folklore says this island is home to two immense invisible dragons—a Hellfrost dragon and a sun dragon—locked in constant warfare. When the sun dragon tires and retreats to its lair, winter encroaches on Rassilon. When the Hellfrost dragon withdraws to lick its wounds, spring dawns anew.

The myth arose because of the island's unusual geography. The northern half is covered in snow and ice for much of the year, while in the south are numerous hot springs and volcanic vents that keep the air much warmer (treat it as being in the Hearthlands for the purposes of temperature). In between is a narrow belt that fluctuates between freeze and thaw and is prone to fierce thunderstorms in spring and fall.

Located on the southern extreme of the White Sea, close to the furthest extent of the winter ice, Two Dragon Island has also become a battleground for the mortal followers of Kenaz and Thrym. While the north is home to a permanent colony of frost giants and ice goblins (minions of King Nagal), the south is unpopulated. Every few years, the cult of Kenaz hires warriors and ships, and engages the icy denizens in open battle. The cult of Kenaz would dearly love to set up a permanent base here, but the island is too far from any major sea lanes, making supplying the garrison a tricky proposition at best.

THE UNDERWATER KINGDOM

Fifty years ago, a merchant ship sailing the blood eel-infested waters of the Serpent Sea became becalmed. While the crew rowed, the merchants had little to do but pray to Thunor for favorable winds and gaze at the ocean. To their surprise, the waters suddenly cleared to reveal the sea floor, much like clouds move aside to reveal the blue of the heavens.

Expecting to see naught but sand, rock, and kelp, they instead gazed in wonder at a strange landscape barely 100 feet beneath the keel. As the ship passed silently overhead, they watched teams of oxen plowing soil, witnessed farmers sowing seeds in the deep furrows, and saw smoke spiralling upward from the chimneys of small cottages. In the center of the settlement was a magnificent gleaming palace, though from what material it was constructed the merchants could not say. What amazed the watchers most was the physical appearance of the denizens—they were not finfolk or havmandr, natives of the deep sea, but normal humans.

One of the plowmen, his attention perhaps drawn by the shadow of the ship passing overhead, looked upward. Upon seeing the vessel and the faces of the merchants staring down, he waved in a friendly gesture. Before the merchants could think to respond in kind, a fierce wind picked up, blowing the ship past at a rapid rate of knots. Despite marking their maps, the merchants were never able to find the underwater kingdom again. Not have any other mariners spied it beneath the waves.

The nature of the Underwater Kingdom, as it has become known along Rassilon's southern coast, is much speculated upon by mariners and the cult of Neorthe. Some say the palace is the home of a sea giant king, the human inhabitants fishermen saved from drowning on the condition they serve him. Others argue the merchants caught a glimpse of Neorthe's watery abode or a domain ruled by the denizens of Finfolkheim. Those who little of the oceans and their many mysteries scoff at such wild stories, insisting the merchants were mistaken, suffered a hallucination, or outright made up the tale.

PERSONS OF NOTE

THE PEARL KING

A nautical wanderer and priest of Neorthe, the Pearl King ceaselessly navigates the coastline of the Narrows and Inner Sea in his small rowboat, offering assistance to coastal communities. He is prepared to help with any task, from mending fishing nets to hauling in the catch, and building boats to blessing them.

No matter how simple or arduous his task, or how long it takes to complete, he asks only for a single pearl as payment. Each pearl is carefully drilled and then threaded onto his sea-green robe. No one has counted the many pearls that hang from his raiment, but most agree they number in the thousands. The material value of his robe would make any king jealous.

The Pearl King never speaks of his past, nor of his future plans—all he cares about is the task at hand. Some fishermen claim he has offended Neorthe and, while he retains his miracles, cannot enter the Afterlife until he has performed a certain number of good deeds as penance. Most just think he is a good-natured cleric who has devoted his life to helping those who rely on the sea, a noble and worthy quest. Those with fanciful imaginations hint he might be a powerful fey noble bound by Neorthe to perform good deeds for some crime, or perhaps even a celestial servant of Neorthe gathering pearls for his lord.

WHY COME HERE?

In other chapters, "here" correlates to a specific realm. In this section it refers to any of the oceans, lakes, and navigable rivers of Rassilon. Unless the heroes have invested in Boating, thus implying they wish to set sail regularly, what reasons might they have for hoisting sail or manning the oars?

* Travel. The most likely reason for heroes to step onto a ship is simply because they need to get from A to B and going by water is the most expedient or safest option. With the Mistlands and Giant's Throne making overland travel dangerous without a lengthy (and likely equally dangerous) detour, adventurers seeking to get from the central Hearthlands to the western realms are likely to seek passage on a ship.

* Orders. Any hero might find himself aboard a ship because someone he answers to has ordered it. The character might have to escort an emissary to foreign lands (or be the actual emissary) or deliver a message in person, guard a precious cargo, wage war against enemies, or set out in pursuit of pirates plaguing the local waters. Equally, a ship voyage may simply be a means of delivering the hero to his eventual destination, thus combining the Orders and Travel options.

* Duty. This option is unlikely to occur unless the GM plans on making regular use of nautical adventures. Parties tied to the cult of Neorthe, working for a merchant, engaged in the war against Orcmark, hunting pirates for a living, or serving a nobleman who owns coastal lands may find their feet getting wet on a regular basis.

* Running Away. Some adventuring parties will make powerful enemies. Since few realms command a powerful navy and the sea is a large place to search, the best way to escape unwanted attention is often to set sail for distant shores.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A nobleman's only son is missing at sea and the father is hiring a crew to find the vessel. His son's ship drifted into a Sargasso and became totally entangled. Kreana raiders detected the vessel and made several attacks, kidnapping the boy during the last one. After defeating a kreana raiding party with the aid of the ship's remaining sailors, the heroes are forced to dive beneath the waves in search of the missing heir before he is sacrificed to Carcharas, the kreana's ever-hungry deity.

* A storm drives the heroes' ship onto an uncharted island inhabited by some terrible beast. They must survive while repairs are made. Inland is a strange ruin of a bygone age. What secrets and dangers does it hold?

* Marshal Theodred of Vestmark is hiring mariners. He might order the crew to deliver spies into Orcmark, drop off supplies for resistance groups, evacuate a recent bunch of escapees, or conduct a raid deep behind orc lines. Orc galleys patrol the waters in growing numbers, and destroying them is a priority.

TROND, BARONY OF

The small barony of Trond is a vital link in the Low Winterlands' trade network, yet it is one which enjoys only a fragile existence. Effectively held to ransom by neighboring Cul, resentment is growing at the expanding power of the frostborn. Racial tension simmers just below the surface, but it could easily spill out into open aggression.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Barony of Trond.

* **Frostborn:** While frostborn in Trond are treated better than in many other realms, there is still some discrimination. Frostborn characters lose the Outsider Hindrance when in Trond. However, due to the general mistrust, they still suffer a –1 Charisma penalty.

* **No Nobles:** Native characters from Trond with the Noble Edge do not possess an actual noble title. Rather, the Edge represents being related to a wealthy landowner, merchant, cleric, or other member of high society, or actually that position. All the regular benefits remain in play, but there is no possibility of obtaining greater status, at least not in Trond.

* **Trading Center:** Treat Trondavoe as a city with regard to the availability of common goods.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Although Trond is technically a barony, the barons have wielded no real power since the local Saxa revolted shortly after the Blizzard War. As part of the settlement intended to prevent a civil war, the baron would serve as a figurehead while a council of elected freemen actually ruled. While this did represent a near-total loss of power, the barons retained the prestige of the title and had more free time to engage in leisurely pursuits.

Trond has no other noble titles, and aside from the barons there are no hereditary positions. It does, however, have social classes. As in many other realms, exactly where one sits on the social ladder depends primarily on one's intended peers. If a merchant is invited to high-society functions, then he is likely in the upper class. Thus, the divisions are highly blurred in many instances.

All citizens in Trond are free men, and have been for centuries. Except for those branded outlaws, all men and women over the age of adulthood (14, as in most realms) may own their own land and businesses, vote in elections and stand for council seats, attend the regional moots, possess weapons, and so on.

Filling the upper class are the wealthy farmers and shepherds, important merchants, and many senior clerics. Although any citizen may own land, laws were introduced to prevent a land grab and curb violent attempts to snatch other people's claims. First, all unclaimed land must be purchased from the baron, the official landowner. Prices are set by the council, however. Second, the land must be actively used. A set of complex guidelines determine how many sheep, crops, or houses must be built on the land in order for it to be claimed. If these guidelines are broken, the land reverts back to the baron.

Lower-grade clerics, mages, merchants in general, shop owners, military commanders, guildmasters, master crafters, important bureaucrats serving the council, and so on dominate the middle classes. In essence, anyone with a trade that brings in a decent income or who holds a position others wish to be associated with is middle class. Everyone else falls into the lower classes. For the most part, these are farmers and shepherds who either tend their own land or work for a richer landowner (still as free men, of course), laborers, dock workers, junior bureaucratic post holders, shop workers, and the like.

THE COUNCIL

The council comprises 21 members, elected by the people of Trond every five years. Of these 20 are voting seats, meaning the councilors can vote on matters put before them. The remaining seat is the chairman. He votes only if there is deadlock. The commander-in-chief of the army sits on the council, but only in an advisory capacity. Unless military business is being discussed, he rarely attends meetings. As noted elsewhere, the baron may call business or summon them to session, but he has no voting power.

Individual posts on the council are decided internally rather than by public consensus. The major posts are the chairman, treasurer, assessor (responsible for collecting taxes), clerk (maintains the records), and the marketman (the council's advisor to the temple of Var).

Because the councilors are landowners, they have duties and responsibilities outside of council business. To lessen the need for travel, the council meets for one week in Plohmonan, two weeks during Werremonan, and for a week during Falmonan.

THE LAW

While the council legislates the law, it does not hold court except when a crime is against Trond as a nation. No one living today can ever recall the council convening for this purpose. Instead, Trond is divided into 21 districts. Until 15 years ago the boundaries of each district varied, for each was centered around one of the council members' estates. With no new councilors elected in decades (every member is of advanced age), it was decided to fix the district boundaries forever. Each district is known simply as a ward.

Within the ward justice is handled by way of a moot, a gathering of all free men living in that district. The moot convenes every month on Raestdaeg, though unless there is pressing business the event is an excuse for a market and a dance. Every year, the citizens elect 12 doomsmen. Doomsmen are the equivalent to lawyers, juror, and judges rolled into one. They must swear a sacred oath to Hothar to be honest in matters of law.

The doomsmen judge all crimes except those few overseen by the council, even capital offenses. Trond has no prisons, nor does it have the death penalty. Many cases are settled by the payment of weregild, but the court can pass down a sentence of outlawing, the most serious punishment in the land.

Outlaws are given one week to put their affairs in order and leave Trond. After this time, they may be killed on sight without their killer having to face justice. Outlawing may be for a fixed period, with a minimum of one year, or for life.

EDUCATION

While Trond once boasted a fine maritime academy and a temple to Hoenir, these have been consigned to history, the once magnificent buildings nothing but another set of crumbling ruins in Trondavoe's suburbs.

Many communities operate primitive schools. Young children gather daily for a few hours in the homes of one of the elders to learn about Trond's culture, history, and laws from those who have

experienced them first hand, and to practice their reading and writing. Most children learn their cultural language first, with Trader being the second language for many. Those with the aptitude typically pick up the second human tongue next.

As the child grows, so less time is spent in academic study and more time spent learning his future occupation. For most, this means working the fields and tending the flocks by the age of ten. While the citizens of Trond know much about their homeland, they are largely ignorant of knowledge that does not directly concern them.

The temple of Var operates a basic academy, though it is primarily concerned with matters that relate to trade. Here one can learn about other nations, their geography, laws, and languages. The service is not free, for Var has no interest in charity work or passing on knowledge purely for the sake of learning.

The temple of Neorthe operates a similar scheme relating to seamanship. Little theoretical lore is studied. Instead, the apprentice signs onto a ship registered with the temple, learning the practical aspects at the same time as earning a few scields.

RELIGION

Trond was colonized by the Anari purely as a trading center, a role it continues in the present day. While few citizens are actively engaged in mercantile activities, Var is the most popular deity. Everyone knows that without the regular trade caravans the barony would quickly wither and die, or worse, fall to the army of Cul. Some murmur that its trade could actually be its downfall, seeing Cul as a greedy, aggressive neighbor which would dearly love to control the port.

The only temple to Var stands in Trondavoe. Raised by the Anari, the sprawling edifice has survived largely intact thanks to its position near the docks, which were never abandoned by the inhabitants. There are two important shrines to the god of trade elsewhere in Trond. The first is located in Vox, where it serves as the focus of the fish market, and the second is on the border with Cul, allowing merchants to say a final prayer before heading off to foreign markets.

Var's clergy have wealth and political influence, but they are rarely elected to the council. Because of the way the electoral system works, citizens tend to vote for their local wealthy farmer or shepherd, since they know him and trust him as a neighbor, to represent their common interests. As merchants, Var's clergy fill a vital role in society, but without a powerbase of voters to call upon they have little hope of ever being elected.

Neorthe is the second most popular deity in terms of worshippers. Much of the nation's trade enters and exits Trond via ship, making the whale road an important part of daily life even for those living inland. Although the only temple stands in Trondavoe, Vox, a major fishing port, boasts an elaborate shrine (see page xxx).

Both aspects of Eostre are honored, though Animalmother has the upper hand in numbers of worshippers. A few small temples to her exist outside the main towns, but none are custom built. Rather, they are part of the framework of milking and shearing sheds, and communal root cellars. Despite a lack of formal temples, the clergy holds great political power, for many are rich farmers and herders.

Many members of the military worship Tiw, though because the army is small his cult lacks political influence. Freo has two shrines, one in the temple of Neorthe and another beside the Var shrine on the Cul border, but most citizens pay him little regard; only those who must travel outside the borders bother to offer prayers or sacrifices. While all the citizens value justice and law, Hothar's name is only invoked in court cases, at the start of council meetings, or when making a personal oath.

Trond survived the reign of the Liche-Priest more by dint of its geographic location and the fell prince's desire to strike down Chalcis and Aspiria, than because of its army. Trond was more densely populated in those days, and many lives were lost as the army struggled to stem the lifeless tide. As the end drew near and the Liche-Priest sensed his demise, he made plans for his second coming. In secret, his minions created a retreat in what was then the southern hills of Heldalund. After Trond's expansion to capture the land around Trondavoe, that site now lies in the barony.

MILITARY

While the Anari and Saxa cultures are roughly equal in terms of population, it is the Anari model the council chose for the barony's army. Much has already been said on Trond's small but professional army in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, and that information is not repeated here.

Two sergeants, one for the infantry and another serving with the cavalry detachment, assist each captain. The latter carries the title sergeant-of-horse to differentiate him when giving orders. This is the total extent of the command structure in each company. When a company's forces must be divided, such as when on patrol or serving to protect a community, an experienced veteran is given command of one of the smaller forces. He has no official title, but he carries the authority of his sergeant.

Trond's small army receives a lot of council money. While in some nations this might result in overpaid peacocks strutting around in fine uniforms, in Trond the money is spent more practically on arms and armor. Each cavalryman is equipped with a chain hauberk, large shield, lance, and long sword or battle axe.

With regard to the infantry, 80 men in each company have chain shirts, medium shields, and either long swords or battle axes. Every fifth man carries a short bow and a quiver of 20 arrows. The remaining 20 men, who form the center of the shieldwall (defensive) or charge (offensive), wear chain hauberks and have large shields. Each man also carries three throwing axes.

With two of Trond's five companies are stationed in Trondavoe, another in Vox, and the remaining two scattered over land belonging to the council members, the barony's borders are largely unprotected. Patrols make occasional sweeps, but they never wander far from their permanent base for long.

In all honesty, there is little for them to worry about. Heldalund is in no state to try and reclaim the land around the port, not that it shows any inclination to do so, the Cairn Lands is non-expansionistic and has few population centers anywhere near the border where troops could muster, and Cul, if it ever chose to invade, can call upon a standing army five times larger than that of Trond. Better, the council thinks, to defend the settlements from the occasional roaming bandit gang than have the troops isolated out on the borders watching over the grasslands. With most of the major settlements lined up along the trade road, this does mean the wilds are largely unprotected. While it is true every settlement boasts a militia, they have no interest in doing anything other than protecting their homes.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Trond may sit at the end of just a single trade road, but that road is part of the greater network spanning the length and breadth of the eastern Low Winterlands. This branch of the road is known locally as the Port Road, for it begins at the harbor in Trondavoe. Though fairly insignificant in the grand scale of continental trade, Trondavoe is an important maritime link, with ships calling in from Ostmark, Hengist, and when the ice allows, from distant Iceport.

Trond's rich citizens are keen to display their wealth, furnishing their homes with expensive, imported artwork (such as tapestries and wood carvings), and wearing gold and silver jewelry. While the nation is roughly evenly divided between Anari and Saxa, there is little cultural bias when it comes to displaying wealth. While some of this lack of bias does stem from having integrated cultures, there is also political astuteness involved; an Anari seen wearing Saxa style jewelry is making a political statement that he supports both cultures.

With only hardy root vegetables suited to Trond's poor agricultural land, grain must be imported from Ostmark. About half the



Barony of Trond

Population: 18,395 (45% Anari, 40% Saxa, 15% frostborn)
Ruler: Baron Rodger ap-Gwar (figurehead) and elected council
Religion: Var, Neorthe, Eostre
Imports: Artwork, grain, jewelry, timber, trade
Exports: Trade (passing through), Wool

cargo is destined for local markets, with the remainder sold on to settlements in the Winterlands. Likewise, the windswept lowlands grow only stunted trees, forcing the locals to import building quality timber. Fortunately, there is a large supply of stone lying around the crumbling suburbs of Trondavoe.

Aside from funneling trade through its port, Trond exports a great deal of wool. Trond may lack the soil for good food crops, but it has proven ideal for certain plants. As such, much of the exported wool is dyed. The rarer the color, the more expensive the wool.

Trondavoe serves as the main harbor for Cul, Heligioland, and Seithrby. Since the rise of Cul, which effectively controls the eastern trade route, Heligioland and Seithrby have grown increasingly concerned over the possibility of Cul invading Trond and seizing the harbor. Were this to happen, Frostweaver could impose even higher duties or close the trade road altogether. While this would not be entirely disastrous thanks to the longer overland routes available through Hellfrost Pass, it would nonetheless hamper trade.

Additionally, the imposing of heavier duties on merchants other than those of Cul makes it less profitable for other merchants to buy directly from the ships in Trondavoe.

Trade delegations from Heligioland and Seithrby have been in Trond for the past four months trying to hammer out some sort of agreement. While Trond is reluctant to do anything to upset Frostweaver, its trading partners want Trond to pass on the reduction in duty it enjoys to their merchants. While all the governments would dearly love to have extra troops stationed in the capital, Heligioland has no standing army and Seithrby's army is too small to divide among other realms.

The citizens of Trond, while free men, are expected to pay taxes. There are both national and local taxes.

Council Tax: Every citizen pays 30% of his or her income directly to the council. These monies are used to pay the army, and maintain the trade road and harbor. Council tax is collected quarterly.

Duties: Because Trond needs trade to survive it is very generous with its trade duties. All imports are charged a flat 4%, as are exports. Local exports are charged at the lower rate of 2%. Half a percent of the duty goes to the temple of Var, since most trade is conducted there.

Local Tax: Every citizen pays 5% of his annual income to his local community. This money helps pay for the militia and maintain any fortifications.

Poll Tax: Every adult citizen who wishes to vote at a council election pays 1 gold scield to the council treasury. This is paid on the day of the election only.

Trade Tax: Trond does not charge sales tax. Instead, families pay 10 gs a year to the council. One-quarter is given to the temple of Var as a communal offering.

ARCHITECTURE

In a land of remote farmsteads and small villages dominated by the Anari and Saxa peoples, one might expect to find predominantly wooden buildings, such as in the Marklands. Not so in Trond. Building timber is in short supply and expensive to import, whereas the ruins of Trondavoe are a veritable quarry of building stone.

Over the centuries, the traditional wooden homes that once adorned the countryside have given way to drystone buildings. House shapes vary, though the Saxa rectangle and squarer Anari designs remain the most popular, but nearly all are single-story stone structures. Most roofs are sods of turf placed over driftwood beams or supported on stone columns with wide slabs at the top, and earth is often packed against the outer walls in steep banks for insulation against the biting winters. Windows are scarce, and when they exist they are usually thin slits high up the walls. They are more for ventilation than to let in light.

Stone recovered from the battered ruins is not just a handy construction material, but also a form of decoration. Many murals and carvings adorned the more prestigious buildings of Trondavoe of old, and today these blocks, or at least partial remnants of them, face inward into family homes. Possessing a high quality decoration is seen as a sign of status and artistic taste.

Without a ready supply of wood, homes are heated by burning dried animal dung. While not as heat efficient as wood, it is readily available for free, if one is willing to get one's hands dirty, that is. In the towns, where keeping flocks of sheep is now prohibited following an unfortunate incident with an elderly council member and an overly amorous ram that took a fancy to his sheepskin cloak, dung can be purchased for a few gold scields per hundredweight (112 lbs, or 51 kg).

MAJOR LOCALES

To be honest, Trond isn't the most interesting place to visit, though adventurers with more on their minds than simply looting will find places of interest to explore and things to do if they look hard enough.

GRANTLY

Population: 469
Ruler: Councilman Berenger ap-Roger

Grantly claims the title of most northerly village in Trond. It stands at the base of Heldalund's central hills, near the mouth of a wide, shallow valley. Technically the valley lies inside Heldalund, but the Heldalunders have never argued their claim.

At the rear of the village is an earthen dam. The ground behind is flooded to knee-height. Reeds poke through the still, dark water, and hidden beneath the surface are low walls, the remains of structures. The lake is fed by runoff from the hills. A constant trickle of water spills over the top of the dam into a narrow channel. The stream eventually flows east to the coast.

No one recalls why the dam was built, and no map as yet uncovered records any settlement in the valley. The locals consider it an evil place, claiming flickering blue-white lights are seen beneath the water, and that sometimes the surface is disturbed, as if some unseen creature is swimming below. This is made more eerie by the fact no fish are known to live in the lake.

While the villagers fear the lake, they praise the water that flows from it. The lake freezes over only in the hardest winters, and rarely is the ice more than an inch thick. Better still, when the water is used to irrigate the fields, the ground becomes equally resistant to frost. It was this phenomenon that led to the building of Grantly, for settlers saw the land along the stream channel remained unfrozen in winter. This has resulted in Grantly being a major supply of crops, making it a prosperous settlement in an otherwise impoverished land.

The dam is in fact the earthly remains of a sun dragon, and the valley was once home to a small farming community. During the Blizzard War, the dragon swore to safeguard the farmers, for it had long been friendly with them. It fought a ferocious battle against a pair of Hellfrost dragons, but fell to their claws and coldfire breath, its corpse half-buried into the earth across the narrow valley mouth. The wounded Hellfrost dragons then razed the village to the ground out of spite. By the time the land was resettled, the dun dragon's corpse had partially decayed, its bones covered in soil, and the land beyond had become a boggy morass.

The dragon's decaying bones are the reason the water does not freeze, for they are imbued with part of its magical essence. The lights that haunt the water are the spirits of the former inhabitants. Wreathed in coldfire, their spirits are unable to reach the Afterlife, held to the mortal realm by their hatred of the dragon that promised to protect them. Only by destroying the dam can they be released, but that would harm Grantly and the food supply of Trond.

Grantly has a temple to Eostre Plantmother, and a smaller shrine honoring Heitrlogr, a hybrid deity taking elements of Kenaz and Neorthe. This deity is not an actual god and has no priests—it is merely the locals' way of trying to explain the nature of the water.

THE SKULL SHRINE

High in the hills of northern Trond, right on the border with Heldalund, is a dark shrine dedicated to Hela and her eternal ser-

vant, the Liche-Priest. The site only came to light three years ago, when wildfire swept the remote peaks, devouring the vegetation. The few settlers dwelling in the region claim the fire was not natural, insisting it burnt with a pale green, lighting up the skyline for many leagues and causing the air to be filled with a terrible wailing sound.

The council duly dispatched an army patrol to investigate. The captain-of-arms and his detachment all made sworn testimonies they found nothing out of the ordinary. They lied. What they found disturbed them to their very core, and each man vowed never to speak of the events, for each knew that the council would only demand further investigation, and none of them could stomach the thought.

Surrounding the location was a picket fence made of human bone. While many of the bones were blackened by fire, it was evident the posts were lashed together by withered sinew, though whether it was of man or beast the soldiers could not determine. As they broke through the fence, the wind turned chill and the stench of death filled the air, causing many of them to retch.

Beyond stood columns of grinning skulls, each as tall as a man and arranged in the form of the Auld Saxa rune of death. Though the entire sight was disturbing, what sickened the men to their core were the top most skulls, for they were no more than a few year's old judging by the weathering on the others.

The captain and his men have maintained their silence, though whether their secret will remain hidden much longer is doubtful. Something dark is stalking northern Trond, and two farmsteads have been found abandoned— yet with all the families' possessions intact. The council is blaming troublemakers in Heldalund, but the soldiers suspect differently, for they desecrated the site, damaging several of the columns before hurrying away as a sudden mist rose.

TRONDAVOE

Cuthbert's Ship Chandlers: Cuthbert Eriksunu runs a successful ship chandlery (a shop supplying essential equipment for ships) near the docks. Every day a ship spends in dock is a day's less wages for the crew and another day before cargos reach their destinations. Cuthbert is adept at fulfilling orders in record time, even procuring hard to get items with relative ease and at very reasonable prices. To ensure captains remember him, he rebates 5% of the invoice total to the ship's crew.

A collector of oddities, Cuthbert also has a large quantity of salvage for sale at reasonable prices. Much of it is junk, but sometimes he has unusual objects in store. He is currently looking for help in recovering an object stolen from his shop some six weeks ago. Late one night, thieves broke in and stole a tall copper jar marked in a strange script and sealed with resin-hard wax.

Cuthbert had grown quite attached to the piece, which was a talking point with customers, though he doubts it is of little intrinsic value, perhaps being a wine or oil storage container lost overseas in a storm. This is what puzzles him most, for the thieves ignored more valuable objects that could be sold on the docks in minutes. While he is loath to admit it, he refused to ever open the jar, sensing that doing so would be a very bad idea.



The Sea Chest: The largest inn in Trondavoe looks like a typical sailor's haunt from the outside, its walls cracked and slates missing from the roof. Inside, though, it is well appointed and spotlessly clean. The innkeeper, Hereswith Ethelredsdohtor, has operated the tavern since her husband ran off with a young doxy some years back. Though rough and ready sailors frequent the inn, Hereswith tolerates no foul language or bar room brawls. Many a mariner has received a verbal ticking off for swearing, and those spoiling for a fight find the old lady is handy with a skillet.

Mariners gather here to swap stories, pass on news regarding pirates and other nautical hazards, and find new ships to join. As such, it is widely regarded as the best place to acquire news of foreign lands outside the temple of Var (where everything has a price).

Thieves' Guild: Trondavoe may be a second-class port in comparison to the great ports of Aspiria, Chalcis, and the Magocracy, but it still attracts thieves. Luckily for Trond, it has attracted only third-rate thieves. The local guild, such as it, consists of just two members, neither of whom are clerics of Nauthiz. While they talk big and have grand plans to secure a "big score," most of their activities are confined to cutting purses and petty burglary.

The pair operates out of a small tavern, the Broken Keel. The tavern cannot be called a true thieves' guild, for all the erstwhile thieves do is sit at a table, drink themselves blind, and whisper conspiratorially about their big plans to get rich.

The Trade Hall: Var's only temple in Trond is a sprawling complex of Anari design dominated by a great bell tower rising from the central hall. Every dawn without fail, the great bell is rung to signal the opening of the temple doors and the start of the trading day. Within the main trading hall are dozens of podiums. Merchants with goods to sell stand atop each one shouting out the wares on offer, while below potential buyers bid on the cargos, often dashing between podiums to bid on multiple lots.

No money changes hands in the trading hall. Instead, all transactions occur in the Vault, a heavily reinforced room which doubles as a treasury. Similarly, all goods for sale must be logged with the temple, whereupon they are kept in the Warehouse, a network of small halls adjoining the back of the temple.

On Marketdaeg, the temple is open to the public. Traders set up stalls in the great east vestibule, known simply as the Market, hawking their goods from dawn until dusk, when the great bell tolls once more.

The position of high priest changes yearly, the appointee being the cleric with the highest profits for the past year. Only clerics who have been resident in Trond for five continuous years may stand for the position. The current high priest is Profiteer Marie ap-Bernier. This is her third stint in the role, though she has never served consecutive terms.

The Whale Hall: Neorthe's temple is one of the rare buildings in Trondavoe, for it is constructed almost entirely of wood (driftwood, to be precise). Its roof is held aloft by the ribs of a colossal whale which washed ashore two generations ago. The outside is etched with carvings of fish, whales, and ships, and studded with shells and pearls. Scrimshaw offerings hang from two wooden columns that serve as the gate to the complex. Each post is the mast of a ship wrecked in a storm outside the safety of the harbor.

As well as prayer facilities, the temple serves as a mission for visiting seamen, and a hospital for injured mariners. Those recuperating here keep busy by mending nets for local fishermen or passing on stories of events up and down the eastern coast.

Navigator Oswy Aescwinesunu currently serves as high priest. The actual incumbent is Cerdic ap-Aalard, but he left suddenly six weeks ago, appointing Oswy to the post as he rushed for a small boat he had hired. Neither Cerdic nor the ship have been seen since. The council has refused to investigate the matter, claiming it is a cult affair. Oswy, worried his mentor is in trouble, is planning on hiring private investigators.

VOX

Neorthe Shrine: As a fishing port, the citizens of Vox hold Neorthe in high regard. At low tide, a tall monolith engraved with prayers and studded with shells emerges from the cold water. Here the faithful gather to offer prayers and make offerings, leaving small tokens at the base of the menhir. At high tide the shrine is completely submerged. As the tide recedes again, Neorthe pulls the offerings into his watery domain.

The Smoke House: Extremely popular with the locals, and thus an excellent place to gather gossip, the Smoke House is a tavern. It takes its name from the smoked fish it sells (whole or as soup), the clouds of pipeweed that float lazily around the rafters, and the open hearth, which burns only dung.

Thieves' Guild: While Trondavoe is blessed with incompetent thieves, the more sedate town of Vox has attracted a better class of villain. While the gang calls itself a thieves' guild, their activities are actually confined to smuggling. On dark nights when the seas are calm, they set out to sea in a small boat to meet Ostmark vessels anchored offshore.

The gang, which calls itself the Sea Wolves, has many contacts in Trondavoe, including the baron. Typical goods smuggled ashore include expensive wines, pipeleaf, and narcotics from the Jade Empire and Al-Shirkuh. Fully aware the baron may try to silence them if they are ever caught, the gang has already proved its vicious streak by murdering several outsiders who were nosing around their headquarters, a fish smoking shed.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons may become acquainted with the heroes during their time in Trond.

BARON RODGER AP-GWAR

As far as the citizens of Trond are concerned, Baron Rodger has little interest in politics. While it is true he spends a great deal of time and money on hosting elaborate parties, he cares deeply about Trond and its people.

Rodger desperately wants to absolve the council, not because he craves power, but because he believes the old goats have grown too comfortable in their posts. To that end, he seeks a new council made up of younger blood with new ideas. Unwilling to raise arms against the elected body, he has hired agents to begin a smear campaign against the existing members, accusing them of everything from corruption to sleeping with livestock.

COUNCILOR MAYEUL AP-GUICHARDE

At 59, Mayeul is one of the youngest members of the council. For the past five years he has been vehemently outspoken against the frostborn, demanding they be evicted from Trond before they become the dominant race. The elder statesman's hatred comes not through any personal conviction, but because he is being blackmailed to stir up trouble.

Pulling his strings is none other than one of Frostweaver's lieutenants. (The warlord fears that his master, Frostweaver, is growing soft by negotiating for better rights for frostborn rather than demanding them outright. If enough anger can be stirred, sooner or later it will turn to physical violence. A few sacrificial frostborn should spur Frostweaver into military action.) Somehow, the frostborn discovered that Mayeul had an affair 30 years ago with a young woman. When she became pregnant, Mayeul had her and her unborn child killed, lest his reputation suffer (he was at the start of his political career). Unless he does as he is told, that information will be made public.

Mayeul is keen to ensure his secret is never learned, but the only way he can see is the removal of his persecutor. To that end, he has concocted a story claiming the frostborn kidnapped and murdered his daughter. In fact the girl is alive and well, having recently moved to Heligioland to be near her now-adult children. He knows full well the council would never act against such a claim, for they have no wish to anger Cul. To that end, he hopes to hire adventurers willing to enact revenge on behalf of a feeble old man with nothing left to live for.

Unclaimed Lands

Below the Icewall, far to the north of the Hearthlands, are the Unclaimed Lands. A vast swathe of forest and rolling hills wracked by near-constant winter, many southerners consider the wilderness uninhabitable. Yet life prospers here for those who know and respect the power of nature and winter. Life is hard and a constant struggle against the elements, but here a man can truly be free.

Rules of the Realm

These setting rules apply in the Unclaimed Lands.

* **Free Land:** The Unclaimed Lands are aptly named, for no lord tries to exert authority here. Thus, nothing prevents the heroes from staking a claim to a swathe of land and adopting a lofty title. However, the native Finnar will not pay them taxes or bow in submission, and few peasants feel the urge to live in a realm of near-permanent winter.

* **Equipment and the Finnar:** The Finnar do not produce metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they sometimes trade for them. The price for metal items in the Unclaimed Lands, when they can be found, is increased five fold. When trying to sell the spoils of their adventures, the heroes' roll to find a buyer suffers a –4 penalty unless the heroes happen across a clan gathering, in which case the penalty is –2. A tribal gathering, a rare event, has no penalty, but given the short duration of these meetings only one roll will be possible.

* **Noble Edge:** Unlike in other cultures, the children of a noble wield virtually no power and have little hope of inheriting the title until they reach the level of maturity and experience required to rule in their own right. A hero with the Noble Edge has all the perks of the Edge until his ruling parent dies, at which time he automatically loses the Edge. Becoming a true Finnar noble prohibits adventuring—the hero is responsible for his people first.

* **Trading with the Finnar:** The Finnar have no need for coins. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in the Unclaimed Lands. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

* **Weather:** Snow falls most often during summer, when warm, moist air drifts up from the south. In spring and fall, the chance of precipitation is halved. In winter, the chance is one-fifth that listed in the Hellfrost Player's Guide. The chance of heavy snow or a blizzard is unaffected—they can strike anywhere in Rassilon and at any time of year.

* **Where's the Food?:** Unless a hero is a Finnar, a Sword or Lance Knight, or a cleric of Eostre or Ullr, all Survival rolls to find food in the Unclaimed Lands are made at –2. This is negated once the hero spends six months surviving in the bleak wilderness, whereupon he learns how to successfully hunt small mammals and recognize edible bark and lichen.

Native Finnar

The Finnar are experts at surviving in the wintry wastes. Vital knowledge on how to hunt, find shelter, and light fires is passed on to the next generation as soon as the children can talk.

At the GM's discretion, any Finnar hero born in the High Winterlands (not just the Unclaimed Lands) ignores the –2 penalty for using Survival untrained, but only when the temperature is below freezing.

Social Hierarchy

Although the Finnar use noble titles, their rulers do not hold power in the same way as among the other human cultures, for in the Unclaimed Lands there are no fiefs or borders. The head of a clan takes the title vapaherra, and the head of a tribe that of kreivi.

A tribe is comprised of a varying number of clans. Such alliances are not based on military or mercantile strength, but on the leadership skills of the kreivi. Those who show great leadership attract more followers. A kreivi is not obligated to accept new families into the tribe, however, for as a tribe grows so its needs become greater, and the amount of hunting land available to it decreases.

Kreivi are not absolute rulers. They settle disputes, provide guidance when asked, and make the life and death decision on when to move camp and to what hunting grounds, but they do not issue orders. Everyone in the tribe knows his position and what is expected of him—the hunters catch food to feed hungry mouths, the crafters produce goods, the herders watch and care for the reindeer, and the children laugh, play, and learn vital skills. Telling another what to do and how to do it is heavily frowned upon, for it insinuates the other person is incompetent. In return, the kreivi are awarded immense respect and given small tokens, such as the finest cuts of meat from a hunt, fur cloaks, and so forth.

The kreivi's children receive a title, but it is basically an honorific, translating loosely as "child of the one who guides." Other blood relatives are accorded respect thanks to their relationship with the chief, but they have no title or power.

The position of kreivi is based on experience and wisdom, not personal strength, wealth, or political influence. When the old ruler dies or steps down, the families within the tribe gather together to choose a new one. Any member of the clan or tribe except for spellcasters may nominate himself as a candidate for the position of chief, but it is the kreivi's advisors, the clerics and mages, who decide eligibility. Age is no barrier to power, but where youthful exuberance may give an edge in one area of leadership, experience counts in others.

Candidates are set a number of tasks, all of which involve leading small groups. When the tasks are complete, the advisors question not the candidate but those he commanded. After a number of tests, the advisors make their decision and appoint the new kreivi.

Clans are formed by families who share a distant ancestor. Each clan is led by a vapaherra, who rules and is appointed as per the kreivi. However, only members of the same clan may be candidates for the post. Children carry the same title as those of kreivis.

Below the headmen are the clerics, those who communicate with the great spirits others call gods, and mages, who regardless of their actual method of spellcasting, are viewed as commanding lesser spirits. They are advisors to their noble, but cannot issue orders to others nor countermand those of their chief. Whether or not a chief accepts their advice is up to him, but it is a foolish one who ignores their words altogether.

With no permanent settlements, clerics are not directly tied to a temple, but rather to their family, clan, and tribe. Nobles appoint their own advisors from within their clan or tribe. Thus, those who serve the kreivi rank slightly higher than those who advise a vapaherra, and they in turn are socially higher than a family cleric. Again, such positions are awarded respect but few other personal benefits.

Last come the bulk of the Finnar, all of whom are considered equal so long as they add to the family, clan, or tribe. The infirm are treated with a healthy dose of contempt, for they cannot contribute

DOES THE SNOW EVER MELT?

Hearthlanders typically view the Winterlands as a wild, snow-blanketed landscape, the vista unchanging throughout the year. While it is true snowfall is regular and the winters are biting cold, summers, short as they are, lead to thaws.

LOW WINTERLANDS

As winter turns to spring, so the sun begins to hang longer in the sky. Although the air temperature remains just below freezing, the ground temperature begins to increase steadily. By the arrival of summer, the top layer of snow covering the plains and low hills has usually melted, revealing the rock-hard ground below. As summer establishes its weak grip, so the ground slowly thaws. Hardy grasses, dormant over winter, extend their tough roots downward in search of nutrients, while their shoots stretch toward the sun. But this bounty is short-lived, for fall soon comes, the temperatures begin to drop away rapidly, and the mud of summer gives way to ice-hardened soil.

Rivers, streams, lakes, and pools begin to flow again as the surface ice weakens and eventually cracks, the process hastened by the relatively warmer water beneath the crust lapping at the fractures. While in winter passage across any inland body of water is reasonably safe, explorers must be cautious once spring dawns.

Above 6,000 feet, snow and ice are patchy but ever-present. Weakened by wind and the warming of surrounding rocks, the snow can become highly unstable, leading to an increased chance of avalanches in summer. Above 12,000 feet, the snow melts only in exceptionally warm summers.

HIGH WINTERLANDS

Despite their well-deserved reputation for being bitterly cold all year round, the High Winterlands are not as snowy as most Hearthlanders make out. Snow falls most heavily from spring to fall, as the cold north wind battles with the warm southern wind. In winter, the air is too dry for much precipitation.

While the air temperature struggles to rise above freezing in summer, the sun shines above the horizon almost all day and night near the Icewall and never actually sets on Heah Sumor Daeg. Bombarded by Sigel's rays, the snow often melts enough to reveal patches of tough grass. The ground never thaws enough to plant crops, but it is enough to feed hungry reindeer.

Snow in sheltered valleys and gloomy woods rarely thaws to reveal the ground beneath the white blanket, for despite its height in the sky it cannot penetrate into the sheltered landscape long enough to produce any noticeable effect.

Bodies of water are rarely ice free, even in the warmest summers. However, this is not to say they are safe to cross on foot, for the ice, while it never disappears, grows thin. One wrong step can mean sudden immersion in water barely above freezing.

Life is much harder at altitude. Snow and ice become weaker during the month-long summer and may slide off tall hills and mountains in great blocks, but the colder air ensures there is no true thawing.

to the well being of the social group yet still drain resources. Those capable of walking often participate in the Great Hunt. Armed but carrying no rations, they say their farewells and head into the wilderness, never to return. Undertaking the Great Hunt is seen as relieving the burden to support the individual, and participants are usually given gifts to carry with them to the Afterlife. For those using the rules on burials, the value of gifts determines the final Glory award. Few Finnar can muster much of great value, however, for such things are needed for the living.

Being old, as compared to physically or mentally disabled, is not seen as a burden. The elders are awarded great respect, having served their people in their youth and being possessed of great knowledge and wisdom they pass on to the younger generations.

Among the other races inhabiting the Unclaimed Lands, nobles rule much as they do elsewhere, giving orders, accepting tribute, and making and enforcing laws.

PERSONAL POSSESSIONS

Finnar society is about the family, clan, and tribe, in that order. Private ownership of goods is extremely rare, for what benefits one benefits all. A family member may borrow any item from another family member without question. Those of the same clan are expected to limit themselves to minor items, rather than taking a hunter's best bow, and to return it in good time, while those of the same tribe are expected to ask permission first.

This mentality can cause problems for Finnar who go adventuring and end up among other cultures. The thought of buying food and drink is alien to them for a start, as is the whole idea of coinage. They fully understand the rules of hospitality, and question why innkeepers do not obey them.

Many Finnar consider their adventuring companions to be family. Thus, they think nothing of taking another hero's last healing potion and drinking it without permission. However, they would do so only if they felt it was necessary and no-one else had greater need—greed is a rare trait among the Finnar. Conversely, asking a Finnar companion if you can use his alchemical device or borrow an item he possesses is rather insulting, for it means the hero does not consider the Finnar to be a family member.

Because Finnar do not crave or value personal items, very few ever worship Nauthiz. Most do not understand the nature of thieves, for if one desires an object then he can ask to borrow it or trade for it.

EDUCATION

There are no schools, academies, or temples to Hoenir in the Unclaimed Lands, and thus no formal education. Children are raised by their family, close and distant, learning the ways of the Finnar, their religion, culture, law, myths, history, and so on.

From an early age they become involved in daily life, helping the women skin animals and cook, learning the footprints, spoor, and noises of the various beasts, and how to tell poisonous plants from edible ones, singing the sacred songs that honor the spirits, and such like. Once they are old enough they will accompany the hunters to learn how to catch winter hares and beavers, steadily progressing to wolves and bears as they mature.

At around the age of 14 they, regardless of gender, will take part in a solo hunt to determine whether or not they are fit to be adults. Failure means another year being treated as a child. Those who fail to reach adulthood by 21 are considered mentally infirm.

Male and female roles are divided in Finnar society, but by custom rather than anything else. Men, for instance, consider themselves inadequate at raising children, making the home comfortable, making objects except hunting tools, and worshipping certain gods, such as Eira and Eostre. After all, these great spirits, who are directly responsible for the creation and governance of life, are female. Women, by comparison, accept that men are stronger and more aggressive, and thus better at the hunt and warfare, which is the preserve of the male spirits. All that said, nothing prohibits a woman from being a hunter or chieftain, or a man from staying at home and raising the family, though these are unusual.

RELIGION

While most deities receive some form of worship, if only as a token gesture, Ullr and Thrym are the main gods of the Unclaimed Lands, at least in terms of number of worshippers. While agriculture is possible in the Low Winterlands portion of the Unclaimed Lands, by far the smallest geographical area, the inhabitants of the High Winterlands subsist on hunting supplemented by hardy lichens, tree bark, and certain pine needles.

Worship of Ullr in these snowy wastes isn't so much an aspect of life, as religion tends to be elsewhere, but at its very center. Among many Finnar tribes, and those Tuomi who have adopted nomadic ways, faith and daily life are so interwoven it is impossible to separate them.

Most inhabitants of the High Winterlands pray to Thrym, though few among the civilized races take him as a patron. It is fairer to say the god of winter is placated rather than actively worshipped. The Finnar may pray to him and leave offerings, but they do so in the hope he will reduce the effects of winter, not bolster them. Likewise, participation in his rituals is minimal, for these foul celebrations seek to bring forth the Fimbulvintr. A similar situation exists elsewhere in Rassilon, where Vali is offered prayers and sacrifices to keep him from wreaking his evil ways on agricultural communities.

Of the other gods, Eostre Animalmother is most popular in terms of worshippers, for the Finnar are reindeer herders as well as hunters. Her Plantmother aspects receives supplication, though for the sake of the lichen-eating reindeer rather than the worshippers directly.

Wind priests exist among some Finnar tribes. They worship Father Air, an entity who may or may not be Thunor. Regardless, Thunor receives some spiritual energy from their devotions, though southerners' knowledge of the storm god's cult would be hard pressed to recognize any of the rituals.

Eira has some adherents, for healers exist in all cultures, Freo is honored when the tribes break camp, for as nomads they are constantly on the move, and Thunor is the great sky god, but that is about the extent of the deities regularly worshipped by the Finnar. Small enclaves of frost dwarves inhabit the region, honoring Ertha as the great mother, as well as Tiw, the god of war, but such is true of any dwarf community.

More unusual is the Finnar method of praying and singing hymns. Rather than simply speaking words, the Finnar employ joik ("yoik"), a form of throat singing considered sacred and pleasing to the spirit, and not for everyday use. Drums, made of birch wood and reindeer skin, accompany the singers.

Finnar refer to clerics and mages as noiade ("noy-deh"), a term which dates back many millennia and was once applied only to shamans, those who communicated with the spirits. To the Finnar, the gods are supremely powerful, but they are just spirits, and wizardry is simply a method of compelling lesser spirits.

BURIALS

When the Liche-Priest rose and cast his fell shadow across the land the Finnar were living far to the north. A few stories reached them, but they were largely ignorant of his power. Even today, the Finnar know little of undead, save for creatures like frost wights and hvitrwyfs. As a result, their burial customs have not changed from interment to cremation.

Burial customs depend on where the tribe is living at the time. Those on the open plains cut graves through the snow and ice into the frozen soil below. Tribes near the mountains place bodies in crevices or caves. Within forests, corpses are placed in hollow tree trunks, their feet touching the ground.

Although the Finnar do not honor Ertha, the earth is an important part of their mythology, for Jábmiidáibmu, the Land of the Dead, is said to lie underground.

MILITARY

There is no central military force in the Unclaimed Lands. Permanent settlements, such as those found along the edges of Frostwater Lake and White Lake maintain militia, and the dwarves and taiga elves have permanent warriors, such as huscarls and bladedancers, at their disposal.

The Finnar, who make up the bulk of the population, have no permanent armies and no militia. When danger rears its ugly head, most families, clans, and even entire tribes find it easier to pack up their homes and move to safer areas. When prudent withdrawal is not an option, attackers may find they have bitten off more than they can chew, for the Finnar are far from helpless.

The vast majority of males between the ages of 15 and 55 is trained as a hunter, skilled with spear and bow, capable of stealthy movement, and adept at living off the land. Though few wear armor on a day-to-day basis, every man keeps a set of hide armor in his home.

Still, the Finnar have little organization, even within a tribe. The menfolk are hunters, not drilled soldiers, and guerilla tactics and hit-and run raids are the preferred method of defending their herds and families. The men of a tribe or clan may fight together, but even then they operate in small groups of no more than a dozen individuals. Women are allowed to fight, but generally only unmarried ones or those without children to protect take up arms.

Magic is a powerful force, and the Finnar make great use of it both when hunting beasts and defending their homes. Wilderness step allows them to move unhindered by snow and speed gives them greater mobility; boost/lower trait can increase their marksmanship, as does aim; altered senses lets them fight at night or in poor weather; beast friend can turn a wild bear into an ally, and even if none are present one might be able to cast summon beast, calling one into the heart of the enemy ranks. Voice on the wind is especially useful, as it allows the disparate groups to maintain communication, coordinate their efforts, and warn neighbors of danger.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Hellfrost Gazetteer lists the Unclaimed Lands as having no imports or exports. This should not be taken to read that no trade exists—it simply means there is no organized trade on a national or even regional scale.

Finnar tribes are largely self-sufficient. Their reindeers provide them with material for clothing, sacks and pouches, drinking horns, and cutlery, as well as meat and milk. Bears and wolves are hunted for fur, meat, and bone as well. Whereas others use clay bowls, the Finnar are quite happy with wooden ones.

The Finnar trade among themselves and with other lands on the borders of the Unclaimed Lands, but no coin changes hands, for shiny metal discs are of no use to nomads. One family, clan, or tribe may have an abundance of felt, for examples, which it might trade for drinking horns or excess meat. Services are also traded. A family with a cleric of Eira in their number might swap herbal remedies for meat, or exchange healing prayers with a clan boasting a cleric of Eostre Animalmother, humans being healed in return for animals being blessed.

Such trade is very small scale and usually only with close neighbors. With the population scattered across a vast area, it is difficult for outsiders to organize any sort of large scale trading network. This doesn't stop the cult of Var from trying, though.

ARCHITECTURE

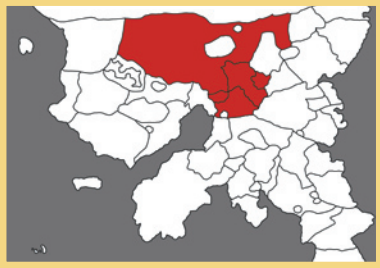
The steads and small villages of the Anari, Saxa, and Tuomi are little different from those in other lands, though insulation is thicker and defenses more rigorous. The few permanent settlements that exist are clustered around the great eastern lakes or in the hills of the Palisade.

The Finnar make use of tents, or lavvu in their native tongue (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion 2*). They know of wood and stone houses, but these do not suit their nomadic lifestyle. Even Finnar swelling in other lands rarely erect permanent houses, for while one can take the Finnar out of the great wilderness, one cannot take the wilderness out of the Finnar so easily.

A lavvu is conical and supported by a framework of thin wooden posts designed to flex in the wind yet provide sufficient strength to stop the lavvu collapsing. The lavvu itself is made from thick reindeer felt covered with an outer layer of reindeer skin for additional waterproofing. Unlike regular tents, which have a flap, lavvus are fitted with felt doors, the hinges being reindeer gut straps. An opening at the top of the cone provides ventilation for the hearth.

Conditions are cramped, but body heat provides valuable warmth, and there are no partitions for those who desire privacy—the citizens of Rassilon are rarely bashful when it comes to natural urges or bodily functions.

unclaimed lands



Population: 100,000+ (55% Finnar, 15% dwarves, 15% Tuomi, 10% taiga elves, 3% Saxa, 2% Anari)
Ruler: None
Religion: Ullr, Thrym
Imports: None
Exports: None

shrine of the lost god

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Vanatáhi's Stead

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The Seer's Tower
Wayland's Smithy
Jotunvalk Mountains
Short Grass Valley
Dwarven Hills
Cave of Teeth
Rimeholm
Rimeholm
The Wild Temple
The Beast Moot
White Wood
Spirit Tree Hill
R. Frostwater
Moorfrost
Ghost Dance Hills
Warriors' Landing


Highwood Forest
Tomb of The Golden Kings
Fell Plateau
The Beacon
Cave of Dancing lights
Valley of Bears
Temple of Madness
Last Chance
Cave of Shadows
Shattered Moor
Bandelbury
Velhem Fort
Shattered Moor


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Black Meg's Broch
The Giants Steps
Giants' Hall
Blackthorn Forge
Hundton/Othicus
Hundton
Vimmar
Maera's Tooth
Hill of the Necromancer
Tethilin
Ironfist Fort
Skull Temple
Iceberg Ferry
The Blood Wall
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Shadowvale
The Pyramidion
White Wolf Temple
WolFheim
Winter Fern hills
Black Skull Tower
Iron Troll Wood
Land of The Ghost Bears
Redwall Mine
Black Skull Tower
Castle of Tortured Metal
Silverdale
Four Wind Tower
Antrad
haunted hills
Two Dragon


R. Frostwater
Moorfrost River
Warriors' landing
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Castle in the Clouds
Orc Camp
Orc Camp
Heligi Mine
Giant's Throne
Valley of Crows
Mound of Suur Töll
The Palisade
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Eira's Spring
River


Shattered
Bandelbury
Velhem Fort
Aelfmeet
Occitan
Fey Feasting Hall
Root
Forest of Omens
Far Reach
Monastry of the Anchorites
Seaton
Fernbury Hills
Murton
Vale of Statues
Hudaby
The Black Stone
Ruins
The Great River
Bjornwold
Feywood
The Fey Market
Seithrby
Ryhoepe
Barrow
Seithrby
The White Market (Winter Only)
Border Wood
Barrow-Fog Vale
Sprangaton
Brae
Barrow-Fog Vale
Trade Mission
Slithering Stone

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are places of interest within the Unclaimed Lands suitable for including in your adventures.

CAVE OF TEETH

On the western extreme of the Jotunvalk Mountains, a range famed for its marauding giants and fearsome orcs, is a deep cave. The outer chamber is decorated with teeth, fixed to wall with a hard resin. Most of the teeth are those of animals, from lowly hares to towering cave bears, but close inspection finds the teeth of orcs, humans, giants, trolls, and goblins. The Finnar consider the site sacred to Ullr, but they do not venture near it, for if it is a sacred site it is a dark one, an old place of worship from a more barbarous age. Many clerics say it is an entrance to Jábmiidáibmu.

Finnar skalds sing of the site. In many tales it is home to a fierce race of primitive men, a throwback to a savage time when men were not as civilized and cannibalism was the norm. These creatures refused to worship the gods, and so were not blessed with intelligence, speech, or creativity, making them dumb brutes. Some say that Ullr does not walk here at all—rather it is Dargar the Destroyer who lurks in the cavern, the teeth grisly trophies from his worshippers' foul and bloody rituals. Others whisper tales of men who consorted with bears, their children becoming debased mockeries, neither animal nor man, yet savage and wild all the same.

GENERAL RUINS

The Unclaimed Lands were once prosperous and settled farmlands. The Selari and others built cities, towns, temples, and castles here. Some of these were damaged in the Demongate War and other ravaged by the Liche-Priest's armies, but the true doom came during the Blizzard War, when entire cultures were eradicated in hours, days, or weeks. With few tomb raiders bothering to risk death in the frozen north, and the Finnar caring little for material wealth, many of these ruins have never been plundered. Almost anything is possible in terms of adventuring. Half-buried temples or the workshops of long-dead mages full of ancient lore and strange apparatus, ancient castles now occupied by murderous orcs or giants, and rubble-strewn cities whose streets are full of frozen corpses await those brave of heart.

GHOST DANCE HILLS

The tombs of the great Finnar heroes of old are now lost beyond the Icewall. Since the end of the Blizzard War the honored dead have been interred in a range of hills situated between Rimeholm and the Sigil Peaks. Every tribe has at least one ancestor buried here, an act designed to tie them to the land and appease the spirits of the animals they herd and hunt.

Tribes passing by the hills on nights of the Deorcmonan endeavor to stop here to pay their respects. Throughout the night skalds and clerics sing stories of the ancestors while others, intoxicated on narcotic herbs, dance with the spirits of the dead from dusk until dawn. Orcs and other fell creatures know better than to disturb the rituals, for the dead are capable of striking out from beyond the grave on these nights.

Once per year, a Finnar player character who partakes in the ritual can make a Spirit roll at –6. He gains a +1 bonus for each whole 20 points of Glory. Success earns him the blessing of his ancestors. He gains the Ancestral Guardian Edge, ignoring all requirements, for one game year. If he already has the Edge, he gains an extra benny each session instead. This benny can *only* be used to activate the Ancestral Guardian Edge.

Failure brings no punishment—not all Finnar are feted to be great heroes and not every deed is enough to impress the great heroes of the Finnar. On a critical failure, his actions have offended his ancestors in some way. If he has the Ancestral Guardian Edge, it is lost until he gains another 40 Glory. Heroes without the Edge have one fewer bennies per session instead.

THE GREAT SHRINE

Being nomadic, the Finnar erect no temples and carry only small, portable shrines with them. In honor that the gods might be properly worshipped, they erected a circle of carved stones. Each stone is carved in the likeness of the one of core deities in their pantheon—Ullr, Eostre Animalmother, Thunor (in his guise as Father Air), Eira, Freo, and Thrym.

Surrounding them is a circle of smaller stones, each one representing an important minor deity—Earhclud (archery), Galdraföðr (storytelling), Gangari (exploration), Geirvaldr (spear combat), Gizzur (riddles), Goðjaðarr (frost giant slaying), Haptasnytrir (teaching), Hfran (messengers), Kjalarr (the home), and Skaði (mammoths)—or one of the other major gods, who are considered of secondary importance.

Any tribe may worship here. Custom dictates that if a tribe is already present, new arrivals must wait for their turn. Lack of temples and major shrines mean few Finnar clerics learn resource miracles (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*), but this is one location where they can be invoked. Unlike the effects of regular resource miracles, those of the Finnar move with the tribe. Their area of effect is no larger than one mile in diameter, though.

While the Finnar move around, they know the site is too important to be left unattended—frost giants and orcs would smash the stones in a heartbeat if given half a chance. To prevent this, each tribe is required to send a handful of members to act as custodians and guardians. Since they cannot migrate their reindeer or go on extended hunts, they live entirely on the generous donations of tribes coming here to worship.

Known as the Custodians of the Great Shrine (see Appendix for more details), the order is divided into two levels. At the top are the actual Custodians, those who take sacred oaths that last the remainder of their lives and who in turn are touched by the gods. Beneath them are the Guardians. They are still oath bound to serve loyally, but only for the duration of their tour. Clerics serve alongside the Custodians of the Great Shrine, but may never be full members.

HOT WATER VALE

The location of Hot Water Vale is a closely guarded secret, known only to Lance Knights, a few clerics of Kenaz, and a very small number of Finnar tribes. Located in a hidden valley in the northwest Scythe Mountains, it is a tiny realm untouched by snow and ice. Here the temperature is the same as the Hearthlands in summer all year. Vents of scolding steam regularly erupt from the ground, while the streams that run through the valley are always warm. The water smells and tastes slightly of rotten eggs, but it is potable.

Chambers have been cut into several large hills, the walls and roofs shored up and made more homely with timbers. Some are used as secret resting places and storehouse by the Lance Knights and cult of Kenaz, for the valley is hard to find, and orcs have never polluted the land with their presence. Others are used by Finnar tribes as temporary homes when winter is particularly bad, for here their reindeer can fatten up on lush grass all year round. All that prevents the Finnar permanently occupying the landscape is the limited amount of grazing land. One has been outfitted as a temple of Kenaz. It has no permanent clerical presence.

Seelie fey frequently cavort in and around the hot water springs and forests, but they shun contact with most mortals. No mortal knows the name of the resident fey noble (or nobles), but the lack of Unseelie fey leads outsiders to believe there is but one court in permanent residence here.

Several large caves line the valley walls. Many end abruptly, but a few eventually lead to chambers full of glowing molten rock, in which sleep sun dragons. A few Lance Knights have entered into dialogue with the great wyrms, but to date they have refused to join in the war against Thrym's legions, claiming the time to awaken has not yet come.

HÖYRYTYS SIENI KENTTÄ

Translating loosely into Trader as "Steaming Fungus Field," Höyrytys Sieni Kenttä is located in the Great Forest. Here the trees grow so

close together their branches form an impenetrable roof. No sunlight or snow ever reaches the forest floor, and though the ground is semi-frozen, thick patches of slimy fungus blanket the earth. The fungus generates its own heat, and constantly steams in the cold air.

Finnar rarely hunt here, for the fungus is inedible and their prey animals do not haunt the area. Some stories claim the fungus is not natural, but rather bubbles up from holes in the ground. Parents warn their children that the fungus can walk, and that if you venture too close it will snatch you and take you into the earth, never to be seen again. As children grow, they mock their parents' stories, but they are quick to repeat them to their own children nonetheless.

Treat lighting here as Dark (–2) during the day and Pitch Darkness (–4) at night. The temperature within Steaming Fungus Field is the same as the Low Winterlands. No precipitation ever reaches the forest floor.

HVERGELMIRAR

Meaning "bubbling cauldrons," Hvergelmirar is a geothermal hotspot in a land gripped by endless cold. Each of the 42 "cauldrons" that make up the site is actually an active geyser. Situated in a natural depression, the air is only slightly warmer than the surrounding wilds, but the ground temperature is high enough to prevent thick ice forming even in winter.

The bottom of the basin is a dank bog, the haunt of an adult marsh dragon. Few visit the site save for the occasional cleric of Kenaz or desperate traveler in search of much-needed warmth, for as well the dragon the bog is home to numerous snakes.

KENAZ'S TEARS

The cult of Kenaz has little doubt their god, while missing, is still alive. The evidence, they claim, is their continuing ability to invoke miracles. Further evidence, plus a possible clue to his location, may have recently been discovered.

Hunters have reported a line of fiery droplets falling from the sky and hitting the earth north of Karad Iarn. On investigating, they found a string of craters. At the heart of each crater was a glowing blob. The line of impacts extends for some ten miles and points arrow-straight toward the Mistlands.

The cult of Kenaz intends to mount a major expedition to study the objects in more details. While they might be tears of Kenaz, past experience has shown they could just as easily be fragments of star metal born generated by Thunor's hammer or Tiw's sword—the hunters did report hearing loud booms just before the fiery trail appeared in the sky.

News of the impact has spread. The cults of Ertha, Tiw (both of whom who want to claim any star metal), and Hoenir, the Lorekeepers, and the Reliquary are all interested in investigating the impact sites. The fiery impacts did not go unnoticed in the Giant's Throne, though. If star metal has fallen, King Nagal desires it for himself. If indeed the blobs are Kenaz's tears, however, he cannot allow them to fall into his enemies' hands.

KYÖPELINVUORI

"Ghosts' Mountain," the Trader translation of the name, is a mountain in the Gray Mountains. One Finnar myth states the peak is home to malevolent hags, who ride forth on the wind each winter in search of children (who they devour) and men (with whom they mate). Certain Finnar tribes hold that women who die without marrying are destined to become hags, while unmarried men are their preferred lovers. Another story has it that the souls of animals gather here before being accepted into the embrace of Eostre Animalmother. A hunter who can catch one of these spectral animals is said to gain great prowess in hunting its mortal ilk, so long as the ghostly creature remains captive.

LAND OF THE GHOST BEARS

Stories concerning ghost bears are rarely told by actual witnesses, for the most recent encounter dates back to several years before the formation of the Mistlands. Details vary, but the general theme is always the same—a hardy hunter or trapper in the wooded foothills of the western Sigil Peaks spies a bear, which he then decides to hunt down. No matter the tracker's skill, the bear always vanishes, leaving no physical trace of its existence.

Though the tale refuses to die, there are no ghost bears in the hills. All the "bears" were fur-clad members of a reclusive people of Saxa ancestry who fled into the mountains for safety when the armies of the Liche-Priest tore through Silverdale. For nigh on 800 years they have remained hidden, fearful of the undead they believe conquered, and still occupy, their ancestral lands.

In that time they have become masters of the wild, living off the land to satisfy their primitive needs (they have not used metal tools in many centuries). Their speech has regressed to a primitive language and many are deformed due to generations of inbreeding, but they are the only humans who have so far mastered druidism.

MAMMOTH HALL

In the wilderness west of Watchgap Fort stands a solitary stead, known across neighboring Heligioland simply as Mammoth Hall. Viewed from a distance during the day, the roof of the main hall gleams gray-white, a dirty smudge on the pure white snow and ice. At dawn and dusk, the gray-white is replaced by blood-red as the wan light from Sigel's Hearth caresses the unique structure. Only as one draws near can one see the reason for the unusual coloring. Located above the doors is the tusked skull of a colossal mammoth, one far larger than any specimen every spied below the forbidding Icewall. The creatures' spine runs along the roof, with massive, bowed ribs curving downward to embrace the wooden walls like bone buttresses. Thin shingles of worked mammoth bone cover the remainder of the roof.

Two large outbuildings complete the stead. The first, twice as long as the main hall yet of poorer construction, normally houses several pygmy mammoths. Investigation reveals they have suffered recent wounds but have been expertly tended to. The hall's owner uses this space to tend injured mammoths, to help female's birth calves, and, in dire winters, to give the local herd some extra protection. The second building is piled high with bales of dried grass, winter stores for the mammoths. A scythe and sharpening stone are also kept here.

The great doors leading into the hall are intricately carved with images of mammoths within a border of an endless knot motif typical of the Saxa. Outside a sign, in Saxa, reads, "Hospitality awaits all those of noble intent. Enter freely and be at home." Banging on the door elicits no response— the sign gives clear instructions that honest guests may enter as they wish.

Inside the air is hot, smoky, and slightly acrid. A great fire pit in the center of the room, fuelled by dried mammoth dung, provides ample heat though minimal lighting. Smoky lamps hang on nails hammered in the wide beams, casting flickering shadows across the expansive interior. Wooden benches covered in mammoth hair cloaks and rugs line both walls. As with other Saxa steads, these are used for sitting and sleeping on, and lift to provide storage space for guests and basic provisions required by the household. The drinking horns, cutlery handles, plates, and bowls within the Hall are all carved of mammoth bone or ivory. The interior is divided into two sections—the main hall, where guests may eat, relax, and sleep, and the owner's private quarters.

The Hall's sole permanent occupant, a hulking Saxa known only as Utgar, is rarely present during the day, for much of his time is spent in the surrounding landscape, tending and watching over the mammoth herds, hunting and gathering food, and tracking down predators. Plentiful food and drink is always placed on a table near the hearth before he departs, in the event unexpected guests come. He returns shortly before dusk each night, showing no surprise if strangers occupy his home.

Utgar survives by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild fungus and edible tubers. When he needs supplies he cannot furnish, he reluctantly takes mammoth bone, hide, and ivory to the markets of Heligioland. Under no circumstances does he ever kill a mammoth to cater for his own needs.

MOUND OF SUUR TÖLL

In Finnar legends, Suur Töll (Töll the Great) was a forest giant chieftain. Ferocious and short-tempered, he nevertheless had a soft spot for the Finnar and often aided them in their struggles. During the Blizzard War, he migrated south with the tribes, fending off attacks by the Hellfrost army.

Despite his strength and skill, Töll finally met his end at the hands (more specifically the axe) of a frost giant. Although he was beheaded, Töll managed to pick up his head, dig his own grave, and cover himself in dirt. As he settled down for his long sleep, he vowed that he would rise from his grave to help the Finnar in times of strife.

Spirit Name: Töll the Great.

Ambience: The giant was renowned for his short-temper. Anyone standing on the mound must make a Spirit roll or suffer from a short fuse—they take offense at perceived slights and resort to violence as a means to end disputes. The effect wears off after 24 hours.

Deity: Tiw.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: Töll speaks in a deep, rumbling voice. It is a voice of authority, yet one also filled with kindness. He speaks only to ask what trouble has befallen the Finnar and what aid the supplicant seeks.

Sacrifice: Töll has a great love of beer in life and death has done little to curb his appetite. Awakening him requires two gallons of ale per Rank of the Leadership Edge requested. Töll accepts only one sacrifice per month—he needs to sober up after his binge drinking—and only from Finnar. The latter does not prevent him blessing others, however. So long as a Finnar pours the ale onto the grave, he can nominate any person present to be the recipient of Töll's gift.

Powers: Töll cannot physically rise from his burial mound. Instead, those who seek his assistance in battle are rewarded with a single Leadership Edge of their choice. All the Edge's requirements are ignored. Since the Edge is temporary, it cannot be used to meet the requirements for Leadership Edges taken as advancements. The blessing remains in effect for 30 days or until the end of the first mass battle in which the hero participates, whichever comes first.

ONE HORSE STEAD

Population: 165
Ruler: Ealdorman Wihtred Bassasunu
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Ullr, Kenaz
Imports: Fish, vegetables
Exports: Furs, horn, wool

This large fortified stead (the locals refer to it as a village), located in the central Palisade, is home to five extended families of hardy shepherds (and their equally hardy sheep) and hunters. Governance lies in the hands of an elected ealdorman, who holds office for three years.

Were it not for one unusual annual event, the name of One Horse Stead would never be spoken outside the region. As it is, it regularly attracts visitors from far and wide. On the first day of spring, when the Unseelie court gives way to that of the Seelie, a band of fey arrive at the stead. Unfortunately for mortals planning on attending the event, the fey do not keep to the ascribed local calendar, and the change between courts can occur any time in the second or third week of Plohmonan. On rare years it happens earlier or later. The fey do not herald their arrival—they just turn up at dawn (and leave the next sunset).

At the head of the procession is the Master of the Regal Stables, a powerful fey who commands the extensive stables of the local fey ruler, the Lord of Thundering Hooves. He rides a golden fey horse bedecked in an exquisitely decorated caparison. Behind him are 10 fey knights mounted on silver fey horses, their squires, and a gaggle of assorted lesser fey servants, hangers-on, and curious visitors.

The fey make camp on the outskirts of the stead, never venturing inside its walls. The locals are permitted to explore the fey camp, but as with all dealings with the fey, there are inherent risks. The fey are not here to trade, though individual fey may have goods or service they wish to barter. Let the buyer beware!

Once the fey are settled, the Master of the Regal Stables brings forth a gold fey horse, much like his own. His herald reads a proclamation, declaring that whoever does best in three contests of the Master's choosing will gain possession of the horse for one year. The nature of the contests varies each year and are left to the GM to devise. The GM should always remember that the fey do not think like mortals—gathering bundles of winter plants or singing lewd songs are just as likely to occur as tests of strength or archery.

The fey horse is a Wild Card and permits only its temporary owner to ride it. *Beast friend* has no effect on it. If the horse is ever sold or given away (including being loaned), it returns to the fey realm at the next sunset, at which time any money earned from the transaction turns into worthless flower petals. If stolen, it is returned to the owner the next dawn, along with a warning not to be so careless.

The locals have no idea why the local fey potentate has chosen to attend the stead and offer a horse each year. Nothing in their folklore can explain the visit, which has occurred every year for centuries. Not that they much care about his motives—the fey cause little trouble and the crowd they draw boosts the local economy.

THE PARADE OF KINGS

The crumbling remains of a stone road snake up from the Great Forest onto the southern edge of the Bleak Moor. Few people devote time and resources to building roads without purpose, and likely its route could be traced to the city at the center of the moor. Flanking the western side is a row of heavily weathered statues. Most are found closest to the edge of the moor. Further north there are just a handful of toppled statues, barely visible through the frozen bog and stunted trees.

One story claims they are the remains of a king and his retinue who were petrified by some powerful fiend as they returned to the city that lay at the moor's center. In myth, their fate is commonly attributed to the Demongate War. More recently, scholars have theorized they represent kings or equivalent potentates, and were likely the rulers of the long dead city. Whether or not they mark the site of royal graves, as some suggest, is debatable. That they stand only on one side of the road and appear to be facing east, toward the rising soon, led the sages to conclude the lords were of Selari stock.

Whatever their origin and whoever they represent, it has long been held that beneath each statue is a stash of treasure. Far from any permanent settlements, the area is considered too hostile to conduct a major excavation. Neither the Finnar nor the Hearth Knights, the most frequent visitors, have much interest in digging for treasure of the windswept moorland.

REDWALL MINE

Before abandoning the region during the Blizzard War, frost dwarves dug deep into the Sigil Peaks. The tunnels of Redwall Mine, once famed for its rich red rubies, lay silent for nearly 500 years. Three years ago, a small band of dwarves seeking their fortune broke the seal protecting the camouflaged stone door and reopened one of the deeper veins.

Things have not worked out as planned. The mine is close to the Giant's Throne that orcs patrol the nearby slopes. Effectively besieged, their supplies running low, the dwarves have resealed the great door. Before they did, they sent a lone messenger to Heligioland. In return for bringing provisions and helping to secure the mine entrance, the dwarves promise a small share in the vast riches waiting to be unearthed. Transporting sufficient provisions will be a challenge, for no pass runs near Redwall Mine. Securing it will be even harder, for King Kaldr has no desire to see enemies dwell so close to his borders.

THE SEER'S TOWER

The Unclaimed Lands came into existence at the end of the Blizzard War. Before that, it was a heavily populated region dotted with towns and villages. All that remains of these today are scattered lichen-clad stones and folk stories. One structure that survived relatively unscathed is the Seer's Tower, a spire of gray granite that sits atop several subterranean levels.

During the Demongate Wars, a powerful magician used spells now forgotten to bind a time demon into a full-length mirror.

Through a mixture of his indomitable will and words of power gleaned from ancient tomes of dark lore he forced the demon to show him visions of the past, present, and future. The tales recounted today make no mention of the demon, for the seer (as he became known) never revealed the source of his knowledge. Skalds who know the story speak only of a mystic or cleric of the Norns who possessed a scrying device.

These same tales do not reveal the truth of the seer's fate, either. Ask a skald or scholar who knows the legend and he will give one of two answers. First, the Norns took offense to his gazing at what had been and what was yet to come. The goddesses shattered his scrying device into a thousand shards and struck the seer blind. Second, the seer looked into the future and witnessed the Blizzard War. His spying attracted the attention of Thrym, who was less than pleased at the intrusion into his future plans. Before the seer could inform others, Thrym destroyed his crystal or mirror in an explosion that cost the mystic his life. While they make for a good story with a mortal element about not delving too far into the future, they are fictitious. No prison is inescapable, and the demon eventually broke free, shattering the glass as it emerged into the world of mortals to enact horrific vengeance on its captor.

Even before the rise of the Liche-Priest it was rumored that while the seer's scrying device was destroyed beyond repair, the individual shards still held a faint trace of their former power. The passage of time and the lack of physical evidence has done nothing to stop adventurers searching the tower in the hopes of making a lucky find. For a change, the rumor is actually true. A character wearing one around his neck gains +1 to his Notice rolls. A cleric of the Norns also gains +1 to their arcane skill rolls when invoking miracles, as does any cleric or mage casting *insight*, *precognition*, or *sentry*.

Unfortunately for those seeking to plunder its treasures (while include many historical tracts and tomes of lore), the tower is not entirely deserted—the time demon still lurks in the lower levels of the tower, unwilling or unable to return to the Abyss.

SHORT GRASS VALLEY

Regularly swept by terrific winds, Short Grass Valley, which lies at the base of the eastern Jotunvalk Mountains, is free of snow and ice except in deep winter. Although the air is no warmer here than elsewhere, and in fact is frequently colder thanks to the wind roaring down from the high mountains, the lack of surface covering allows lichen to grow in abundance. It is this yellow-green carpet that gives the valley its name.

Local Finnar tribes regularly come here on a rotating basis to feed their reindeer herds, each staying for a single month before moving on and allowing others to enjoy the relative bounty. The constant presence of the great herds means plentiful prey for wolves, and worse creatures, making the valley a dangerous place to explore.

Near the far end of the valley are several ruins. The Finnar fear them and never camp within sight of them. Their skalds sing of the ruins being dark places, where the light of sun was unwelcome. Built by the Selari, the ruins are all that remains of a temple complex devoted to Cyhyraeth, as the Selari called Niht.

SHRINE OF THE LOST GOD

As powerful as the gods are, they are reliant on mortal worshippers. Stripped of prayers and supplications, they wither like plants deprived of their roots. While this loss of power cannot kill a god, it can reduce it to a pitiful wreck, a pale, insignificant shadow of its former majesty. Such incidents are rare, though. Throughout history conquerors have crushed neighboring lands, only to incorporate the native gods into their own pantheons as aspects of the greater gods. While names and myths may change, the essence of the deity remains untouched, and thus unaffected. However, when an entire culture is wiped out, as occurred during the Blizzard War, worship of the very minor deities may cease in a heartbeat.

North of the Great Forest, almost nestled against the imposing Icewall, stands a solitary obelisk. The ground surrounding the monolith is free of surface snow for a distance of ten yards, though the temperature is as cold as elsewhere in the High Winterlands.

MINOR DEITY: OZWIENA

Titles: Lady of Glory, Fame-Bringer.
Aspects: Glory.
Affiliations: Ozwiena is initially affiliated with no major deities. Tying her to existing major gods will require extensive promotion of the new faith among existing cults, a task that might take a life-time. The Norns, Tiw, or the Unknowable One are ideal choices. Remember, no minor god may ever be affiliated to more than two major deities.
Symbol: No standard symbol. Clerics are expected to carry around a token depicting a famous hero. This includes their own image if they are that vain.
Priesthood: Promoters of Fame (priests); Glory-hounds (paladins).
Herald: None.
Holy Days: Any day a cleric achieves a Glory award is a personal high holy day. Any day the cleric helps another person achieve a Glory award is a personal holy day.
Duties: To acquire fame and glory, to help others acquire fame and glory.
Sins: (Minor) not earning 3+ Glory for yourself (paladins) or another (priests) once per month, lying about your achievements or those of others, not making a boast (see *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*) once per three months; (Major) allowing another person to tell of your tales in order to gain Glory, not earning a Glory award for yourself (paladins) or another (priest) once per year, failing to complete a boast for any reason; (Mortal) losing personal Glory for any reason.
Signature Power: *Charismatic aura*.
Powers*: *Battle song, boost/lower trait, fortune's favored, gift of battle, precognition, smite, speak language, warrior's gift*.
Trappings: Any.
Special: Clerics of Ozwiena are treated as skalds for the purposes of the Glorious Deeds Table.
Ozwiena's clergy are a mixture of warriors and poets. Priests are less concerned with their own personal fame, instead focusing on helping others achieve greatness. Conversely, paladins are expected to become famous heroes in their own right, and recount their personal deeds to amaze and entertain others. As might be expected, egotism is a prized trait among the cult.
Ceremonies to honor Ozwiena take the form of stories, either of personal glory or of heroes of old. The goddess cares nothing about the heroes' culture, thriving on any glorious epic.
** Until the cult has 5 ordained clerics, existing clerics are limited to Novice powers. Seasoned spells may be gained only after the cult reaches 10 clerics, and the sole Veteran spell once it achieves a clerical membership of 25.*

Faded inscriptions written in a runic script (*speak language* is required to decipher the text) proclaim the stone to be a shrine to Ozwiena, the goddess of fame and glory. Within the stone exists the last remnants of the deity, a weak spirit, emaciated through lack of worship down the centuries.

Before the Selari imposed their system of light-dark duality on the region, a minor human warrior culture whose leaders were noted for their fame rather than their ability to lead prospered here. Finding no place for the goddess in their pantheon, her worship was prohibited, eventually disappearing a century later, as the last vestiges of the ancient culture were bred out.

Touching the stone with bare hands imparts a brief telepathic message, in which the goddess promises the explorer fame in return for worship. To awaken her fully requires the character to voluntarily sacrifice a permanent die in Spirit. In return for this sacrifice, he gains Faith d4 and the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge of the new faith (see sidebar). Initially weak, the character's choice of miracles grows as he works to develop the faith. While the Selari saw no need for a goddess of glory, such a deity might prove popular among the current human cultures, especially the Saxa.

SILENT LAKE

Watered by streams carrying rain and meltwater from the Ice-barrier Mountains, the fertile lands west of Heligioland remain

unsettled due to the presence of the frost giants and orcs of Giant's Throne. In days of yore, though, this was considered prime hunting grounds for herds of aurochs. Of the many small lakes that dot the mountains, one in particular was keenly sought by hunters.

Also known as Hunters' Lake, the chill waters of this particular body of water are blessed by Ullr. Any creature that drinks here becomes mute for one week (a curse for many spellcasters), but is gifted with exceptional hearing (+4 to Notice rolls based on sound) for the same period.

Little hunting took place on or near the shore—the animals that drank here were equally blessed and thus could hear hunters approaching long before they entered bow range. Instead, hunters would make camp on its shores and take a mouthful before setting out in search of game further afield. The blessed water loses all properties if removed from the lake.

SOMETIMES MANOR

The land between Watchgap Fort and the Mistlands is a grassy plain broken only by low, gently sloping hills and patches of thin woodland. Ravaged first by the armies of the Liche-Priest (c. –300) and later by Thrym's horde (c. –12) as it pushed toward Hellfrost Pass, it was never resettled in any strength.

Some travelers have reported visiting a fortified Anari manor. The lord, Baron Quinault ap-Foilan, is welcoming of strangers, and gladly offers a seat at his warm hearth, satisfying meals from his well-stocked larder, and a comfortable bed. For all the warm welcome, there are many oddities.

First, manors rarely exist without a village to support them, yet this one sits isolated. Second, while the baron refers to servants by name, no guest has ever seen one. Third, the lord's house, clothing, and wall hangings, while in good order, are of archaic style. Similarly, the stories he tells and songs he sings are of heroes and events that occurred before –320. Fourth, the baron refers to the Anari Empire and its decadent rulers in the present tense.

When questioned about his life, the baron has little to say, stating only that his family has ruled here for centuries, though that will soon end—he is the last of his line, his wife is dead, and he has not seen his son, Gobert, in many years. As for the lack of a nearby village, he merely shrugs, adding if pressed on the topic that he pays his servants to keep his house in working order and cares nothing for how they do so.

While all this raises some eyebrows among guests, it is not the biggest mystery concerning the manor. Those who have been granted hospitality are a minority—most who pass by the location of the manor find only tumbled, weathered stones and faint traces of walls protruding from the wiry grass.

Baron Quinault has been dead for centuries, his lands razed and his subjects slaughtered by the Liche-Priest's black army. Unwilling to accept his fate, for his death did indeed end his familial line, the baron's spirit has remained tethered to the mortal realm. The baron, his manor, and its contents are physical objects, but exist only on days of the year of great relevance to his life (and while he has guests in residence).

The baron's ghost, while not evil in any way, is an affront to the natural order of things. It can be laid to rest permanently through two means. First, he can be slain while in physical form. Since he believes he is alive, he will die a second, and final, time. Second, his spirit will accept its fate if it can be proven beyond any reasonable doubt that the baron is already dead. *Banish* will not work—the baron is convinced he is still alive, and his belief is strong enough to resist even this powerful miracle.

SPIRIT TREE HILL

Finnar and taiga elves gather at Spirit Tree Hill to honor Ullr, offer sacrifices, and ask his blessing in hunts over the coming months. The hill, a large, domed tumulus, stands between Rimeholm and the Great Forest. A single tree grows on the summit. The tree is a sacred site.

Spirit Name: Hunt Brother.

Ambience: The air is filled with a wild savagery. Characters with Beast Master gain no special protection against wild animals that may be present.

Deity: Ullr.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: Hunt Brother show pleasure at being worshipped by raising his branches, holding his sacrifices he has been offered aloft for Ullr to see. If displeased, the sacrifices fall to the ground.

Sacrifice: Hunt Brother requires a ritual be performed and sacrifices left in order to grant a blessing. Hunt Brother requires sacrifices which will return to the earth quickly. Carved bone and antler (such as combs, pins, or basic tools), leatherwork, animal carcasses, furs, and so on are the preferred offering. Sacrifices must be hung on the branches between dawn and dusk. Participation in the ritual takes the whole day, for there is much singing, drumming, and dancing involved. Individuals may only participate in the ceremony once per three months.

Powers: A cleric of Ullr must lead the ritual required to appease Hunt Brother. Once all the sacrifices are made, he makes a Faith roll. Others clerics of Ullr may cooperate using the standard rules.

With success, Hunt Brother grants a +1 bonus to Survival rolls for each 100 gs worth of sacrifices. A raise grants a +1 bonus for every 75 gs of sacrifices. For ease, Hunt Brother deems half the trade goods a hero carries suitable. There is no limit to the bonuses which can be gained.

Failure means the ritual yields no result, though the sacrifices cannot be reclaimed—those who do so are affected as if they rolled a critical failure. With critical failure, the ritual is performed wrong and Hunt Brother is insulted. Every participant suffers a –1 penalty to all Survival rolls for the next month. The same penalty applies if as much as 1 gs of offerings are stolen from the tree.

The bonuses form a communal pool. Any participants in the ritual can draw from the pool as required, adding up to +4 on a single roll. They can draw on the energy anywhere in Rassilon. The bonus pool does not regenerate, it cannot go negative, and bonuses not used after three months from the date of the ritual are lost.

STENCHROT MARSH

Between the Bleak Moor and the Icewall lies Stenchrot Marsh. For much of the year it is frozen solid, a sheet of rough ice broken only by withered clumps of hardy grasses and rushes. In summer, the ice thaws, powered no doubt by whatever force affects the nearby Bleak Moor. When this happens the air is heavy with the overpowering stench of rotting flesh.

Three legends relate to the site among non-Finnar people, but there are no firm facts to back up any of them. The first claims the marsh was the site of a battle during the Blizzard War. An army of men, perhaps from the ruined city in the heart of the Bleak Moor, met their deaths in what was then a low-lying wetland. The second says the legend relates to the reign of the Liche-Priest, though opinions are divided on whether the dead were part of his army or his victims. The third story follows takes place during the Demongate War, when it is believed a powerful fiend was slain on the spot. To the Finnar, Stenchrot Marsh is yet another entrance to Jábmiidáibmu.

Regardless of the truth, Stenchrot Marsh is much feared by the inhabitants of the Unclaimed Lands, and few dare to even walk its borders for fear of what might lie within. Occasionally a brave explorer finds a rusted sword or fragment of armor, but no corpses or skeletons have been reported.

THE THUNDERLIZARD TOMBS

Deep in the Great Forest is an ancient site that very few have heard of and even fewer have visited. The ruins form a grand complex stretching almost a mile, though the grand layout is lost to the eye due to the encroachment of the forest.

Each of the tombs is circular. The burial chamber is sunk into the ground to an average depth of ten feet. In the center is a stone bier with dimensions that could accommodate a large human. Although no doubt built to last the ages, as tombs often are, time shows little

mercy toward the works of intelligent design. The monumental stonework is badly cracked, the walls distorted by roots pushing against the stone lining.

On the surface, the perimeter is marked by three tiers of stones, leaving the interior open to the elements. The best guess of scholars, who have found no postholes, timbers, or piles of debris that would indicate a roof ever covered the interior, is that the dead were deliberately left on display. Likely this was done so the living could commune with their spirits, continue to leave gifts, or sing songs in their honor.

No physical remains or grave goods have yet been discovered, but this is hardly surprising—the tombs have been open to the elements for thousands of years. Scholars hope that, perhaps deeper in the forest, there might be sealed tombs that will yield some clues to the nature of the builders or those whose remains once lay here.

Neither masons nor mourners left any writing. The only carvings show what appear to be thunderlizards. Not only are the beasts bipedal, but they are wearing clothes and armor, and carrying weapons and what appear to be symbols of authority. No thunderlizards have lived this far north since long before humans walked the earth—even the elves have no stories or songs concerning this. Some scholars argue the monuments were raised by gatormen in some distant epoch. This holds little water with those who know the gatormen, for nowhere else has that elder race showed thunderlizards as anything other than beasts, and their sole deity, Sarkeb, is always depicted a one of their race. Thus, for now at least, who built the tombs remains one of many mysteries in Rassilon.

TOWER OF THE SLEEPING WOMAN

The Tale of the Sleeping Woman is known from north to south and east to west. At its most basic, the theme centers on a woman who was cursed to fall into a magical sleep by a wicked spellcaster. In order to ward the woman against being woken by outsiders, she was placed in a tall tower with a single window near the top the only entrance. Around the base of the tower grows a dense tangle of deadly thorns.

Variations are commonplace. The cult of Scaetha tells how an evil necromancer laid a curse of a mighty paladin during the last days of the Liche-Priest, for the paladin was fated to slay the Liche-Priest. Some fanatical Anari claim the woman is the rightful heir to the empire, cursed by a Saxa magician to prevent the empire rising again. Finnar tell of a hunter who killed the prize reindeer of a terrible hag, and whose daughter was taken from him as punishment. Tuomi speak of a vain fey noblewoman who grew jealous at the beauty of a mortal child. A Midmarker legend tells how a wicked stepmother banished the rightful daughter of a king to prevent her ever ascending the throne. Engro insist the "woman" is merely a metaphor for a fabulous treasure. In Chalcis, the sleeper is a cleric of Kenaz cursed by the Ice Queen, the tower made of ice, and the hawthorns replaced with chill thorns.

Every version of the tale claims the woman is still sleeping, but can be awakened under the right circumstances. A kiss from a prince or man of pure heart, daubing her head with certain herbs, reciting certain phrases, whispering her true name in her ear—the list goes on.

But all might not be as pleasant as the tales make out. Darker versions, perhaps older, perhaps just intended to warn people to be careful to avoid the unknown, reverse the roles. The sleeper is variously said to be a vampire, liche, demon, or fell cleric, and her supposed oppressor a good-hearted cleric of mage seeking to rid the world of an evil she could not slay or banish. Often the sleeper resides at the base of the tower, not the top, and the window is warded against curious intruders.

The story of the sleeping princess is based on truth. The tower still stands, the sleeper still sleeps, and dense hawthorns grow around the base. The thorns actually grow as a huge maze. Over time this has become home to a band of malevolent fey whose flesh bristle with sharp thorns (treat as a wood warrior, but with the ability to cast thorny *bolts* using their Spirit die).

Although this entry has been placed in the Unclaimed Lands, it can be used moved to any realm—the exact location of the tower remains unknown.

TRADE MISSION

Population: 37
Ruler: Profiteer Joie ap-Godfroi
Religion: Var
Imports: Trade
Exports: Trade

The trade mission sits in the Low Winterlands, roughly halfway between the Palisade and Watchgap Fort, on a spur of land protruding into White Lake. It is the brainchild and home of Profiteer Joie ap-Godfroi, a stubborn, matronly priestess of Var. Although labeled the trade mission on maps, most merchants know it better as "Joie's Place."

Knowing that merchants from Heligioland resented the long trip to the settlements of the Palisade and few bothered using ships, she paid for the construction of a trading station from her own pocket. Rather than making the tiresome journey to the end of the trade route and then having to travel from village to village, merchants now sell goods to the mission, which in turn sells them on to a consortium of local merchants at a healthy profit.

The Heligioland merchants don't begrudge her the income—each day less they spend traveling means less fodder for the animals, less wear and tear on wagons, and less wages for guards and wagoners. The local merchants buy at a discounted rate to what they would normally pay, so they are not out of pocket by having to make the journey to the trading mission. It also means deliveries are more frequent, which pleases their customers.

Founded 40 years ago by the then-youthful priestess, it originally handled trade from Silverdale (now the Mistlands) as well, but that income died suddenly 30 years ago when the mists descended upon the doomed realm. Although Joie could make far more money running a similar venture along a major trade road, her profits are healthy and, in her own way, she helps keep this small part of the Unclaimed Lands in civilized hands.

The mission sits inside a sturdy palisade with a walkway running the entire perimeter, and two guard towers situated in opposite corners. Originally it comprised just a small trading post, but business has been good and Joie has invested wisely in ensuring merchants want to keep coming back.

The largest structure is the trading post, which doubles as a temple of Var. Although the mission was founded for the purchase and sale of bulk cargos, there is a general store inside the building which sells individual items. The trading post is the only stone structure in the mission. It has reinforced doors, strong locks, no windows, and slate tiles on the roof as a fire prevention.

Three Saxa style steads provide accommodation for the clerics of Var, the mercenary guards, and the other inhabitants. The only two-story building is the Horse and Mammoth, an inn. Finally, there is a sauna run by the cult of Eira. It charges a token 1 ss per half-hour (other services offered here may cost more). Stables line the east wall, providing shelter for mounts as large as pygmy mammoths (the trading post keeps two trained as beasts of burden; they are also handy for pulling carts out of bogs, mud, and deep slush).

In addition to the aged cleric, the mission houses 36 others.

Clerics of Var (5): The five clerics are actually novitiates, apprentices learning mercantile skills. After taking their final vows they are sent into the world to make their own profits. New apprentices are then hired. Competition for a posting is fierce, for Joie is widely regarded as being one of Var's most profitable clerics.

Paladins of Var (2): Although there are mercenaries stationed here, Joie has two trusted Thieftakers on her staff. Both served their apprenticeships under Joie, and have returned to serve her as full members of the faith. Naturally they are paid for their services.

Mercenaries (16): Joie has a long-term contract with the Iron Guild. Since fees are paid in advance, the Guild ships their wastrels and troublemakers here. Joie rules her mission with a hard but fair hand, and most of the mercenaries quickly lose their bad habits or their teeth, for the old bird is not as helpless as she looks.

Laborers (8): These burly men are responsible for loading and unloading cargo, as well as routine maintenance work. They aren't much use in melee, but they are competent archers.

Angarad Wighelmsdohtor: A priestess of Eira, Angarad doesn't actually work for Joie. Rather, she operates the sauna and sells

herbal remedies and alchemical devices as an independent trader. She lives in the inn. Angarad doesn't approve of Belle's profession, but it is a valid faith and one that is affiliated to her own goddess, so she keeps her disapproval to herself out of respect.

Belle: Belle is a paladin of Gersemi, the minor deity of consensual sex and an aspect of Eira. She isn't quite a prostitute, since she doesn't charge for her "joint worship." Instead, her co-worshippers are expected to make a donation to the cult. She operates out of a room in the sauna. Eardwulf (see below) refused to give her lodging in the inn at first, but her money was good and he figured it was better to have her under his roof, where he could keep an eye on her and his daughters at the same time.

Eardwulf Osricsunu (+2): Eardwulf runs the trading mission's inn with his two daughters, Ingrid (17) and Eadhild (15). He has forbidden them from befriending Belle (see above) for fear she will "corrupt" them. Both girls are pretty and certainly old enough to take husbands. Although Eardwulf would love to marry them off, his protective instincts and gruff manner have driven away most suitors. He is an independent businessman who pays ground rent to the cult of Var.

TUONELA

In Finnar mythology, the underworld comprises three distinct locations. Jábmiidáibmu is the Land of the Dead (more fully, "The Eternal Land Where Souls Reside"), the final resting place for the souls of the deceased. Surrounding it is the Celestial River, across which souls are transported by Tuonen piika ("Death's Maid"). Before that, and connecting directly to the mortal realm, is Tuonela, or "Death's Hall." This is the equivalent of Scaetha's Hall. All three locations are said to be subterranean.

Carved into the western tip of the Gray Mountains is an immense necropolis. Spread over multiple levels, it predates the arrival of the Finnar by many centuries, perhaps even millennia. In that time it has been extended by multiple cultures.

The extent of the tunnels and burial chambers is as yet unknown. The Finnar rarely venture here. In their eyes, this is a literal part of Tuonela, a place reserved solely for the dead. They shun it partly out of reverence for the dead and partly for fear they might stumble across the banks of the Celestial River and be whisked away to the Afterlife before their time. Adventurers have walked the necropolis, but all have been driven back by undead at some point. Still, several miles have been explored and thoroughly looted over time. Explorers who seek treasure must push past the ghastly guardians into unexplored territory.

The cult of Scaetha, fearful the Liche-Priest might enlist the undead when he awakens, would dearly love to mount an extended expedition, but their strength is required elsewhere.

ULLR'S LAVVU

Ullr's Lavvu is not a fixed point. Instead, can be found at any place in the Unclaimed Lands. Folklore states that the lavvu appears only to those in need of shelter, though one should never count on it to save them—Ullr looks after those who look after themselves. Similarly, there is no way to summon the tent, though at the GM's discretion a follower of Ullr seeking divine aid may be sent the tent instead of a benny.

The lavvu does not appear out of thin air. Instead, desperate travelers stumble across a tent large enough to exactly accommodate the party members seemingly abandoned in the middle of nowhere. It is sparsely furnished, but there are always enough sleeping furs and blankets for those in the party, as well as basic foods and bundles of firewood enough to last the explorers exactly three days (the traditional period of hospitality).

There is no time limit to how long one may remain in the lavvu—it does not suddenly vanish, leaving travelers abandoned in the wilds, nor does it teleport them around the Unclaimed Lands. However, extended use causes the lavvu to lose its protection against the winter. For each day after the first three days, its protection rating against the cold drops by one point. When it reaches zero, the lavvu falls apart. No magic has been able to prevent such an occurrence. Whenever and wherever it next appears, however, it is in perfect working order and fully replenished.

The Finnar are divided as to whether there is more than one lavvu or whether the gradual decline is a sign that one has outstayed one's welcome and placed others in danger.

VANATÜHI'S STEAD

In a vast clearing in the western Great Forest stands an enormous stead. Its walls are constructed from entire tree trunks and the roof covered in a dense layer of spongy moss. The stead is the home of Vanatühi, a forest giant and priest of Eostre Plantmother, and his servant, Kaval, a dim-witted cliff giant. Vanatühi desires nothing more to be left alone to tend his garden, in which he grows all manner of vegetables, and sing. The wielder of secret charms and forgotten songs, his hardy, frost-resistant plants grow even in the frozen soil of the High Winterlands. While he does not openly court visitors, he does tolerate those who bring him dung for his plants. In return, he offers equal weight of vegetables from his stores.

WARRIORS' LANDING

Population: 530
Ruler: Ridder Amstern Shatterstone

Thegn Rungar Hammerhand of Karad Marn may only have 400 mercenaries in his army at present, but the call to arms has gone out far and wide. One of the great difficulties is actually getting troops to the city—the walk from Hellfrost Keep alone takes nearly two months in summer, and twice that once the snows begin. The thegn has recently hit on a solution to both this issue and the problem of extended supply lines.

Hundreds of laborers, protected two companies of dwarf warriors, are constructing of a new port on the western banks of the Frostwater River. When completed, it will allow both reinforcements and supplies embarking at Far Reach, Ryhoepe, or one of the small Heligioland fishing villages to use White Lake and Frostwater Lake as a highway. Using wood donated from the elves of Rimeholm, the workers have constructed a palisade and ditch and accommodation enough for 1000 people. Work on the wharves is continuing apace. Ridder Amstern hopes they will be ready for use in a few months.

Thegn Rungar knows his plan faces many obstacles, not least the embarkation ports raising tax on vessels destined for the new settlement. Envoys are currently negotiating with each settlement for future shares in Karad Marn's productive mines. Whether the thegn will hold to his deals once the war is won is another matter entirely.

WAYLAND'S SMITHY

Legends tell that Wayland was a dwarf artificer of great skill. Such was his skill that some skalds claim he could forge relics. Eventually tiring of being pestered, he disappeared into the bowels of the earth, leaving behind his anvil and hammer so that visitors might help themselves. Though most dismiss these stories as nonsense, there is no doubt his anvil and hammer, which remain his long abandoned workshop, are imbued with great spiritual power.

The sacred site known as Wayland's Smithy is known in songs and poems as far south as Sutmark, for many of the great heroes of old, or so it is said, came here seeking aid. The Smithy is not a building—it is a cave. Unlike the heroes of yore, reaching the Smithy is no easy task in the modern era, for it lies in the western foothills of the northern Jotunvalk Mountains. No trail leads to its entrance, for few know its exact location.

Inside the cave are two objects—an iron anvil inscribed with dwarven runes of crafting, hardening, and sharpening, and a smith's hammer inscribed with the dwarven rune of destruction.

Spirit Name: Wayland the Smith (no one is entirely sure the resident spirit is actually that of Wayland, but it has always been referred to as such).

Ambience: Despite being no warmer than the outside air, and there being no forge, the cave feels hot and stuffy, like the inside of a conventional smithy.

Deity: Ertha.

Senses: Notice d4.

Communication: Wayland converses only to explain how the smithy works. He speaks in a gruff, deep voice, and then only in an ancient variant of Dwarven. Understanding him requires both knowledge of the language and Smarts d8+.

Sacrifice: Wayland requires a sacrifice of precious stones with a value of at least 500 gs. These must be placed on the anvil and smashed to dust with the hammer. Once this is done, the runes on both objects glow brightly. Offering an additional 1500 gs worth of gems allows for an improved reward. An individual can make only one sacrifice in any one 13-month period.

Powers: Once the sacrifice is made, the supplicant must place a single metal weapon (or one with a metal head, such as a spear) on the anvil and strike it thrice with the hammer while calling out the name of Ertha. This done, the weapon is imbued with *smite* (cast with a success) for the next three months, but only functions for the person who made the sacrifice and wielded the hammer. No roll is required—the enchantment is always active. If additional gems were sacrificed, the power works as if cast with a raise. The power can be *dispelled* or *negated*, but the weapons resists with a d12+2 arcane skill die.

WEATHERHORN HILL

Weatherhorn Hill is one of the southern foothills of the Gray Mountains. It takes its name from the enormous horn that stands on its surface. A full 30 feet long, it is carved from a single piece of weathered bone.

Two main legends exist concerning the great horn. The first originated in Aspiria. So the story goes, a fire giant crafted the horn in the earliest days of the Blizzard War. When blown, its low, deep note was heard in distant Aspiria, alerting the citizens to the coming storm and giving their armies time to prepare.

Finnar skalds tell a different tale. They claim the horn was gifted to the first kalevanpojat (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*) by Kaleva. If the giants are satisfied the Finnar have not trespassed in their hunting grounds over the last year, they blow the horn in the spring. This brings an early and warm (by High Winterlands' standards) summer and a short winter. Warmer temperatures melt more snow, allowing reindeer to reach the moss and lichen they need to fatten up for winter. Should the Finnar have angered the giants, though, the horn's note causes the reverse effect. Southerners may mock the veracity of this tale, but those who have walked the wastes swear that on one day each year they have heard a single deep, low note rumbling across the High Winterlands.

It is possible for a hero to blow the horn, though it requires immense effort. A successful Vigor roll at –6 produces a single, short note than can be heard 1d10 miles away. The exertion leaves the blower Fatigued. A raise extends the distance to 1d10 x 10 miles and may, at the GM's discretion, alter the weather within that distance. Since no non-kalevanpojat knows the correct note, the effect is as likely to be destructive as it is benign. Failure causes the blower to become Exhausted for 24 hours. No matter who blows it, the horn can be used just once per year. Should the kalevanpojat find that outsiders have tampered with the horn, their ire is likely to be raised.

THE WHITE MARKET

As winter tightens its grip on the land, temperatures begin to plummet, and the snow begins to deepen, so the trade routes in the Low Winterlands see less traffic. The major routes are rarely completely deserted, but the flow of caravans to and from the Trade Mission (see p. xxx) all but ceases. While the land routes become impassable due to accumulated snow, the annual freezing over of White Lake opens a new temporary trade route that is quickly exploited.

In early winter, as soon as the shore ice is thick enough to support heavily laden sledges, merchants from the Palisade, western Seithrby, and western Heligioland gather at the White Market, a makeshift camp in the middle of White Lake. The market, also known as the Winter Fair and Last Gathering, exists for only two weeks a year—it is the last chance to buy goods before hunkering down for the long winter ahead. It begins on the second Marketdaeg and ends on the fourth Marketdaeg of Fogmonan.

Home to around 100 hardy souls living in tents, the White Market sells mainly essentials—luxuries can wait until summer. The most common wares sold here are arrows, candles, furs, food, oil, and salt, though most any Village item can be found. When available (GMs discretion), Town items cost twice as much as normal and City items five times as much.

Never one to miss a trick, Profiteer Joie from the Trade Mission has actively supported the trading venture, seeing it not as competition but a chance to make money during what is traditionally a lax time of year. In return for a cut of the profits, the Mission provides a makeshift shrine to Var. It also supplies a Profiteer to help negotiate deals, and a Thieftaker and five mercenaries to protect the merchants and their wares. Most merchants bring a handful of warriors from their local community, so the White Market is amply protected.

WINTER FERN HILLS

Finnar mythology claims that certain ferns growing on Winter Fern Hill produce seeds (normal ferns reproduce by means of spores). Eating the seed is said to grant one the ability to detect *aarnivalkea* (Finnari for "hidden fey hoard"), spots where the fey have buried treasure. These caches are supposedly marked by a flame invisible to mortal eyes.

The story is mostly false—fey have little interest in treasure as mortals understand it, and leaving a flaming marker other fey can easily discern hardly makes for a secure hiding place. That said, there are unique ferns in the hills, and the seeds do contain a very unusual property. Properly prepared, they make a thick paste that, when daubed on the eyelids, grants the benefits of *detect arcana* for one hour. As with all herbal remedies, a prepared batch lasts for just one week (8 days). Even the Finnar who harvest the hardy ferns for use in bedding have difficulty locating the seed-producing strain, for they are extremely rare (–4 rarity modifier with no bonus in the preparation stage).

WOLFHEIM

The safest route between Rimeholm and Lakeland or the Drachenlands is a stretch of snow-covered open plain that skirts the northern foothills of the Sigil Peaks, winds around the southern tip of the Great Forest, and passes dangerously close to Iron Troll Wood. However, safe is a subjective term, for orcs watch over the gap from their mountain lairs, and hungry trolls regularly hunt here. While cutting through the southern arm of the Great Forest is quicker, it is considered a more dangerous route.

The Finnar tribes call the entire part of the Great Forest east of Shadowvale and south of the Gray Mountains Wolfheim. A land of ice and trees, much of the region is claimed (though not controlled) by frost wolf clans. Each clan is led by a frost wolf lord, and bulked out with dire wolves and winter hounds. Finnar skalds claim the clans are loosely united under a great king, a hulking frost wolf lord who rules from a palace constructed from the bone and skins of the frost wolves' countless victims.

Despite the nomads' fears, the frost wolves do not entirely dominate the forest. Orcs and ice goblins hold the northern reaches, and there are isolated taiga elf communities and ancestral Finnar summer camps along the eastern flank. Although wolves are a constant danger, those who move cautiously can pass through the forest without rousing the natives' attention. Whether or not a king rules here has yet to be verified, but if he does his grip is weak—the clans spend much of their time competing with each other for food and territory.

Located somewhere beneath the canopy is a temple honoring an aspect of Thrym known only as the White Wolf. A ravenous deity, it is believed to be a gigantic dire wolf suckled on Thrym's icy blood and weaned on the flesh of godlings loyal to Kenaz and Sigel. The actual temple, a forest of standing stones covering ten acres, predates the arrival of the frost wolves by many centuries. Who erected it and what deity it once served is now forgotten. The centerpiece of the temple is a monstrous wolf skull. The temple is neutral ground to the rival clans, a place where they gather in harmony to worship and settle disputes without bloodshed.

PERSONS OF NOTE

KREIVI VILHO PAATALO

Current chieftain of a large tribe, Kreivi Vilho has aspirations of founding a new Finnar homeland. Each year the weather worsens and food becomes harder to find in the Unclaimed Lands. He hears stories of more suitable lands to the south, lands where summer is warmer, where grass grows for some months of the year, and where there is plentiful game and wild food.

But he knows if he migrates there, the local nobles will try to impose their laws on him and his people, and that the Finnar will not tolerate. To that end, he is trying to rally his people to invade Lakeland and the Borderlands to ensure their survival.

The Finnar have never invaded anyone before, for they have always dwelt where others care not to, and the thought of waging war is alien to them. But Vilho is a charismatic speaker, and the thought of better living conditions is an appealing one.

Vilho isn't stupid. He knows that if he marches an army south, Aspiria and Chalcis will rally troops to protect their borders, and maybe even aid their northern neighbors. To that end, he plans to offer Aspiria and Chalcis a portion of the lands he eventually conquers to keep their armies in their barracks.

With almost half the population trained as hunters, Vilho could perhaps must a total army of 8-10,000 men, assuming he can get the entire Finnar nation behind him. Right now that looks difficult, but the tide is slowly beginning to turn in his favor. Five years, maybe ten, and war could wrack the eastern Winterlands.

LANCE KNIGHT ALAIS THRYM-CURSED

Lance Knight Alais ap-Picolet was always something of an oddity. A frostborn of Anari stock, she blatantly refuses to take or accept a nickname over her birth name. While others of her kin are drawn toward Thrym, Alais chose to worship Kenaz. That she then decided to become a Hearth Knight only added to her rejection of her icy blood.

Although largely mistrusted by her peers, Alais proved an indomitable warrior, aggressively waging war against all Hellfrost beasts and their equally fell servants. Promotion to Sword Knight soon followed, and within five years she had achieved the pinnacle of knighthood, being accepted into the ranks of the Lance Knights.

While in the Hellfrost, Alais encountered a colossal frost giant priest of Thrym. As the fiend lay dying, its icy blood hardening the snow around it, it spoke its last words—Thrym commands you to remember your true heritage. Alais thought nothing of the words, for no magic was wrought upon her, and she felt no different in body or spirit. The meaning was to become apparent months later, when, on returning to Hellfrost Keep, she got into a heated argument with a Sword Knight.

Whenever Alais is angered, an aura of burning coldfire crackles into life around her. Her hair becomes dancing blue-white flame, her fingernails turn glacier-blue, and her eyes shine like sunlight reflecting off virgin snow. Treat this as the *aura* spell with a coldfire trapping. Any Shaken result from a physical attack, Test of Will, or Trick angers her. Removing the aura requires her to make a Spirit roll as her only action for the round (except free ones, such as movement).

Shunned more than ever, yet remaining fanatically loyal to her calling, Alais now spends much of her time in the Unclaimed Lands and the Hellfrost.

UTGAR

In a previous life Utgar was known as Lance Knight Utgar Henriksunu, nicknamed "Hammer of the Giants" by his peers. Utgar almost died in the Hellfrost. During a terrible blizzard he had the misfortune to encounter a pair of frost giants. Unable to see clearly through the whirling snow, he failed to parry a blow and was sent sprawling to the ground, his right leg shattered. His last vision before consciousness fled was of a colossal, white mammoth trampling the frost giants to a bloody pulp.

As Utgar lay unconscious he dreamed of a beautiful young maiden, who called herself Skaði. She told him he had been saved by one of her children. In return for his life, she requested Utgar repay her by watching over her children until the end of his days. All the raw materials he would need to build a temple in her honor would be found when he awoke.

When he regained consciousness he found himself within a graveyard. Scattered around him for miles were the bones of long-dead mammoths. Utgar lashed together a crude sledge, loaded it high with bones, and had his pygmy mammoth, Sigelluðr ("Sigel's Trumpet"), which had somehow survived the encounter with the giants without a scratch, haul it a thousand miles south.

Once in the Low Winterlands, he began constructing the Mammoth Hall. He did not toil alone, for a host of mammoths emerged from the wilderness unbidden to help lift the heavy bones. Once the hall was finished, Utgar resigned his Hearth Knight status on the grounds of his injury and devoted his life to watching over the local mammoth herds.

Utgar stands close to seven feet in his socks (though with a noticeable lean to the right), is muscular, and has fiery red hair and a bushy, equally red beard. His face is weathered and browned from exposure to the biting wind and sunlight reflecting off the ice and snow. Utgar is a man of few words. He greets guests with his name, asks their business, and then leaves them to their own devices. Asked about the Hall, Utgar merely replies, "This is Mammoth Hall, a temple to Skaði, the Great Herd Mother."

WHY COME HERE?

The Unclaimed Lands measure a staggering 1,600 miles by 800 miles at its extremes and covers about three-quarters of a million square miles. The air temperature struggles to rise above freezing even in high summer, the population density is less than one person per six square miles, and there is precious little to eat unless one knows the wilderness, although plenty of creatures want to eat explorers. So what can drag a hero from the relative safety and warmth of the Hearthlands into the wintry reaches of this forbidding landscape?

* Orders. At some point in their life, clerics of Kenaz, and to a lesser extent clerics of Sigel and Hearth Knights, will be ordered into the Unclaimed Lands. For Hearth Knights looking to advance to higher status such a trip is compulsory. For the clerics, the venture is likely to be to fight the minions of Thrym and search for clues as to the missing deities. Frost dwarves or taiga elves beholden to a noble have plenty of reason to be dispatched here, for there are many small communities scattered through the icy wastes, and *voice on the wind* has limitations.

No hero with the Orders Hindrance is immune to being sent here, though—clerics of Eira or Sisters of Mercy may have to help cure a plague or locate a rare herb, Iron Guild soldiers might escort a trade caravan to some distant community, Lorekeepers and Reliquary search the ruins for hidden knowledge, and even the Convocation sends members here to learn more about the Hellfrost and its denizens.

* Opportunity. Countless ruins lie half-buried in the snow, yet scant legends recall the names of the cultures who raised them or what they might contain. Heroes seeking treasure, lost wisdom, or just the chance to be the first person to explore a ruin will find ample opportunity here.

* Glory. While Hellfrost dragons, frost giants, trolls, and orcs can be found far and wide, the Unclaimed Lands are their playground. Virtually any beast at home in ice and snow can be found here if one looks hard enough. A character looking to immortalize his name through glorious deeds can find plenty of foes waiting for him.

* Passing Through. No one passes through the Unclaimed Lands by accident. It is the sole route to the Hellfrost, Rimeholm, and Karad Marn, and moving between the eastern and western Winterlands, Low or High, yet these routes are traveled only by a handful of civilized beings.

VALE, THE

A land of green hills and gentle valleys, of small settlements and cheery inhabitants, the Vale is widely regarded as an idyllic land. Yet all is not well in this paradise. Refugees from Vestmark cross the border in growing numbers, bringing with them disease and banditry, and within the peaceful valleys lie many dark secrets.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Vale.

* **No Nobles:** Except among engros, whose titles center on the heads of families and clans, the Vale has no nobility. As such, native non-engro characters may only take the Noble Edge to represent another form of important person, such as rich merchants or senior clergy.

Should a character ever be elected as a burgomaster, he receives +2 Charisma while in office, but no other benefits typically associated with nobility.

* **Pipeleaf:** Costs 10 gs per pouch in the Vale. Bulk orders may receive a discount.

WHO ARE THE ENGROS?

The origins of the engro race are something of a mystery. That they originated much further north, in lands now beyond the Icewall, is common knowledge. While many sages and engros claim they migrated south ahead of the advancing Hellfrost armies, few ever bother to ask how the engro, whose caravans move at a languid pace, managed to escape flights of dragons and columns of tireless orcs.

Although largely nomadic now, engros were not always travelers. In days past they lived in villages and towns, much like the Anari and Saxa. They traded with the Heligi and Selari, whose lands bordered their southern domains, as well as with cultures now lost to history under a blanket of perpetual ice and snow. Those who escaped the wrath of Thrym were the lucky ones, the handful of survivors who had the foresight to flee before the main disaster struck. Much like the taiga elves, their nomadic existence appears to be a direct result of the Blizzard War, a modern desire not to be caught out by future disasters.

They are widely regarded as thieves. In days past, engros were law-abiding citizens who valued personal possessions much like the other races. After the exodus, known among engros as the Great Flight, the survivors happily shared what they had with each other. The old social order had dissolved and keeping their race alive meant more than bothering about who owned the cooking pot. Among their own people the idea of personal possessions is still something of an oddity, though times are changing slowly. In order to survive during the War and its terrible, lengthy aftermath, engros simply did what was necessary to survive—they took what they needed. That mentality is still ingrained in their race.

Despite having lost their homeland forever and being widely distrusted, engros are a cheery bunch. They have weathered a terrible storm and, while greatly reduced in number, have survived. They look to the future, where things are always bright, not the distant past full of misery and suffering.

Unlike many races, who accept their fate as preordained by the gods, engros, who favor the Unknowable One above all others, are creatures who believe fortune favors the bold, and nothing is written in stone. It is a common saying among their people that mortals make their own luck, and those with closed minds will miss god-given opportunities.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

While citizens of the Vale may hold noble titles, and receive respect out of courtesy, outside the engro communities noble titles do not grant authority over others. The Vale's society is divided based on social standing, occupation, and wealth.

At the top are the burgomasters, the elected officials who govern the settlements. The mayor of Weem is the highest-ranking official in the land, though his powers are largely confined to the capital. Any citizen born in the Vale may stand for office. Voting is open to every adult (14 years and above), regardless of sex, gender, race, or religion. The burgomasters meet every two months in Weem to discuss common policies.

The following positions on the social ladder are guidelines rather than absolutes—individual circumstances affect one's social status. For instance, a wealthy landowner in a small village may well be in the local upper class, but he may only rank as middle class in Weem, being too poor for the rich and powerful of the capital to associate with. Similarly, a farmer may own many fields, but if his income is low, he won't count as highly as his tracts of land might at first indicate.

Typically, the top rung below the burgomasters is filled by the gentry, a social position reserved for high priests (the head of any temple, even if he has a superior at another temple) and rich landowners. Possession of land and wealth are required for a position in the gentry.

The upper class comprises mainly rich merchants. Possessors of noble titles above hauld are usually accepted as being upper class, regardless of their income. Of course, the nobleman must be able to prove his lineage and legal right to hold the title.

Beneath them are the middle classes—master craftsmen, important clerics and mages, skilled herbalists, well-to-do landowners and merchants, nobles with titles below hauld, and the like. Generally, occupation rather than wealth is the most important factor, though as can be seen, this is not a strict requirement.

The lower class comprises laborers, craftsmen, small holder farmers, fishermen, store owners, apprentices, junior clerics and wizards, entertainers, and the like.

Finally there are the lowly wood and dung collectors, thieves, vagrants, and other ne'er-do-wells. Even in a realm the size of the Vale, there are poor.

While engros live and abide by the above social strata, they retain their own social system as well. Most other races base the engro nobility on where they fit in the greater scheme. If there is any doubt, they default to human equivalents of the noble titles.

JUSTICE

Technically the burgomaster of each settlement is responsible for justice in his territory. In small communities this is often the case, but in larger ones, and at Easton where the role of burgomaster is more ceremonial, the burgomaster appoints a judge skilled in the law and customs of the land. Many judges are clerics of Hothar, though this is not a requirement. The burgomaster can overrule the judge's decision, but since he appointed the official it looks bad if he makes a habit of it.

Although the Vale is not as organized as the Crystalflow Confederacy, every settlement has signed an accord permitting a criminal wanted in one settlement to be extradited to another for trial.

Aside from when swearing oaths or making agreements, court cases are the only time Hothar's name is invoked and prayers are offered.

the vale



Population: 32,347 (65% Anari, 20% Saxa, 15% engro)
Ruler: Mayor Pepin ap-Peredur
Religion: Eostre, Ertha, Kenaz
Imports: Jewelry, mead, wine
Exports: Ale, rain, pipeleaf, vegetables

Caldstanar
Marsh
The Arkhw Towe
Purple Hills
Tullveig's Meadow
Bradwold
Ridderhil
Scathmoor
The Moor Up and Come Inn
Goldsheaf
The Black Keep
Tiw's Ridge
Shade Marsh
Tomb of Inescapable Death
Frogton
Rushton
Illiligby
Weston
Castle Hrafn
The Vale
Vale of Smoke
Barge Court
Temple of the Secret Wind
Weem
Six Stone Hill
Catnip Vale
Valegaet
Hill Giants Stead
Kyrton
Easton
Fey lake
Drakeport
Drakeport Delta
Forge
Elverun
The Ribbon
Crystal Sound
Nard
Field of Screams
Moon Fog Vale
Kingswood
Dorvik
The Handle
Watchers Island
Drakeport/Alth
Yetand
Kingswood Elven Realm
Ost bay
River Ost
Ostersund
Ost Port
The black bog
R. Icespike
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EDUCATION

While the Vale lacks any formal educational establishments, such as academies or schools of magic, its citizens are well educated, at least in certain aspects. All children receive a grounding in the Vale's customs, laws, geography, and politics, as well receiving a firm grounding in Eostre's teachings (regardless of their parents' occupation). In most settlements the elderly are put to good use passing on their accumulated wisdom. Clerics, when available, add their knowledge to the mix. Merchants and travelers bring stories of their homelands to the small communities. Veermark and the Confederacy are especially well represented.

On reaching the age of ten, education slows and the child is put to work learning the skills he will need to survive. Unless a child can be apprenticed or accepted into a temple, he is destined to follow in the footsteps of one of his parents.

Citizens wishing to learn more advanced topics or gain a greater understanding of the world must travel further afield for schooling. Many head to Drakeport, the largest city on the continent.

All children learn the language of their parents first, and then Trader as a matter of course. Most know one of the other major languages of the realm as a third tongue, though few are fluent.

RELIGION

While the inhabitants of the Vale hold three gods above all others, most of the other good gods receive some form of worship, if only in a handful of communities or at set times of the year. It is widely held that the citizens become devout followers of any major god when a major festival is due, but only because they love socializing. In many instances these claims are true.

Agriculture and livestock rearing forms the backbone of the Vale's trade. As such, Eostre is the most popular deity. Her Plant-mother aspect has the greater number of worshippers, though the distinction between the two cults is often blurred in the Vale. Every settlement boasts a shrine to one aspect of the goddess or has a dual-aspect shrine. Most settlements over 500 souls have a temple.

While it would be unfair to call the citizens fanatical, they are extremely devout. The majority of the population honors all Eostre's major ceremonies, both because they believe in the power of the deity and because it is an excuse for a feast. Images representing Eostre appears on many buildings and in much local artwork. Often the goddess is not shown in person. Rather, plants and animals represent her.

The Vale has no precious metals and metalworking is a minor trade, but Ertha is a popular deity. In the Vale, she is worshipped as the god of soil, and is thus an important part of agricultural life. Denizens of the Vale hold that Ertha is Eostre's daughter. Traditionalist followers of Ertha find this offensive to varying degrees, but Ertha has yet to show her displeasure.

The last of the gods receiving widespread popular support is Kenaz. He is honored primarily as the god of hearths and home comforts, and if there is one thing the inhabitants of the rural communities enjoy it is their home comforts.

The soil and climate of the Vale are excellent for medicinal herbs. While the cult of Eira has few temples, she receives much support from the herbalists who dwell here. Most settlements boast at least one herbalists, who is often the local midwife and healer as well.

Neorthe is worshipped in the few communities living on the tiny stretch of coast. He is viewed as Eostre's son. Ullr, Eostre's other son, is patron of hunting and fishing. Most of his worshippers live along the banks of the River Ivens, where fishing is popular both as a hobby and a means of feeding the family.

Large settlements (500+ souls) usually have a shrine to Rigr, if only because local belief has it it's better to see danger coming and then react than waste money and time constantly prepared for war. Kenaz, not Tiw, is the dominant god of war, though Tiw has a few followers among the Saxa population.

Sigel and Thrym are worshipped seasonally as Eostre's helpers. During spring and harvest the pair receive many prayers. In summer worship is sporadic, while in winter it is virtually unheard of. Scaetha, goddess of death, is honored only on First Death Day and at funerals, for undead are unheard of in the tranquil valleys.

Both Nauthiz and the Unknowable One have sizeable numbers of worshipers among the engro. Despite their reputation, the engro are rarely troublemakers or out and out thieves, though it is fair to say they are mischievous and light-fingered at times. Nauthiz is most commonly worshipped as the god of chance, while the Unknowable One serves as patron to storytellers and entertainers, as well as many elders. Freo is worshipped even by the settled engro, for they have not forgotten their roots.

Vali receives a lot of attention on certain holy days, but only to keep him from troubling the Vale. The other evil gods have a handful of worshippers, but not enough to cause any serious problems.

BURIALS AND CREMATIONS

The Liche-Priest and horrific undead are stories to frighten children, for neither has troubled the Vale. As a result, the deceased are commonly buried in the soil along with grave goods and seeds (a present for Eostre). The poor are buried in simple graves, while those with wealth erect barrows to honor their dead.

As nomads, engros disliked burying their dead, for it meant leaving them behind when they next broke camp. Even today, with many engro settled into permanent homes, the practice of cremation remains popular. The ashes are kept in the family home, where the dead can be suitably honored and called upon for assistance.

MILITARY

The Vale is a land of independent communities, much like the Crystalflow Confederacy. However, unlike their eastern neighbors, the settlements of the Vale have no policy of centralized military force. Each community looks after its own defenses, though it might come to its neighbors' aid if asked. Were the Vale ever to be attacked in force, it is likely each settlement would look to its own defenses rather than the realm presenting a unified front.

A permanent militia and the fyrd protect a typical settlement. The size of the permanent garrison is around 1% of the population, with the fyrd ranging from 5% to 20%, depending on the season and the nature of the aggressor. The armies of the three main towns are detailed below.

Easton: Three extended Saxa families are paid a stipend to protect Easton from bandits. Comprising 30 men and women, they are well-trained and well-equipped, but are rarely on active duty. Treat them as typical huscarls. Their leader is a Wild Card veteran huscarl. While they train regularly, they are called to arms only in emergencies. Much of their time is spent as farmers and herders.

Policing is handled by a force of 30 militia led by the Constable of Easton, an elected position. The militia (treat as typical watch) is divided into a day shift of 10 members and a night shift of 20 members. Both watches are commanded by a sergeant.

Weem: The capital of the Vale is guarded by 60 typical militia known as the Stickers because they carry clubs except in times of war, an event unknown in living memory. Half of them are stationed at the tollhouse, and the other half in the town proper. Every tenth Sticker is a sergeant. Keeping the peace is a force of 20 Bludgeoners. They are led by an experienced bludgeoner who carries the title Master Slinger.

Both factions are answerable to the Constable of the Vale, technically the Vale's supreme military commander. He is an elected official. Despite there never having been much need, by tradition he must be of proven military prowess and possess military leadership skills and tactical knowledge. Treat him as a watch captain.

Weston: One of the larger isolated communities, Weston is guarded and policed by just 15 militia (typical watch) and ten Bludgeoners. Each force is commanded by a sergeant. Traditionally, the Constable, again an elected post, is always an engro. Treat him or her as a Wild Card experienced bludgeoner.

As a rough rule of thumb, any settlement with 1,000 or more inhabitants has typical watchmen protecting it, while smaller ones

have village militia. Generally the engro provide a small force of bludgeoners. For every 20 militia, or part thereof, there is one sergeant. Every settlement, no matter how small, has an official designated as constable. Normally his role is part-time.

The burgomasters are, amongst other problems, debating the "Vestmark issue." The beleaguered nation has often asked for troops, but the Vale has so far refused, claiming that it lacks a professional army of any worth and that its farmers are needed in the fields to help keep Vestmark's forces fed.

The big dilemma is whether or not to raise a standing army. Should Vestmark fall to the orcs, and no one is betting against that ever happening, the advancing horde will find the Vale easy pickings. Royalmark and the Confederacy might help them, but it is more likely they will do so at a heavy price—if not hard coin, then a demand for land. But if an army is raised, the current excuses about helping Vestmark become void.

Some argue that not supplying troops might cause Vestmark to seek revenge once the country is back on its feet. Critics argue that will take so long the Vale's inaction will be long forgotten. Others use scare tactics to avoid forming an army, saying that victorious orcs are far more likely to attack the Vale if there is an army on their eastern flank.

The growing number of refugees from Vestmark is also an issue that has yet to be resolved. To send them back is likely to impose a death sentence, but they are rapidly becoming a nuisance. Sealing the border with Vestmark has been discussed, but that would require an army to be positioned along the entire border, an impossible expense for any community.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Vale lies along one of the major trade roads. To the west, it runs through troubled Vestmark to join with the western north-south road that links the Magocracy to the Winterlands. To the east, it ends at Drakeport, the start of the mighty Crystalflow Confederacy and its trade network. Located almost centrally on the southern link, the Vale is ideally placed to trade across southern Rassilon.

With so many religious festivals being honored, the inhabitants of the Vale consume a lot of alcohol. While the Vale brews a variety of good ales, it imports mead from Midmark (against whom it competes for ale revenue) and wine from Nordmark. Both are shipped via the Crystalflow Confederacy.

Jewelry is popular among all the social classes, for wealth is best displayed openly, if only to attract looks of admiration from peers. Engros are especially fond of displaying their wealth. Because the Saxa are the majority, much of the imports come from Royalmark. Those with more diverse tastes find the workmanship of Coglelund's jewelers and gold and silversmiths irresistible. For those with money to spare, goods from Angarion and Chalcis can be purchased via Coglelund.

The Vale's most profitable export is pipeleaf. Until recently it dominated the trade the length and breadth of the continent. Unfortunately, Ostmark's foray into growing the valuable crop has severely damaged trade with the eastern nations. As a result, most of the Vale's produce now goes only to the Magocracy. Competition with Ostmark over the Royalmark market is intensifying.

Ale exports tend to vanish into the trading network of the Crystalflow Confederacy. Common ales do not travel far, but the specialty brews reach as far as the Low Winterlands thanks to the brewer's skill at producing recipes that travel well.

For the best part of two decades much of the vegetable export, and it produces a sizeable quantity, has gone to feed the troops in Vestmark. Sadly, the supply of coin meant to flow the other way has all but dried up. The burgomasters have debated the outstanding debts year after year, but have yet to reach a consensus.

If they stop supplying vegetables, as has been proposed more than once, then Vestmark's hungry troops may not be able to resist an orc offensive. Since the two nations share a long border, the Vale will likely be attacked if Vestmark falls. However, continuing to honor their part of the bargain means the farmers are growing poorer and poorer. Many farms have already gone fallow as the owners move out to look for other work.

With Aslov and the Blackstone Barony offering hard coin in return for vegetables, many farmers are urging the burgomasters to shift the emphasis on trade to the north and east. It means competition with other nations, but even reduced profits are better than no profits.

Despite its roaring trade, the Vale has proven awkward for the clerics of Var. Every settlement has its own trade regulations and quotas, not to mention its own market. Without a centralized trading system, the clergy are forced to either limit their activities or try to set up a nationwide trading network. Few have the resources for the latter. The large engro population also means hiring more Thieftakers than would normally be required.

In terms of taxes, the citizens of the Vale pay only local taxes. With no nobility to support and the burgomasters elected officials who receive a set wage, the money goes into a community fund. Mainly it pays for the small number of soldiers, maintenance of any fortifications (which most settlements lack), the burgomaster's salary, and so on. Most of the taxes is set aside for hard times or invested into community projects, such as a new temple or shrine.

There are many different types of local tax, and not all are found in every settlement, In general, though, a citizen can expect to lose 30% of his earnings to taxes.

ARCHITECTURE

The communities of the Vale are an eclectic collection of longhouses, Anari cottages, static engro caravans, small hovels, and the occasional engro house tunneled into a hill. Despite the mish-mash of cultural styles, they blend together seamlessly. A few settlements are nestled behind ditches and palisades, but they are the minority. In many cases, villages stretch along the valleys, with houses dotted in small clusters or standing alone. Every settlement exudes a rustic charm not found in other parts of Rassilon.

Even in the more densely settled areas, every home has a small vegetable plot reserved for the family's personal use. Excess produce is usually sold at the local market rather than grouped in with the farmers' yields for export.

MAJOR LOCALES

The Vale is a small realm with many scattered settlements. But despite this there are still wild places few care to walk without armed escort.

CATNIP VALE

Nestled amid the rolling hills that make up the Vale is Catnip Vale. It is named for the abundance of catnip, a member of the mint family, that grows here. The cult of Veth, minor goddess of vermin hunting, has a permanently manned shrine here. Access to the plants is restricted to clerics of druids, Eostre, and herbalists known to the cult, for Haratt the Rat King's earthly agents prize it as a means of subduing their hated foes.

One myth relates how Veth went in search of Haratt the Rat King, who was hiding from her on the mortal world. In order to protect his ally, Vali, acting in disguise, pointed Veth in the direction of this valley. Here he knew there grew an abundance of catnip, for he stolen the seeds from Eostre and planted them himself. Overcome by the narcotic effect of catnip, Veth almost forgot her quest. Fortunately, Freo was passing by on one of his many wanderings and pulled the young goddess out of the fragrant plants. Another story says that Eostre Plantmother created catnip as a reward for her daughter's hard work. Which version a cultist espouses tells more about her views on drugs than her faith. Many hunting cat owners use it to reward their cats.

Followers of Veth bruise raw leaves and then chew them as a recreational drug (treat as a stimulant II herbal brew). Too much, though, can generate aggressive behavior (as per the berserk herbal remedy). Strangely, the plant produces absolutely no effects in other creatures except cats. Catnip's only commercial value is as an ingredient for insect repellent herbal remedies.

FEY LAKE

More a large pond than a true lake, the clear water is home to Lorelle, a nykr. No ordinary fey, Lorelle is actually a lesser noble, possessed of many powers her common sisters lack. Except on one specific day each year, Lorelle prohibits all fishing in her home. Offenders find their lines snap or nets tear. Persistent offenders may be pulled into the pool and drowned—Lorelle may be Seelie, but that does not mean she is a pacifist or prepared to look the other way when her rules are broken.

On Rod and Line Day (see *Matters of Faith*), fishermen from across the Vale and neighboring Vestmark descend on the lake in droves, for Lorelle blesses the waters so they teem with fish. So great are their numbers that the water appears to be boiling as the heaving multitude breaks the surface.

Although fishing is restricted to just one day, no one ever goes home empty-handed. Every line snares a fish, every net brings in scores of succulent fish. Indeed, so high are their numbers that some folk wade in and catch them with their bare hands. Some folk have been standing idly by the edge, usually smoking a pipe or talking with friends, only to find a fish leap straight into their hands.

The largest fish are taken home and eaten at a celebratory feast to honor Ullr, god of freshwater fishermen (anglers are seen as being little different to other hunters). The rest are smoked, dried, salted, or pickled for later in the year. Valelanders consider it bad taste to make a profit by selling the fish, though they think nothing of giving them as gifts to friends.

The growing numbers of Vestmarkers drawn here in the hope of securing many meals worth of fish has led to growing tension. Lorelle welcomes all equally, but the Valelanders see the lake as rightfully theirs—having throngs of starving foreigners descend on the lake means fewer fish for locals. Most Vestmarkers are simply looking to feed their family, but rumors have spread that some are growing wealthy selling their catch to less fortunate kinsmen back home.

FROGTON

Population: 136
Ruler: Burgomaster Perith ap-Gurn

Frogton ("the frog enclosure") sits a few miles from the Frog River, a tributary of the River Ivens that flows out of Shade Marsh. The Frog River is good fishing water once one clears the bog surrounding its upper reaches. It takes its name from the abundance of frog which live in and around the river, a popular local delicacy.

The boggy soil prevents the citizens from growing an abundance of crops, and fishing and frog catching are major industries. Recently, though, several fishermen have gone missing. The locals know a tribe of bufomi live in the swampy parts on the far bank, but they have never had any trouble with them before. Unfortunately, the local militia is tiny (just six members), enough to uphold the peace but not enough to venture into the marsh looking for trouble. The burgomaster is considering using communal funds to pay for mercenaries.

KYRTON

Population: 280
Ruler: Burgomaster Salaberge ap-Cadmar

With much of the central Vale being devoted to agriculture, livestock rearing has been pushed to the edges. Kyrton, located on the very southwestern extreme, specializes in rearing herds of cattle. The hairy, temperamental beasts used to roam across the hills, feasting on the lush grass and heather, but times have changed, and not for the better.

Cattle theft has risen sharply, though, forcing the herders to keep the cattle nearer to their farms and taxing the resources of the militia. The perpetrators are not giants and orcs, but starving citizens and warriors from Vestmark. The burgomaster has offered to sell them cattle, but the desperate souls have nothing with which to buy or barter.

Burgomaster Salaberge is a tiny woman, barely taller than the engro who lives in the village. She jokes there is engro blood in her family, a fact she backs up with her habitual pipe smoking. She is currently hiring adventurers to help guard the cattle. Her belief is that is the raiders are soundly thrashed, they will think twice about trying to rob Kyrton of its prized assets. She has no wish to see the raiders slain.

SIX STONE HILL

On the eastern bank of the River Ivens, overlooking the watercourse from atop a high hill, are six standing stones. Their placement seems entirely random. Claims they were once part of a larger collection, the other stones having been removed at some point, are casually dismissed by the native engros.

They believe the stones are six mighty druids who swore a sacred vow to return to life to defend the land should the Vale be attacked. Quite why these druids chose such a selfless act, or felt the need to defend the Vale from invasion, is never really explained, for the Vale has seen no real violence since the Saxa rebellion and even then there was minimal bloodshed.

Regardless of the stones' origin, hundreds of engros travel to the hill each Oath Renewal Day, where they leave supplications of drink, food, and pipeleaf at the base of each stone before hosting a huge communal feast among the stones.

During the rest of the year engro druids use the site. Here they hold festivals and meetings, tend to the stones, and enjoy being outdoors while smoking a pipe or two in peace and quiet.

STEAD OF THE HILL GIANTS

When Vestmark went to war it was forced to station troops close to the Ribbon. In doing so, it drove out a number of hill giant families. Unwilling to head into orc lands, where they would be enslaved and put to work in the army, the giants managed to escape their pursuers and flee into the Vale.

For years they lived in relative peace, stealing the odd stray sheep but never causing much trouble. Now, though, the divided families have been united under a brutish chieftain. They have built a colossal stead (more resembling a small fort in its proportions and durability) into which they have recruited a small number of orcs.

With Vestmark's army occupied and the Vale lacking a true military force, the hill giants and their orc allies have began raiding with impunity. Steads and hamlets have been torched, the livestock stolen, and the inhabitants put to the sword (metaphorically speaking) or enslaved.

The problem has grown beyond the confines of the local settlements, forcing the burgomasters to act together to quell the threat. The Vale cannot afford a costly war in its territory (in terms of money or crops destroyed), but it can afford to hire a small band of hardened heroes to deal the giants a blow from which they will never recover. Even if they can't manage that, it is hoped a show of force will persuade the giants to relocate, preferably in Vestmark.

TEMPLE OF THE SECRET WIND

Traditionally, Thunor was master of the four winds (before the north wind joined Thrym's cause). But legends in the Vale have always claimed there was a secret wind, one which he dared not unleash because of its ferocity. This is known as the Secret Wind. According to local skalds, Thunor imprisoned the wind in a cave somewhere in the rolling hills of the Vale. When a storm sweeps the land and leaves behind a trail of destruction, the locals claim the Secret Wind escaped (before being rightfully imprisoned again).

Most clerics of Thunor dismiss the claims, for Thunor is against chaining anything, yet alone the winds he created. Yet there is a grain of truth in the story, for deep in the heart of the hills is a cave from which a mighty wind does on occasion howl. Locals know where the entrance lies, but they give it a wide berth—even at a distance of several miles the wind can cause damage to houses.

The "temple" is a network of tunnels and chambers, all carved by intelligent hands in some distant epoch. Sporadically, a wind does tear through the labyrinthine complex, smashing intruders into walls or sending them tumbling head over heels for dozens if not hundreds of yards. Death by bludgeoning is a very real risk, even for clerics of

Thunor, for their protective charms offer little resistance against the terrible gale. In order to be completely safe, an explorer needs both *energy immunity* (to stop physical damage from the wind stripping away flesh) and *environmental protection* (which prevents the recipient being blown over but not scoured) spells.

All manner of air elementals, including usually rare storm and thunder elementals, haunt the temple. Deep within its dark, winding depths lies the source of the wind, a powerful elemental locus of air, a tear in the fabric of reality that allows the elemental realm to occasionally spill out into the mortal realm.

THE TOMB OF INESCAPABLE DEATH

On a cliff face staring out over the haunted wastes of Shade Marsh, two identical figures clad in archaic clothes and carrying a staff flank the entrance. One hand is positioned not in warning, but in a sweeping gesture, as if inviting passersby to enter. Between them is a huge granite door warded with potent charms. The magic employed in them is long forgotten, and far too powerful to be dismissed with common *dispel* or *negate* spells.

The door opens from the outside with a casual shove, despite its weight. Ten minutes after opening, it swings shut—no force wielded by mortals can prevent this. The only way to open the door is to find four enchanted gems scattered throughout the complex and place them in indentations in the door's inner face. The gems must be placed in the right order. Failure to do so activates damaging spells.

The tomb predates the Blizzard War by centuries. The statues represent a powerful heahwisard who developed specialist knowledge of golems. He lies inside, thoroughly dead, but surrounded by his vast personal fortune (and maybe some relics). His tomb is a testament to his power, ingenuity, and his cruel nature.

Deadly traps, both magical and mundane, combined with an army of golems, some typically anthropomorphic and others disguised as portcullises that slam down whenever someone passes beneath them; bridges that form arms or buck to throw those crossing them into spiked pits; lurching, gnashing bear traps that crunch and grind flesh and bone; and accurate ballistas capable of independent movement on wheels, as well as bestial forms such as dragons and manticores, are arrayed against would be thieves.

Unsurprisingly, no one who has entered the tomb has ever returned, at least not in living memory.

THE VALE OF SMOKE

Located east of Weem and south of the trade road, the Vale of Smoke is the major pipeleaf producing area. The settlements that sit upon the hills overlooking the fertile valley are small and scattered, but quite wealthy. Although the Vale's name might appear to come from its harvest, it actually stems from the thick mists that rise up from the valley bottom on cold nights.

Over the last few months the locals have been the target for crop raiders. Frequent patrols are dispatched to protect the valuable crops, but the thieves only ever come when the mists form, limiting the patrols' effectiveness. There is much debate among the farmers and burgomasters (five small communities claim territory here) as to the nature of the thieves.

Some suspect deserters from Vestmark are to blame, while others point the finger at the growing number of refugees passing through the region. In either case, a sack load of pipeleaf is good for bartering anywhere in Rassilon. A small few blame fungals, a persistent if uncommon threat. A growing number are casting their eye further afield, questioning as to whether the pipeleaf farmers of Ostmark are up to dirty tricks in order to maximize their profits and monopolize the market.

WEEM

The Vale's capital is a lively, bustling place. No palisade or ditch marks its boundaries—the last noticeable threat to the Vale was the Saxa during their rebellion, and that was centuries ago.

Digby's Place: Digby, an Anari skald of little talent, runs a small, cozy inn. He provides the nightly entertainment, which usually comprises boring poetry of his own composition. Although a poor skald, Digby has many friends and knows much of what happens in the Vale. Getting information out of him requires listening to one of his epics, followed by heaping him with praise.

Marmaduke's Scrolls: This crowded shop on the very outskirts of town is owned and run by Marmaduke (he prefers to be called Duke). A druid by training, Duke has decided there is more money to be made in selling alchemical devices than there is in protecting the wilds. As the name of his establishment implies, he specializes in scrolls. He also sells maps, having purchased an impressive collection from a merchant in Drakeport some years ago.

Business doesn't run as smoothly as Duke would like, though. He has adopted a number of stray cats. The felines have a tendency to knock inkwells onto his works in progress, shred maps he is trying to sell, and harass customers by clawing at their legs. The five beasts are named Gambit, Imp (a kitten), Mina (Wilhelmina), Panthro, and Winnie (Winifred). His neighbors claim the felines' behavior is a sign that Duke has lost his way and should return to honoring nature.

The Misty Cave: One of Weem's better-known taverns, the Misty Cave is a low-ceilinged drinking den owned by an engro who goes by the name of Hearth. Day or night, the tavern is busy with patrons, for the fire is hot, the drinks are cheap (and rather poor quality), and the entertainment lively. On opening the door, patrons are greeted by a thick pall of acrid pipe smoke drifting out. Inside, the bar area has the appearance of being swallowed by mist, so heavily do the patrons smoke.

Hearth grows his own pipeleaf, a particularly rough smoke he calls "Old Lung Clearer." Strangers are challenged to smoke a pipe full without coughing (Vigor roll at –2). If they do, all their drinks (but not those of any traveling companions) are on the house for the rest of the night.

A former mercenary, Hearth has many contacts across Rassilon. For the right price, he can acquire armor, weapons, and troops at reasonable prices.

Petunia the Herbalist: One of the best herbalists in the Vale, Petunia appears to be a wizened old engro of less than appealing looks. Her manner is gruff, but she knows her herbs. She keeps a wide variety of dried herbs and freshly brewed herbal remedies in stock.

Petunia is not as elderly or ugly as she first appears. In fact she is quite young and attractive beneath her disguise. A former herbalist to an assassin's guild in Drakeport, she is currently on the run after "borrowing" a rather large amount of money. She hides in the Vale because of its large engro population.

Pipes and Pouches: Smoking is a common pastime in the Vale. Many engro would argue that smoking is an art form. As well as common pipes and leather pipeleaf pouches, Sam, the proprietor, produces custom pieces to customer's exact specifications. Pipe bowls that resemble faces or the heads of fantastical beasts (dragons are very popular), pipes made from unusual materials, and pouches embossed with heraldic designs or monograms—so long as the customer has the necessary gold coin, nothing is beyond the artisan's skill.

Smoking one of Sam's custom pipes when interacting peacefully with engros of any nationality grants +1 Charisma, but only if the pipe cost 50+ gold scields.

Pippy's Pets: When Pippy, a female engro apprentice druid, opened her shop everyone said she would be bankrupt in weeks. That was ten years ago. The shop sells a range of animals. War dogs, hawks, hunting cats, and carrier pigeons are her stock trade, though she also sells hedgehogs (known as "prickle pigs" locally) to gardeners looking to rid their prized plants of slugs.

Though orc pirates hamper trade, she still manages to purchase exotic birds and lizards from Al-Shirkuh every now and then from her contacts in Drakeport. These strange beasts command very high prices, but a growing number of locals are seeing them as status symbols.

Stones: While any small stone is ideal for use with a sling, specially shaped stones have better aerodynamics. Tom, a retired bludgeoner, is a master at shaping sling stones. A pouch of 10 stones costs 5 scields and extends a sling's range by 1/2/4.

VEERMARK

Hidden behind the imposing Dragonspine and Brokentail Mountains, ruled by two kings, and divided by its geography, Veermark is an unusual realm. In the west the land is settled and farmed, while the east is a wide, grassy landscape, across which the Saxa horse nomads thunder. It is a realm of biting winters, rapacious orcs, and barbaric centaurs and beastmen.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Veermark.

* **What's In A Name?:** For the purposes of this entry, Hrosmark refers solely to eastern Veermark, the land of the horse nomads. The use of Veermark refers to the entire realm.

* **Trading:** Hrosmarkers have little need for coins. Those in the north may have some Ostmark currency, but typically all trade is done in the form of barter. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in Hrosmark. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

* **The Weather:** In western Veermark the chance of precipitation is doubled in fall and halved in winter. It retains a Hearthland climate. Hrosmark, by comparison, suffers cold winters. Treat the winter temperature as the Low Winterlands.

NATIVE HROSMARKERS

Male Veermark characters born in the Grasslands must have Fighting, Riding, and Shooting at d4. Females must have Riding d4.

NPC stat blocks for native male Hrosmarkers, regardless of their profession, should be modified to include a minimum of Fighting d4, Riding d6, and Shooting d4. Females should include a minimum of Riding d6.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Western Veermark is lorded over by Cyning Oddni Sturlasunu. Oddni owns all the land, though he directly governs only a quarter. The remainder of the land is divided between five jarls, who rule in the name of the king rather than personally owning the land. Each jarl subdivides his domain to ease the administrative duties. He may appoint or absolve lesser noble titles, though doing either requires the permission of the king.

Ranking below the nobility are the priesthood and mages, followed by the huscarls, crafters, merchants, warriors, and then the general populace.

Horse-Cyning Thrand Belly-Shaker rules Hrosmark, but he does not claim ownership of the land. Rather, he has been given temporary stewardship over the land, ruling it in Freo's name. The title is not hereditary. When the king dies, the jarls elect a new king from their own number.

Swearing loyalty to the horse-king are the many clans of the Grasslands, each ruled by a jarl. Unlike elsewhere, jarls do not govern any set piece of land. Instead, they are appointed grazing land each year based on their loyalty to the crown. Other noble titles are based on the relationship to the current jarl. His closest sibling and eldest child are both entitled thegn. Second children and other brothers are haulds, and other children or siblings hold the title lendmann. The head of every family is a ridder in name, if not in power.

Traditionally the horse-cyning does not demand the nobles of his realm swear allegiance to him. However, those who are not oath bound do not receive trade bars (see page xxx), which prevents them from conducting trade with outsiders legally, cannot call upon the king to settle legal disputes, cannot instigate legal cases against or claim weregild from those sworn to the king, and may not set up camp in Veergarth over the summer. In essence, they are open to raids from their neighbors and isolated from trading.

Unlike most other realms, Hrosmark has no native merchants or crafters. Below the nobility, the social order has priests of Freo and Thunor at the top, then the heavy cavalry, medium cavalry, light cavalry, priests of other faiths and mages, and finally the masses.

EDUCATION

Far from the beaten track, traditionalist western Veermark lacks any formal schools. Private tutors instruct young nobles in all the skills they will need to rule wisely and justly. Most citizens are farmers, learning the skills they need from parents or clerics of Eostre. All parents hope their children will aspire to something better, and competition for trade apprenticeships among the lower classes can be fierce. Better still is for their child to show strong faith and join the clergy. While skalds are honored among the native Saxa and can earn the patronage of the nobility, few parents want their children to learn the other magical arts.

In Hrosmark, children are taught to ride before they can walk. Once a male child is strong enough he learns how to wield lance, sword, and bow on foot and when mounted. All children are taught the nomads' traditional songs, stories, customs, and laws, learn the holy ceremonies they will perform as adults, and instructed in the geography of their realm so they know the best grazing lands and where orcs are likely to dwell.

RELIGION

The division between western Veermark and Hrosmark extends into religious beliefs as well. Blessed with rich agricultural and grazing land, the western Saxa honor Eostre above all others, with her Plantmother aspect taking the greater share of worship. The light forest is home to plentiful game, earning Ullr a place in the inhabitant's religious devotion. Thunor is honored as both the god of freedom, for the Veermarkers have never been conquered or subdued, and for the eastern wind he blows across the land in fall. As the warm air rises up the Dragonspine it forms huge thunderstorms. Although floods are common, the winters are mild, and Thunor receives credit for this. That a few homes may be washed away is a small price to pay for escaping the ravages of Thrym.

In Hrosmark, Freo is king. His main cult and those of his aspects Atriðr, god of cavalry, and Epona, goddess of horses, are worshipped with great fervor. Despite being the goddess of animals, Eostre receives little formal worship among the nomads, for horses, in their faith, are part of Freo's aspects. Bordered by hills in the north and

Veermark



Population: 46,577 (84% Saxa, 7% hearth elves, 6% Anari, 3% engro)
Ruler: Cyning Oddni Sturlasunu (west) and Horse-Cyning Thrand Belly-Shaker (east)
Religion: Freo, Ullr, Eostre, Thunor
Imports: Furs, leathergoods
Exports: Horses, livestock

Greenwood
Teuvia
Locksburgh
Broken Fence
The Beacon
Weatherly
Chalk Door Hill
Cavern
The Workshop of Angar Kindlefire
Holm
Veerma
The White Horse
Border Mounds
Iacsen
Beranstarth
The Black Obelisk
Oakwood
Barony of Blackstone
Wild Horse Temple
Blackstone
Katar's Hold
Oratonspine Mountains
Karad Dahn
Blood Falls
Veergarth
Zigzag Pass
Moon Mountain Temple
Zigzag Fort
Marshwatch
Ruins of the Old City
Tapeby
Redstream
Igilsinn



west and mountains in the east, Hrosmark is an open expanse of short grass and rolling hills, totally exposed to the sky. Thunor is greatly honored, both for the southern wind, which provides some respite from bone-freezing temperatures, and because he allows the nomads to wander freely.

Burial Customs

Little troubled by undead, western Veermarkers inter their dead in shallow graves or burial mounds in the style of their ancestors. Grave goods are placed with the corpse, for the soul will need these in the Afterlife.

In Hrosmark a very different practice has evolved. It is believed the soul remains on Rassilon for a year and a day after death. During this time it continues to travel with the clan, watching over and guiding the living.

When a nomad dies, his favorite horse is ritually slain. A simple wooden frame is erected in the Grasslands. Mounted on his horse, the nomad and mount are tethered to the frame with ropes and sticks and left to rot naturally, a practice similar to the sky burials practiced by worshippers of Thunor. Nobles are adorned in their finest armor and weapons, which rusts away over time.

Only criminals are buried in the earth, for this not only prevents their souls from traveling the Grasslands, but also makes it much harder for Freo's heralds (a local difference from the more widespread belief that Scaetha's heralds accompany the dead) from finding the soul and taking it to the Afterlife.

Military

Totaling all the huscarls of western Veermark's nobles, the realm can muster about 100. Militias and town watches add another 100 or so warriors, and the fyrd totals some 3,000 members, assuming it could ever be called out in strength. Despite having a standing army of just 200 soldiers, Cyning Oddni has little fear of invasion, for on his eastern borders are thousands of horse warriors. While the two kings rarely see eye-to-eye on anything, a threat to any part of Veermark will result in a joint defense of the realm.

As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, Horse-Cyning Thrand can call on about one-third of his people in time of war. Every adult male is trained to use lance, sword, and bow from an early age, and with no fields to tend and very few crafters needed to produce goods, the army, some 7,000 mounted warriors, can be mustered in its entirety. The army has never gathered at full strength, but over the last few centuries forces as strong as 2,000 have mustered to fight back orc invasions.

Whether a soldier fights as light, medium, or heavy cavalry simply depends on his wealth. The heavy cavalry are the fewest in number, typically comprising the nobles and their huscarls. Clad in expensively imported plate armor (remember, this is not the same as medieval plate armor) or chain hauberks, they ride trained warhorses. Their function is to lead the charge and smash the enemy lines using their lances.

Medium cavalry sport scale armor or chain shirts and while equipped with a lance for tearing into fleeing foes, they do not launch frontal attacks. Instead, they follow up the heavy cavalry with brandished swords to take advantage of the confusion.

The light cavalry, mounted on riding horses and wearing leather armor, are mobile archers, trained to ride up to the enemy, unleash a volley of arrows, and then retreat before repeating the maneuver.

Trade & Tribute

Veermark once lay on two trade roads. Today it boasts just one (the High Road being closed due to troubles in Sutmark), and this lies in the west. Goods from Midmark flow through the Blackstone Barony, into western Veermark, and then onto the great markets in Ostmark, and vice versa. Each settlement is responsible for its own trading.

The nomadic Hrosmarkers have little need for coin, and bartering is considered the norm. However, all trade is firmly controlled by the Horse-Cyning.

All merchants looking to trade must first visit the Beacon (see page xxx), where he must purchase trade bars from the king's representative.

Trade bars are flat pieces of wood, upon which is inscribed the king's mark. Every merchant is given a unique rune, which he retains year after year. This is then branded onto each trade bar he purchases. Heroes hoping to sell war booty should note that *any* foreigners trying to sell or barter require a trade bar.

By law, outsiders may only trade with the clan head. Because the clans move, finding the right camp can be a chore. As such, a tradition has evolved to make the process easier.

When a merchant enters a camp, he informs the locals he has goods to trade. A runner is then dispatched to the clan head (every family in a clan keeps in regular communication). The clan head then packs up his camp and moves to the merchant's location, while sending out riders to inform the other families he rules over. Within a few days, what may have been a camp of just two or three tents becomes a temporary village bustling with activity.

Once the clan head is present, the lengthy process of haggling and bartering begins in earnest. When a deal is struck, the merchant records the transaction on one of his trade bars, which he then hands to the clan head. The clan head stamps his clan's trading rune onto the bar and keeps it safe. Only one trade bar is required per camp per visit, not per individual sale.

In return, the clan ruler inscribes a copy of the transaction onto one of his clan's trade bars. This is then marked with the merchant's trade rune, ensuring the visitor has an exact copy of what was bought and sold from the clan.

Each year during the summer gathering, every clan hands over its trade bars from the past trading season. These are totted up by the king's agents. This process allows the king to judge a clan's wealth by the amount of trade it undertakes and the goods it purchases and sells.

Trade bars cost 50 gs each (coin is accepted for these) and one is required for each clan a merchant trades with. While purchasing multiple trade bars might seem expensive, Horse-Cyning Thrand enforces no other taxation on merchants, regardless of the value of their wares. This encourages them to come heavily laden and make visits to multiple clans.

The king's representatives have the right to stop merchants and demand to see their collection of trade bars. Fast riders are then sent to the relevant clans to see if the trade bars match, while the caravan is searched and a detailed inventory taken. Any discrepancies result in instant fines. If the fine cannot be met, the head merchant is taken captive until the fine is paid, plus extra for his room and board during his captivity. Checks are sporadic, but frequent enough to ensure cheating is a risky venture. Given the low taxation, most merchants are only too happy to comply.

CLANS ON THE MOVE

As noted above, the clans do not remain stationary during the year. Between Sceranmonan and Haerfestmonan, much of the population is gathered at Veergarth in the south. Veergarth's southerly position was chosen because the high passes through Zigzag Pass are free of snow in summer, allowing caravans from Sutmark to make the arduous journey. Sutmark has not traded for two years thanks to the siege, and should trade not resume soon, Thrand may be forced to chose a more central location.

With so many horses present in one place, clans may have to travel 50 miles (a day's ride for a Hrosmark horse) or more to find good grazing ground.

As Haerfestmonan ends, the clans are assigned their winter grazing grounds. There then follows a mass migration, as the clans travel to their assigned territories. By law they are forbidden from grazing their horses aside these lands, though they are free to move as they desire within them. In this way, the horse-king rewards loyal clans with plentiful pasture while punishing those who have offended him with smaller territories, forcing the clan to compete internally for the best grass.

In spring, once the snows melt, the clans are free to travel the Grasslands as they wish. They jostle and bargain for the best lands, but are forbidden from fighting. If a dispute arises, and it often does, the clans must ask the horse-king to make a judgment.

As the days warm and lengthen as summer draws ever nearer, so the mass migration back to Veergarth begins and the yearly cycle of life draws to a close, ready to begin anew as summer ends.

ARCHITECTURE

The houses of western Veermark are typical Saxa longhouses and steads. Wood is plentiful here and the Anari influence found in other Marklands lacking. As a result, few buildings are built of stone.

Hrosmarkers, by comparison, live in round, felt-covered, wood lattice-framed tents with fur or carpet floors, similar to those of the taiga elves. The roof is steeply pitched, allowing for rain to run off easily and preventing accumulation of snow in winter. In Auld Saxa the name for these constructions is *runenfilthus*, which literally means "round felt house."

Each is large enough to sleep a family of ten, although conditions are a little cramped above six. As with most cultures in Rassilon, privacy is not the norm, and natural functions are carried out in front of others, be they kith, kin, or guests. A central hearth lined with stones serves for light, warmth, and cooking.

The tents are designed around the nomads' mobile lifestyle. A native family, well practiced at moving home every few days or weeks, can pack away a tent and its contents and be ready to move on in an hour. In the same way families inherit houses, so Hrosmarkers inherit tents. Repaired and patched over the generations, families take immense pride in their homes.

MAJOR LOCALES

THE BEACON

Population: 100

The Beacon stands on the last slope of the northern Border Mounds, overlooking the trade road. Outside of Veergarth, it is the only permanent settlement in the whole of Hrosmark. Its miniscule population comprises 80 mounted heavy cavalry and 20 administrators, all of whom are clerics of Var.

No ditch or palisade protects the site, for that is not the Hrosmarker way. Instead, the warriors' tents form a triple circle around the center, being positioned in such a way that no straight line of attack can be made. In the center is an enormous tent, which serves as a shrine to Var and an administrative office.

The site takes its name from the huge fiery beacon that burns day and night, guiding merchants to the camp. All visiting merchants must come to the Beacon to purchase trade bars if they wish to ply their trade in Hrosmark and, despite its size, the camp is a bustle of constant activity day and night.

While at the Beacon the merchants are accorded the horse-king's protection. Notices in all the civilized languages encircle the camp, warning of dire punishments to those who would steal from visiting merchants. Horse-Cyning Thrand has made it a capital offense to rob merchants, the typical punishment being tethered to four stallions. When the horses gallop off in different directions, the criminal literally has his limbs torn off.

For added protection, there are the clerics of Var. Paladins outnumber the priests three-to-one, and they are only too happy to use their magic to protect cargos and hunt down thieves. They are under no compulsion to bring back thieves alive, something frowned upon in other lands.

While Ostmark could quite easily trade with clans in the far north without visiting the Beacon, they have avoided the practice since Thrand's great-grandfather gained the throne. As one of his first acts, the horse-cyning made it abundantly clear that any infringement of his trading laws would lead to retaliatory raids. Given the size of army Hrosmark can muster, Ostmark happily agreed to play by his rules and has kept its side of the bargain ever since.

BLACK ORC CAVERNS

Named for the color of the rock rather than the skin of its inhabitants, Black Orc Caverns lies in the Brokentail Mountains, close to

where they join the line of the Dragonspine. A warren of narrow tunnels and cathedral like chambers, the caverns house a large number of orcs. The vile creatures frequently raid into western Veermark, much to the frustration of the king.

Oddni's army is too small to deal the orcs a crippling blow, and the horse nomads refuse to enter the caverns because they cannot fight mounted. Ostmark has volunteered a small army fit for the task, but Oddni suspects they would use the orcs' presence as an excuse to maintain a permanent garrison on his soil.

Oddni's chief ranger has a suspicion the orcs are being paid to raid, thus keeping Veermark's small army occupied. In secret he points the finger of blame at Blackstone Barony, for he has heard many rumors regarding the small, insular realm. Even with firm evidence, there is little Veermark could do without the support of the nomads, and war is a costly business.

BROKEN FENCE

Three centuries ago the king of western Veermark, fearful of the unruly horse nomads, ordered the construction of monumental defensive wall. The decision was taken to construct a high wooden wall from the edge of the Brokentail Mountains across the wide valley and then along the northern and central Border Mounds. The epic project almost bankrupted the tiny state.

A vast earth rampart lined with timbers was duly raised, with motte-and-bailey forts positioned every 50 miles. Unfortunately, it was also a colossal waste of money, for after the king's death his successor and the then horse-cyning struck a non-aggression pact, agreeing to keep their realms separate yet bonded by oaths of mutual defense. The northern part of the wall remained manned for another fifty years, as it allowed the king to tax merchants, but even this policy was eventually stopped in order to promote greater trade.

Over the centuries large amounts of timber have been looted for construction projects. What man has not destroyed, the weather has rotted. With the protective timbers gone, the earth rampart has been weathered almost flat.

Only two of the forts remain in anything resembling good condition. One stands in the wide valley in northern Vestmark. Merchants use it as a convenient place to rest up. The king maintains a small garrison here, not to defend his borders, which lie further north, but to protect the caravans. The second lies about a third of the way down the Border Mounds. A band of orcs has recently moved into the ruin. From here they launch raids on both sides of Veermark. Both the king and horse-cyning claim the other is responsible for dealing with the orcs, and neither has taken any action to remove them.

CHALK DOOR HILL

Cut into the side of western Border Mounds is a chalk figure. The figure is genderless and of no discernible race, being little more than a featureless outline. Its arms are outstretched, and each holds a vertical staff as tall as the chalk figure. Although recorded in ancient song, the figure, unlike other such images, has never needed maintenance to ensure its form remains visible.

Local villagers pay the site little attention for much of the year, though they refuse to walk within a mile of the figure, especially after sunset, claiming those who do risk being taken by fey. On the day before Summer and Winter Court Day, the locals leave appropriate gifts at the figure's feet before retreating to their home and barricading the doors.

According to local tradition, the figure is a gatekeeper, a sentinel set to watch over a major portal to the fey realm. The figure is relieved of his duties only twice a year—between dusk and dawn on the two holy days. In the space between the staves is a void filled with softly glowing mist. Lilting music and laughter drifts from the portal, enticing all who hear it to come and participate in the revelry. Those who accept the invitation are lost forever, or so the stories go. Only the elves of Oakwood are believed able to come and go without harm, though whether they do venture beyond the gate way is something the elves keep secret.

It is widely held at the elves know secret songs that can open the portal at other times of the year, though such stories are based solely on hearsay.

GHOST WOLF VALLEY

The sharp, craggy peaks of the eastern Dragonspine Mountains mark Hrosmark's southern border. The long, winding valleys that cut through the foothills and lower slopes are home to many orc and goblin tribes, most answerable to frost giants who live higher in the dense block of mountains.

The nomads shun one of these many valleys, for it is said to be haunted by the ghosts of wolf- or dog-headed beastmen. According to legend, when the Saxa first settled here they warred against the beastmen who called the Grasslands home, driving them back into their valley home before slaughtering the entire species.

Every now and then, snarling, pale-furred ghosts strike out from the valley, raiding nearby nomad camps before disappearing back into the mountain. The nomads call these specters *gastulfrwerren*, or ghost-wolf-men. Unusually for ghosts they can bleed, but no corpses have ever been recovered after raids, leading to the belief they cannot truly be killed.

Some nomads claim that an unearthly howling emanates from the valley, the mournful cry of a gigantic howl calling the spirits of the dead beastmen to serve it in its endless quest for bloody revenge. Given that the entire area is home to many mortal wolves and dire wolves, such stories may simply be fanciful workings of over active imaginations.

Largely unexplored for centuries, the walls of the valley are said to be dotted with caves whose walls are decorated with crude paintings of a gargantuan wolf-like deity devouring living sacrifices. At the far end is supposedly a monumental wolf head carving, its maw gaping wide. At the back of its throat is a tunnel, which leads into what is no doubt a temple to the unnamed wolf deity.

Although the number of raids has increased, Thrand has been unable to coax, cajole, or threaten his warriors into entering the valley. He is prepared to offer outsiders reasonable terms if they rid his lands of the fell specters, but first he must find a suitable band of heroes.

NO THREAD RUIN

Before the Saxa adopted a nomadic lifestyle they lived much as other Saxa. Much of their construction was done with wood, which has rotted away to leave no trace. However, in the center of the Grasslands stands a sprawling mass of half-crumbled stone towers, buildings, and walls, an ancient edifice said by some to have been raised even before the Saxa first settled here.

The migrating Saxa of old supposedly investigated the site out of curiosity, and promptly vowed never to settle nearby. The site is said to be cursed by Maera, for absolutely no arcane magic functions within its walls (this much is proven fact). There is no Siphoning, just a total inability to weave the threads of magic into cohesive patterns. The grass for ten miles around the structure grows black and coarse, and has proven poisonous to the nomads' horses.

Many myths and stories exist about the site, but none are verifiable. Some say it was raised during the Demongate Wars to imprison a demon lord. Others claim it belonged to a powerful mage whose experiments proved unwise and ultimately fatal. Giants are blamed by others, though the stonework is built to human scale. More than one sage has indicated it might have been a temple to Thrym, destroyed during the Blizzard War by clerics of Kenaz and Sigel, or a legacy from the reign of the Liche-Priest. A small few are bold enough to suggest it may have stood since the God War.

Both clerics of Maera and members of the Reliquary are frequent visitors, for both seek to understand the complete absence of magical energy here.

THE WHITE HORSE OF VEERMARK

Cut into the eastern side of the Border Hills is a stylized horse. First cut by the horse nomads to mark their dominance over the rolling grasslands of Hrosmark, it has subsequently become a temple to Epona. The horse is a sacred place, and has the power to transport mortals who provide suitable sacrifice to other parts of the continent. This ability is widely known to Hrosmarkers, but little used.

At the base of the hill is a small collection of tents, home to one

priest and five paladins of Epona, the guardians of the chalk figure. A white riding stallion is housed in one of the tents. Hrosmarkers pay huge sums to have their mares mate with the sacred beast on Saddle Day, for it is said their offspring will be swift of leg and strong of heart. Such horses have +2 Pace and increase their Vigor die one die type. When found for sale, a rare event, they carry a price three times that of a standard horse of the appropriate type.

Spirit Name: Skjotrhross ("Swift Horse").

Ambience: Standing on the hill induces feelings of exhilaration, as if one is riding a horse at full gallop. Those unused to horses often complain of feeling slightly unwell, though they suffer no adverse effects.

Deity: Freo.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: None. Skjotrhross makes no attempt to communicate with mortals, though it can hear and understand their conversations.

Sacrifice: A riding horse of at least average quality must be sacrificed on the hill. The spirit of the animal is blessed by Epona, and joins her celestial herd. While the blood is being spilled, the supplicant must state where he wishes to travel. Those who wish to travel with him must then mark their foreheads in the sacrifice's blood.

If a party wishes to split and have its members travel to different locations, each trip requires a separate sacrifice. Should a supplicant mark himself with the blood of two sacrifices, he travels nowhere—he cannot be in two places simultaneously.

Powers: Skjotrhross' sole power is the ability to transport those who perform the necessary sacrifice to any point in Rassilon. Note that the Hellfrost is not considered part of the continent, and thus the spirit can travel no further north than the southern base of the Icewall. In order to travel, those marked in blood must go to sleep on the horse's back.

No matter the distance involved, the travelers awake the next dawn in their desired location, having spent the night dreaming of thundering through the sky atop a white mare. No harm befalls the travelers between falling asleep and waking—they are no longer in the mortal realm. Although the travel is accurate, the spirit cannot enter buildings—travelers are deposited outside any structure they name, even unenclosed ones such as hill forts and temples of Thunor.

The trip is one way only— Skjotrhross has no power to bring travelers back to his home.

WILD HORSE TEMPLE

In the southern arm of the Border Mounds, close to where the hills take a southwestern bend and overlooking distant Oakwood, stand a network of standing stones of varying size. Viewed from above, the stones form the pattern of a stylized horse, albeit one measuring several miles long. The surrounding landscape is light forest carpeted with unruly vegetation.

To the centaurs, beastmen, manticores, and other intelligent beasts who walked the land long before the humans, it is sacred to Eostre, patron of all life. Even the elves of Oakwood worship here, though they make no claims to own the stones. The Hrosmarkers claim it is a temple to Freo Horselord, as evidenced by its layout.

Druids and clerics of Eostre, regardless of race, are allowed to worship at Wild Horse Temple, but they are not accorded any special protection and must vow to help defend the temple during their stay. Ceremonies held here are bloody, violent, and wild affairs, harking back to a bygone age.

Over the years the nomads have launched several attacks in a bid to capture the temple, but each one was driven back by fierce centaurs and beastmen, the marksmanship of deadly manticores, ferocious wild beasts, towering tree men, and summoned wood elementals fighting in unison. The elves have, so far, not sent warriors to help protect Wild Horse Temple, though the alchemical devices they have donated to the guardians have no doubt played a vital role in protecting the site.

Hrosmarkers believe a powerful centaur king, an inhuman counterpart to the horse-cyning who may be an actual offspring of Eostre from before the rise of the civilized races, makes his home here. Some say he is an immortal being, a child of Eostre blessed with awesome supernatural power over the natural world. Although a centaur, he is said to have the antlers of an elk and the tail of a manticore.

WIND TENT

The Wind Tent is an invisible tent, its walls and roof formed of swirling winds. From outside, one can detect nothing of its presence until one walks into the wall, whereupon howling winds buffet the unfortunate wandered. The interior is warm and calm, protected against the worst weather by its invisible walls. Anyone in the interior can see the rolling heavens and starry firmament as if standing in the open, yet they remain complete invisible to those outside. Some skalds claim the interior is larger than the outside dimensions would allow, but few have ever visited the tent and even fewer have been inside, so such talk is generally considered speculative embellishment.

The tent moves around the Grasslands, seemingly at random. It also travels at amazing speeds, for one day it may be detected in the north, and the next day far to the south. Many seek the Wind Tent, but few are ever fortunate enough to find it.

Such a locale may seem like a legendary place, or perhaps a sacred site, yet it is a very real place and, although worshippers of Thunor consider it special, no spirit dwells here. The Wind Tent is the personal abode of Thunderson Sturmric (see below).

PERSONS OF NOTE

JARL EDLAF GODHELMSUNU

Jarl Edlaf respects the power of Horse-Cyning Thrand, though he has no love for the man. Vain, arrogant, and more than a little naive, he seeks to usurp power through the darkest of alliances. Undead have never plagued Hrosmark, and while the people have heard stories from strangers, they have little true conception of the power of Hela's cult. Jarl Edlaf believes the cult to be a minor player, easily manipulated by others.

To that end he hatched a plan to become horse-cyning. Agents were sent out into the wider world to recruit clerics of Hela. Corpses are readily available in Hrosmark, especially those of warriors and nobles, and Edlaf intended to have the clerics of Hela animate him an army of undead horsemen, which he will then use to conquer the realm and impose his own rule.

Several clerics of Hela answered his call. They have played to his weaknesses, flattering the jarl and whispering of his future power, all the while secretly animating the corpses and concealing them in a valley in the far south. With the Liche-Priest set to awaken soon, having an army of undead cavalry so deep inside the Hearthlands would be a major boost to his growing army of pitiless warriors. Edlaf remains blissfully unaware of their true plans.

THUNDERSON STURMRIC

A priest of Thunor, Sturmric, whose name translates as Storm of Power, is said to have powers far beyond the ken of other clerics. He can, the skalds tell, summon all manner of elementals relating to the air, can converse with birds and air spirits, and knows the secret of the winds. Thrym, legends say, fears him, for he exerts control even over the north wind.

Sturmric is widely considered to be at least half mad. He never shaves or cuts his hair, washes only when the rain falls on him, and spends much of his time talking to invisible spirits or dancing wildly outside his tent while blowing a long trumpet carved from the horn of some legendary beast. Sturmric is loyal to the horse-cyning, though he rarely bothers to visit Veergarth to renew his oath of allegiance. For his part, Thrand seems little bothered by the lack of display of loyalty.

VESTMARK

Vestmark, once famed for its productive silver mines and high standard of living, is a ravaged land. Severed in twain by the loss of Orcmark, the opulence has given way to privation and starvation. While the inhabitants talk of victory and a quick return to the old ways, such talk is a mixture of bravado and hope, and many secretly believe the cause is lost. For those who live here Vestmark has become a living hell, but for outsiders seeking a life of adventure Vestmark promises bountiful opportunity.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Vestmark.

* **Born to Hate:** Characters aged 25 years or less who are native to Vestmark can take Favored Foe (Orcs) at Novice Rank. They must meet all the other requirements.

* **Disrespectful:** The citizens of Vestmark blame the nobility for their problems. Nobles gain only +1 Charisma from the Noble Edge in this realm. This does not affect heroes who have taken the Edge to represent other forms of "nobility."

* **Severe Shortages:** Vestmark's armies are draining the country dry. Food costs 20 times normal. Expensive meals have C availability and rations a T availability. The cost of and armor weapons is increased by five times normal and availability ratings increase one level, to a maximum of C.

ATMOSPHERE

Entering Vestmark by one of the established routes, visitors cannot help but notice the trouble besetting the once prosperous realm. The border with Coglelund is choked with fearful refugees, and the roads into the Vale packed with small caravans and lines of half-starved peasants. Skei and Tarn, the only remaining ports, are military compounds, the former besieged by desperate citizens intent on fleeing to a better life yet unable to leave for fear of the orc galleys prowling the water.

Moving inland, the landscape is largely deserted. Steads and small villages stand empty, the buildings sliding inexorably into terminal decay and the fields choked with weeds and failed harvests. Young boys armed with spears patrol the roads, questioning strangers with the manner of men, but clearly fearful of ever having to use their weapons.

Those who have stayed behind are starving and diseased, dressed in rags and living in squalor, a result of the king's harsh taxation policies. Scrawny, toothless women, perhaps as young as 20, but with the appearance of aged crones, offer up screaming babies to passers-by, begging them in the name of the gods to take their children away to a better place. Sickly animals, their bones prominent through withered skin, stagger the roads, the steads' last vestiges of wealth. Rows of old men and women till the fields, forced to till the land by hand after having given up their oxen to tax collectors or forced to devour them just to stay alive. Eyes are averted from strangers, partly to hide their suffering and partly to avoid attracting the attention of bandits or recruiters.

Though deprived of the basics, the citizens of Veermark have not forgotten the laws of hospitality. Strangers are greeted with bowls of rat stew bulked out with straw and cups of water while the hosts look on, silently imploring their guests to accept the meager fare yet also secretly regretting having to part with hard to come by rations. Hosts talk loudly of imminent victory and a return to the old days of prosperity, but their eyes betray the utter despair gnawing at their souls.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Before the war King Horgar was served by seven jarls. Today, five serve, including Ostersund's military commander. Of these, only two, Jarls Hafnir Smooth-Tongue and Ingjald Orchammer, are actively engaged in the ongoing conflict. Though still bound to the king by oaths, they answer more to Marshal Theodred, the nearest thing Vestmark has to a true leader.

Hafnir's business acumen has resulted in his being appointed to oversee the broken economy, while Ingjald is responsible for holding Tarn and the western stretch of the border with Orcmark.

Beneath the jarls are the lesser nobles. War does strange things to men, and the nobility is not immune. Some seek to profit politically or financially from the instability, while others find the courage to stand against the tide of orcs. Many are self-serving, safeguarding their families at the expense of the peasants they are honor-bound to protect, but a minority has endeavored to alleviate the burden placed on the population. Very few have not chosen a stance.

The middle classes, the clerics, mages, scholars, master crafters, and merchants, have fared little better than the peasantry in most cases. Many crafters now serve the armies, while the merchants not involved in the import of arms and armor have seen their profits plummet to almost nothing. Many clerics have been ordered to war by their superiors. Mages are highly sought after by the army, who pay well for their services. Thus, while the majority has lost out, a few of the middle class benefit from the war. But such is always the way, for even in suffering there is profit to be made.

At the bottom are the peasants, the poor wretches crippled by taxes and starvation, whose sons and fathers made the ultimate sacrifice, laying down their lives to protect a land spiraling into destruction.

EDUCATION

Like most realms, education in Vestmark was divided by social class. Peasants learned what they needed to know from family members and local clerics, while those of high station could afford to have their children tutored in all manner of lore.

Nowadays, the war has lessened the divide. Children across the social spectrum are instructed in the ways of war from an early age, quickly losing their innocence as the brutal reality of their future is hammered home by clerics of Tiw. Recruiters tour the villages, taking away young boys to serve the Marshal. Many families have taken to hiding their male children, secreting them away when the recruiters come, or dressing them as girls.

Even if the war ended tomorrow, Vestmark's depleted population seriously lacks the basic skills necessary to rebuild its infrastructure.

RELIGION

A generation of war has seen a dramatic change in Vestmark's religious beliefs. Twenty years ago Ertha, Var, and Eostre Plantmother were honored above all others. Today, Tiw and Sigel, both militaristic gods, rank highest, with Thunor in his guise as god of liberation from oppression following close behind.

The former deities have not been neglected entirely, for the silver mines still operate and merchants still make call here, but congre-

gation numbers have declined. With the majority of menfolk dead or serving in the army, Eostre's worship has been reduced to lip service among the rural communities.

Eira's clerics are making inroads into these communities. Though they can promise no miraculous deliverance from hardship, they can at least try to alleviate some of the suffering.

MILITARY

The basic structure of Vestmark's army is described in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

Of Vestmark's population some 20% are warriors. The majority are mercenaries, outsiders lured to the realm not by the promise of conflict but by the silver offered by King Horgar. While the shadow of death always hovers close by, most of the troops are paid to do little but man barricades, suffer sporadic artillery and arrow fire, and await a major orc attack that never seems to come.

The 500 huscarls are almost the last of Vestmark's full-time warriors, a mixture of experienced soldiers, nobles' retinues, and young noblemen seeking fame and fortune (as well as those with enough honor to actually fight for their homeland). Each noble family has withheld huscarls, citing the need to protect the nobility from internal and external threats. While Theodred could in theory commandeer these reserves, he has better things to do than become engaged in political strife with his countrymen over a few hundred huscarls.

The 2,500 spearmen and axemen serving under the Marshal are common men, some militiamen but most simple peasants drafted into the army and given rudimentary training. Those who survive an orc raid quickly develop better martial skills.

The makeup and deployment of the 36 mercenary companies is left deliberately vague, so as not to stifle the GM's creativity. Similarly, the native companies have not been tied down to any particular region.

While Vestmark boasts an impressive army, it is very much a defensive force. Outnumbered by the orcs stationed on the far banks of the Elve alone, it has little hope of actually launching an invasion.

Batteries of heavy catapults and trebuchets stand inside redoubts, ready at a moment's notice to unleash a rain of boulders upon the orc lines. Hidden amid the debris are ballistas and coldfire throwers, primed to target any orcs foolish enough to try crossing the Elve.

Apart from a handful of units stationed on the riverbank to man the artillery and provide lookout, most of the army sits away from the war, barricaded behind rows of iron-tipped stakes, shattered walls, hastily constructed forts, and lines of expensive "war discs." More ballistas and coldfire throwers await any orcs advancing toward the hinterlands.

Thus an uneasy balance is maintained. The orcs have the warriors to push forward, but would enter a lethal and carefully prepared killing ground. Vestmark has ensured its safety through its defenses, but that very strategy is bleeding the country dry and playing into the orcs' hands.

Although the border with Orcmark, the town of Skei, and the coastlines of Crystal Sound and Blackwater Bay are home to the five native frontline companies and around 75% of the mercenary force, Vestmark has not neglected its other borders.

The borders with the Magocracy must be watched to protect against troll incursions from Foulwater Swamp, Coglelund's deployment of troops along the Hearthrun has forced Vestmark to do the same, the foothills of the Hearth Range must be patrolled in event any orcs here rally to Nagrat's banner, and the Vale, while not a military threat, must be watched to prevent profiteers from the Crystalflow Confederacy crossing into Vestmark. Troops must also guard the precious silver mines, for orcs and giants are abroad in the hills, and safeguard the caravans of food and arms. Unfortunately, this necessity requires troops to be taken away from the war zone.

WORRYING TIMES

The current state of the war has Marshal Theodred deeply troubled. While unsure of the exact strength of the orc army facing him, he knows his defenders are greatly outnumbered. The border with Orcmark is heavily fortified, making any attack a costly one, but the orcs have warriors to spare. With no reserve army to call upon, Theodred knows he would be unable to stop a full invasion. So why, he ponders, has Nagrat not pushed home his advantage? Part of him hopes against hope that Nagrat is playing a waiting game, starving Vestmark into submission before unleashing the killing blow. True or not, every day the orcs delay gives Vestmark one more day of hope.

But Theodred also suspects the orc king is up to something that would give him a better advantage. If Nagrat won Vestmark, he would have Royalmark, the Vale, Coglelund, and the Magocracy on his borders. Even with his great army, Nagrat would be unable to protect all his new borders, especially with Midmark in the process of assembling a great fleet with which to reinforce Ostersund, and his troops would be unable to expand into neighboring lands without exposing their rear or flank.

What the Marshal of the Mark desperately needs is reliable intelligence on Nagrat's plans. Such missions are ideally suited to small groups of talented individuals, especially those with access to magic. GMs looking to run military-based adventures will find an adventure generator in the *Hellfrost Encounters* book.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Before the war, Vestmark's abundance of silver allowed taxation to be kept low and provided the monies to import many goods. Today, the entire silver output is spent on arms and armor, iron ingots to forge new weapons, and the hiring of mercenaries.

Once largely self-sufficient in crops and livestock, Vestmark must now import foodstuffs at great expense. Merchants importing luxuries find few buyers in Vestmark, and those hawking more basic wares not of use to the army face crippling excise duties to help pay for the lower duties on war essentials.

The populace accepted new taxes raised to support the war effort at first, but the short campaign they were promised never materialized and additional taxes have been implemented year after year. While the nobility has suffered hardship, the gulf between rich and poor has actually expanded, especially since food prices have soared.

Tax collectors, supported by heavily armed troops, frequent the towns and steads, demanding money, goods, and services the populace can no longer afford to give. When demands are refused, force is applied.

ARCHITECTURE

A former Anari province, Vestmark's coastal and river towns, the last remnants of Anari occupation, retain a distinct Anari feel. Buildings (where they still stand) are built as high as two stories, are raised in terraces, and incorporate more stone than Saxa dwellings. The streets are narrow and cobbled.

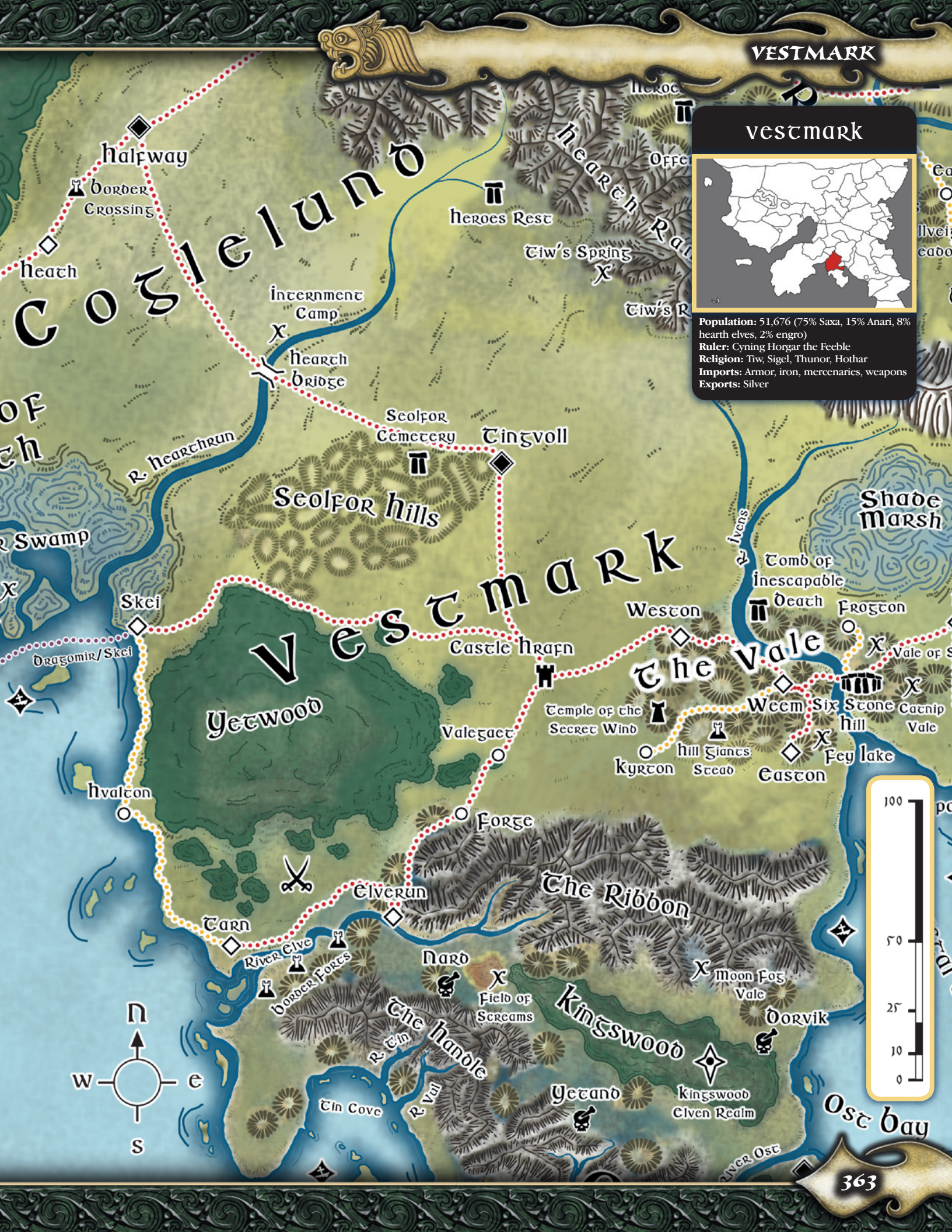
Tingvoll, the modern capital, and most of the villages are of Saxa origin and style, erected after the occupation ended. Most buildings are constructed of wood, with turf or shingle roofs. Roads are unpaved and heavily rutted. After heavy rains they quickly turn into quagmires.

MAJOR LOCALES

Presented below are several locales heroes may have reason to visit while in Vestmark.

FORGE

Forge is a new settlement, created only a decade ago to serve the army. It doesn't even have a real name, just a title telling of its purpose. Dwelling and working here is a small army of blacksmiths, weaponsmiths, and armorers. Surrounded by a palisade and protected by a company of mercenaries, Forge is an industrial center,


vestmark
Population: 51,676 (75% Saxa, 15% Anari, 8% hearth elves, 2% engro)
Ruler: Cyning Horgar the Feeble
Religion: Tiw, Sigel, Thunor, Hothar
Imports: Armor, iron, mercenaries, weapons
Exports: Silver
Coglelund
Halfway
Border Crossing
Heath
Heroes Rest
Hearth Ra
Tiw's Spring
Internment Camp
Hearth Bridge
Seolfor Cemetery
Tingvoll
R. Hearthrun
Seolfor Hills
Swamp
Vestmark
Skei
Dragomir/Skei
Castle Hrafn
Yetwood
Valegaet
Hvalton
Forge
Elverun
Carn
River Clive
Border Forts
The Ribbon
Nard
Field of Screams
Moon Fog Vale
Dorvik
Kingswood
The Handle
R. Tin
R. Val
Tin Cove
Yetand
Kingswood Elven Realm
Osc Bay
R. Ivens
Shade Marsh
Tomb of Inescapable Death
Weston
The Vale
Frogton
Vale of S
Temple of the Secret Wind
Weem
Six Stone Hill
Catnip Vale
Kyrton
Hill Giants Stead
Easton
Fey Lake
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not a true village. Day and night, the air rings with the thump of metal on metal and the stench of burning charcoal fills the hot air.

Although the craftsmen are supposed to be making arms, armor, and horseshoes for the army, they are not above selling items to visitors. The guards, fully aware of what is occurring, take a 20% cut to look the other way and to smuggle the illegal earnings to the crafters' families. Any regularly available (i.e. not special) weapons and armor can be found here at twice the normal cost, a high price, but still cheaper than elsewhere in Vestmark.

HEROES REST

Marshal Theodred is aware of the scheming and corruption in Tingvoll, but the war commands his attention. That said, he has done his best to protect the people from the insane proclamations of Cyning Horgar when it is within his power. When the ailing king decreed that Vestmark's fallen warriors should be left to rot where they fell as a warning to others who "failed in their duty," Theodred acted quickly to prevent open revolt or desertions among the military and insurrection by the general population.

Despite knowing his enemies would whisper of his disobedience into the mad king's ear, Theodred commanded that all fallen warriors should be interred with full funeral rites beneath small barrows close to the Hearth Range, opposite the Mounds of Heroes Gone. So many barrows have been constructed that the region looks as if it has been invaded by giant moles. The brown soil and exposed rocks of new tombs stand in stark contrast to the grass that grows on earlier barrows.

Shortage of arms and armor means that none can go to the grave with the tools they will need in the Afterlife. Theodred laments this affront to the warriors' spirits and to Tiw, but in times such as these the needs of the living take priority.

Well aware of the situation in Vestmark, the cult of Scaetha has agreed to defer the cost of funeral rites and prayers until the war is over and the economy improves. It has further agreed to provide guards for the new cemetery—the thought of an army of corpses just waiting to be animated by Hela's cult is too terrible to ignore for the sake of coins.

Unfortunately, not every warrior's spirit has traveled to the Afterlife. Perhaps angered by their untimely deaths or at the corruption of the nobility, who scheme and plot to secure power and wealth while Vestmark's sons and daughters shed blood to ensure their country's survival, some haunt the barrows as ghosts. Unlike the spirits populating the Mounds of Heroes Gone, those of Vestmark have little interest in aiding the living. Since these shades are not Hela's servants and exist with their goddess' blessing (or at leas tacit support), the cult of Scaetha has no interest in laying them to rest.

HRAFNTON

Literally meaning "the enclosure of the ravens," the Hrafnton is a building within Tingvoll. Despite the similarities in name, it has no connection with Castle Hrafn, which was constructed only recently. The name dates back to the early Anari occupation, when a small town stood just east of the modern capital. In the center of the town stood a temple to Hoenir, along with a shrine to Hrafn, the lesser deity of messengers affiliated with both Freo and Hoenir.

The location was such that clerics using *voice on the wind* spells could reach as far away as the Icebarrier to the north and the Thunor Range and Dragonspine to the east. Heading west, messages could be transmitted to what is now Kingshall in the Magocracy. One of many such stations, it formed part of a communication network spanning the Anari Empire.

Today a new building stands on the ground occupied by the one devoted to Hoenir. Still dedicated to Hrafn, it serves as the nexus for King Horgar's intelligence service. Here clerics of Hrafn and air elementalists construct alchemical *voice on the wind* devices for military use, design and decrypt ciphers, transmit and receive messages to and from the kingdom and neighboring lands. As well as employing magical means, the clerics and staff act as official messengers, traveling the continent on foot or by horse.

The clerics currently work primarily on military matters, relaying orders to dispersed companies and receiving transmissions from spies deep within Orcmark. As one might expect, security is extremely tight around the walled complex.

HVALTON

Population: 59
Ruler: Hauld Eyulf Sveinsunu

The small fishing village of Hvalton ("enclose of the whales" in Saxa) lies on the western coast, roughly halfway between Skei and Tarn. The only road follows the rugged coastline, trapped between the raging sea and the dense woodland of Yetwood. While the elves have recently ended their isolation and sent troops to the border, they do not appreciate trespassers, and only the desperate seek a shortcut through the dense woodland.

Hvalton sits atop a low (50' high), flat-topped hill overlooking the turbulent ocean. Surrounding it is a wooden wall, which follows the edge of the hill. Although the wall is only four feet high, the steep slope near the summit makes it extremely difficult to scale. Two towers rise over the walk. To the west is a simple watchtower with a brazier on top, a primitive beacon designed to aid ships in bad weather. On the landward side the tower doubles as a gatehouse. While it is possible to head straight up the hill, the path, which is lined with logs to provide secure footing, starts at the south side of the hill, curving upward and northward along the eastern flank.

The center of the village is enclosed behind a high drystone wall. Inside stands the hauld's mead hall, the center of power in Hvalton. The hall was designed to accommodate the entire population at a squeeze, though these days there is plentiful room to spare. The compound serves as the last line of defense should the settlement ever come under attack. Nestled between the twin defenses are the houses and workshops of the citizens.

The buildings are typical Saxa longhouses, though wooden shingles are used instead of thatch due to the frequent storms that batter the coast. Decades of neglect have left Hvalton a shadow of its former glory. Many of the buildings are in desperate need of repair, most having lost shingles to storm winds. Fortunately, the smaller population has enabled the citizens to survive better than their kinfolk further inland, for the sea, while a cruel mistress, is at least bountiful.

A small, sandy cove located 200 yards from the southern edge of the hill provides a natural harbor for the villagers' small whaling fleet.

The war against Orcmark has sucked the life from the village. All the men folk of fighting age, and many who would be considered too young to fight in times of peace, have been conscripted to serve as warriors or craftsmen. Many of their wives accompanied them, leaving behind only the elderly and the very young, women who refused to leave, plus a token garrison and a few others whose services were not required on the frontline. Once a bustling little fishing community of 250 souls, its current population is barely a quarter of that now.

Hauld Eyulf, an old man, is advised by three notables. His right-hand man is Osric Storm-Cheeks, the resident priest of Neorthe. Osric's hair is close-cropped and thinning on top. His nickname comes from his advanced age and his lifelong addiction to pipeleaf, both of which leave him gasping for breath after even minor physical exertion.

His most trusted warrior is Aud Hrafnsdohtor, a 19-year-old paladin of Rigr who considers herself the village's defender. Her attractive face is marred by her missing left eye, the result of an orc blade. Hauld Eyulf treats her like a daughter, his three sons having died fighting against the orc invaders.

Finally there is Sword Wiglaf Ulricsunu, an outsider and a paladin of Tiw. Wiglaf is little more than a boy, sent here to train the local militia because no one on the frontline wanted him in their company. Wiglaf wears his hair cropped short in the style of Tiw's devout clergy. Concealed on his right forearm is a tattoo. It was meant to resemble a storm dragon, but Wiglaf couldn't tolerate the pain and it is only a quarter finished. Sadly for him, it is the rear quarter.

Hvalton is a haunted place. Many of Vestmark's coastal residents turned to piracy during the Anari invasion of the Saxa kingdoms.

Among the most feared was Coenmund the Sea-wolf, a rapacious brute. Finally captured, Coenmund and his crew were lashed to the mast of their ship and set adrift as archers peppered it with fire arrows. Coenmund went to a watery grave vowing revenge. Centuries later, the vow has come to fruition. Coenmund's fire-blackened longship now prowls the stormy waters off Hvalton, the site of his death, his crew of charred skeletons eager to seek revenge on the living. See page xxx for more details.

Seolfor Cemetery

Located in the Seolfor Hills, the cemetery has been the ancestral burial ground of the Saxa nobility for millennia. During the Anari occupation, the invaders also interred their dead here, intent on linking them to the heroes and kings of old. Although the practice of burials has largely been replaced by cremation, the burial mounds remain standing.

Whereas the spirits of the dead protect the Mounds of Heroes Gone, the Seolfor cemetery is watched over by a group of elderly clerics of Scaetha, guardians of the deceased who spend their days warding off tomb robbers and singing dirges for the dead.

King Horgar's decree that the dead be taxed for their grave goods (see Adventure Seeds) has raised the clerics ire. While they could sell their lives fighting the king's tax collectors, they know such resistance would be short lived and delay the inevitable for but a few days. The clerics have instead taken a more drastic measure, one that stretches their holy oaths to breaking point. In secret, they are stealing the grave goods, hiding them in nearby caves.

Tiw's Ridge

A flat promontory of the Hearth Range. Legends claim that after a row with Eira, Tiw stormed off, swishing his sword as he went. By accident, his blade sank into the mortal realm, slashing the top off a hill. Although there is nothing to substantiate the myth, local clerics of Tiw prefer to take their holy vows here.

Regardless of which race tells the story, Tiw and Eira, whose divorce is often cited in myth, always feature prominently in the origins of arguments.

Before Loki (the Unknowable One's malicious father) was imprisoned, he brought Tiw a gift, a harmless-looking creature he named Argument. Seeing no military value in the gift, Tiw promptly passed it on to his wife, Eira, proudly proclaiming it was a sign of his affection. Eira was delighted at her husband's gift, at least for a short while.

Stubborn and opinionated, Argument did nothing but quarrel with Eira. Her patience at an end, Eira returned the gift to Tiw, scorning him all the while. Seeing Loki laughing outside his window, Tiw flew into a rage, cut Argument in myriad pieces, and threw him to the mortal world. Thus it was that arguments entered the world.

Tiw's Spring

Like the ridge above, this site came into being as a result of one of Tiw's many violent sulks. This time he thrust his sword into the earth in a fit of rage. When he withdrew his blade, red water gushed forth. Quickly traveling to the underworld, he discovered he had inadvertently wounded Ertha. Eira also rushed to the underworld, tending to the injury while bemoaning Tiw for his stupidity (Argument was still with her at this time).

The waters are sacred to both Ertha and Tiw. Used in the creation of *smite* alchemical devices by Tiw's clergy, they grant +1 to Knowledge (Alchemy) rolls. Clerics of Ertha gain a similar bonus for *armor* devices. This magical property is retained only for 24 hours if the waters are bottled and taken away.

Valegaet

Valegaet is a small village near the southern trade road, not far from a small marsh. Until its menfolk were conscripted, the village's fields produced bountiful crops, enough for Valegaet to sell its surplus. Although the fields lie fallow, the villagers are surprisingly well fed, not to mention quite prosperous. While they publicly claim to be receiving aid from generous engros in the Vale, the truth is far more sinister.

Six years ago a trapper hunting birds in the marshes stumbled across a statue half-buried in the mire. Encrusted with filth and badly weathered, the trapper could tell only that it depicted a crocodile, a creature long since extinct outside the Great Swamp. Hauling it back, the trapper stowed it away in his house, intending to sell it to a passing merchant as a curiosity. He never did.

Once part of a gatorman temple, the statue has had a dire effect on the inhabitants of the sleepy village. They have turned to cannibalism, feeding on small merchant caravans and selling their wares to other traders. The disappearance of merchants has not gone unnoticed in the Vale and in Vestmark, though no one yet suspects the plump villagers of Valegaet.

Persons of Note

Many of Vestmark's rulers are outlined in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Enough detail is given to allow the GM to flesh them out to fit his campaign. This section introduces a few other individuals heroes might encounter in their journeys through the realm.

Argon Three-Tongues

The highest-ranking Anari in the Vestmark royal court, Argon serves King Horgar as chief herald. A trained skald and powerful in the ways of song magic, it is Argon's task to make the laws palatable to the masses, turn losses into victories, win hearts and minds, and convince everyone the war is close to being won. A master spin doctor, Argon uses poems, songs, satire, and allusions to the past to stir hearts, quash rumors and defeatist talk, and generally make everything seem well.

Coenmund Sea-Wolf

During the Anari conquest of the Hearthlands, those living in the south of what is now Vestmark turned from fishing and farming to piracy, their dragon-prow longships raiding Anari settlements far and wide, even venturing up the Crystalflow in search of plunder. Aided by kinfolk in Midmark, which never fell under Anari rule, the sea-raiders terrorized the Anari for centuries.

The end of the rebellion and subsequent formation of the Marklands brought the golden age of the sea-raiders to a swift conclusion, though not all willingly gave up their longships. Those who refused to give up the pirate life turned their attention to the Magocracy, plundering its coastal communities with impunity. Fearing such activities would lead to a new war against the Anari, the high cyning eventually called upon his kin to end the practice. Most obeyed, for within the king's message was a veiled threat—if Vestmark was invaded due to provocation of its own making, the other Marklands would not come to its aid, despite its rich silver mines.

While many pirates obeyed the decree, seeing wisdom in the high cyning's word, not all surrendered their longships and turned to fishing, farming, and trading. One who refused to heed the warning was Hauld Coenmund, known to many as Sea-Wolf. For the best part of two decades his rapacious crew terrorized the coast of the Magocracy, razing villages to the ground, slaughtering the inhabitants, and taking whatever they could sell.

Eventually the emissaries of the Mage-King issued a stark warning to Vestmark's king—stop Coenmund or suffer the consequences. Unwilling to start a war because of the actions of one man, the king declared Coenmund an outlaw. One winter's day in 187 IR, Coenmund's ship was attacked just off the western Vestmark coast. Following a ferocious battle, the pirate and his remaining crew were captured.

The sea-raiders were sentenced to death. The common crew was drowned, thrown out of the boats with heavy rocks tied to their limbs. Coenmund, a minor nobleman, was accorded a death befitting his rank, but one with a cruel twist. The pirate chief and his

crew were lashed to the mast, the ship coated in pitch, and then pushed out to sea. As it drifted from the shore, archers fired flaming arrows into the timbers, igniting the vessel.

As the ship burned fiercely, Coenmund broke his bonds and stood upon the deck, his flesh black and bubbling, his clothes and hair aflame. With his last breath he uttered a terrible curse, vowing that he would return from the grave if another ship was ever set aflame on the waters that now formed his tomb. Coenmund's curse was duly honored by gods, but it was taken literally. While the nobility of Vestmark were sometimes set adrift in burning funeral ships, such activities never occurred near the spot of Coenmund's death. And so Coenmund's fell spirit remains in limbo, awaiting the day it can return to seek revenge. After many centuries that day has finally dawned, for a nobleman was recently cremated aboard his longship off the coast of western Vestmark.

Once a proud warrior noble, Coenmund is now a vengeful specter. His black, blistered flesh bubbles and hisses as if still on fire, his hair and beard are made of acrid smoke, his eyes burn with a fire hotter than that which consumed his life, and tongues of flame dance wildly across his arms.

Coenmund's ship is a snekke. Its timbers are blackened by fire and still smolder, filling the surrounding air with the ghastly smell of burning pitch and human flesh. Its sail hangs in burnt tatters. The dragon prow, once a mighty sea dragon, is now a menacing sun dragon, flames constantly licking from its gaping maw.

Crewing the unholy vessel are Coenmund's undead shipmates. Most are skeletons, their bones charred and cracked, raging fires burning in their dark eye sockets. A small few are zombies. They reek of burnt flesh and singed hair. Much of their skin and muscle has melted away, revealing fire-black bones beneath. They are treated as regular skeletal warriors and zombies, but are immune to fire and heat attacks.

JARL EORCWIC VINSUNU

Jarl Eorcwic, known to many as the Seolfor Jarl ("Silver earl"), has lands in the Seolfor Hills and central Vestmark. As far as the populace is concerned, Eorcwic is responsible for ensuring the silver mines remain open. As he is quick to point out, should the silver stop flowing, the taxes will have to increase. Factual as it may be, such comments have not earned him any public adoration.

Orc agents sent by Nagrat have had several secret dealings with the jarl. In return for "losing" silver, shipments the jarl is at liberty to keep, Nagrat promises the nobleman a position of power when Vestmark falls.

Eorcwic is torn between his oaths to the king and the promise of power when the inevitable comes. So far he has refused the agents' demands, but with the situation worsening daily, and his coffers being rapidly depleted, his resolve is weakening.

JARL HROTHGAR EDMUNDSUNU

Hrothgar is rapidly becoming something of a celebrity. Though he rarely comes down from his northern estates to visit the war zone, he is a strong supporter of the cause. When Marshal Theodred called for nobles to send troops, Hrothgar made great show of dispatching not just the majority of his household forces, but also wagons of provisions from his personal stores. Since then he has made several more grand gestures of goods and coin from his own coffers, to much applause from the starving peasants.

Hrothgar's generosity isn't all it seems, and his donations are far from draining his personal coffers. Like all the jarls, Hrothgar knows King Horgar won't be ruler for much longer. If his insanity doesn't claim his life, then an assassin's dagger surely will. Knowing that Theodred is likely to be the preferred candidate, Hrothgar is running a public relations campaign to better his own name—sooner or later the war will end, and Hrothgar intends to be a court favorite. The funds he so generously and publicly donates are actually siphoned from the royal treasury, funds which were destined to reach the front line anyway.

To ensure his name reaches the top of the list, he pays agitators to speak against Theodred's handling of the war. They insinuate that Theodred is in league with the orcs, refusing to openly wage war so as to weaken the realm ready for conquest, that the Marshal of the Mark has lost his nerve and has no plans to ever liberate southern Vestmark, and that he desires not a victory, but merely continued support of the people so he can claim the throne. Of course, Jarl Hrothgar is quick to speak against these vile rumors, though always in a way that still leaves an air of doubt about Theodred.

RIDDER BOTWARD INRAEDSUNU

A former huscarl, Ridder Botward came to Marshal Theodred's attention five years ago when he led the defense of a narrow valley from orc raiders. Brave and tactically gifted, he accepted the Marshal's award of nobility and command of a company of Vestmark troops with humility.

No one doubts his competency, but his leadership qualities have much to be desired. Botward sets himself very high standards, and he expects his men to meet those same standards. Discipline is harshly enforced for even minor infractions, and those who consistently fail him are shipped out to other units. Theodred has tried to convince Botward to lower his standards, but his words have not sunk in.

WHY COME HERE?

Like Orcmark, war-torn Vestmark is a great adventuring locale for heroes with Leadership Edges. Any of the reasons to adventure in Orcmark apply equally here.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Vestmark's dead have much to be angry about, but that does not mean they cannot be calmed. Marshal Theodred is seeking renowned Saxa heroes (Glory 140+) to parley with the spirits with an eye to recruiting them for the war effort.

* Marshal Theodred has learned that someone is pilfering from the royal coffers. With his major agents known to his enemies and not yet wishing to show his hand, Theodred hopes to recruit trustworthy adventurers to investigate the claims. Heroes with the Noble Edge are especially sought after, since their noble blood will allow them access to the court.

* Orcs gathering in the Seolfor Hills are threatening silver production. Unable to spare companies to scour the expansive hills, Jarl Hafnir decides to hire outsiders to slay the orcs' chieftains. In return, the heroes may keep whatever treasures they recover.

* The village of Aeflwuduton ("the enclosure by the elf wood"), just south of Yetwood, is being terrorized by a fiend. A dozen corpses, all with their throats ripped out, have been discovered in the last month. Haulda Yvaine Ormsdohtor, the local ruler, has good reason to suspect the killer is a vampire; after all, she released it.

Family tales spoke of a cursed family member who came back from the war against the Liche-Priest a changed man. He lived an evil life before the peasants finally rose up and killed him. Curious as to whether the stories were true, Yvaine had excavations performed beneath the ancestral home, a stone-built Anari edifice. Sure enough, the workmen uncovered a sealed room containing a withered corpse.

Accidentally pricking her finger on its sharp teeth, a single drop of Yvaine's blood dripped into its mouth. The corpse-creature opened its eyes and stared at its kinswoman, its indomitable will boring into her mind. Yvaine has since become the vampire's unwilling servant, bringing it fresh meals as often as she dares. Unfortunately, the peasants are so sickly she has been forced to secure a large number in a very short time.

* King Horgar has introduced a new death tax. It isn't a tax on dying, but a tax on the dead. Knowing that many Saxa are buried with grave goods, Horgar has decreed their graves must be dug up and their treasures used help to fund the war. As well as offending public sensibilities with his decree of desecration, he risks awakening all manner of entombed undead. Heroes are sought to escort the diggers and deal with any undead.

WITCHWOOD

Beyond the Icewall, the Hellfrost stretches to the top of the world. A land of temperatures cold enough to freeze blood in the veins and endless blizzards that tear flesh from bone, it is home to many fearsome creatures. Yet within the Low Winterlands lies Witchwood, a realm just as inhospitable. This is the domain of the Ice Queen, a creature both beautiful and terrible, whose powers extend far beyond mortal ken.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Witchwood.

* **Fire Sense:** Fire and heat are anathema to the Ice Queen. She automatically senses the presence of fire elementalists and clerics of Kenaz and Sigel who intrude in her realm, though she can narrow down their location only to within ten miles of their actual position. An intruder casting any spell with a fire or heat trapping allows the distance to be narrowed down to one mile.

* **My Realm:** The Ice Queen has great control over her realm. At her whim she can call down blizzards, cold snaps, fog, freezing rain, heavy snowfall, or icicle rain anywhere in Witchwood. The minimum area she can affect is one square mile. The maximum area is the entire forest realm.

Furthermore, she can summon any of these effects only along the border, thus making intrusion or escape a difficult proposition.

* **No Respect:** Frostborn, hrimwisards, and clerics of Thrym are welcome in Witchwood, but are not treated with any great respect or special protection, for none compare in power to the awesome might of the realm's ruler. Those who wish to take up residence may do so, but only after swearing undying loyalty to the Ice Queen.

* **Temperature:** The temperature of the forest also changes as one heads deeper. In the outer region of deciduous trees, the temperature is equivalent to the Low Winterlands. Among the pines it is the same as the High Winterlands. The core, an area some 50 miles in diameter (centered on the Winter Palace), is equivalent to the outer Hellfrost.

WHO IS THE ICE QUEEN?

The Ice Queen. The White Witch. The White Lady. The Frost Hag. Thrym's Maiden. The ruler of Witchwood has many titles, yet no one has ever apportioned her a true name. Even skalds, famed for creating names for the heroes and villains of their tales and songs, have avoided doing so for the Ice Queen.

Her physical appearance is subject to much debate, even among those who have entered her presence and survived. Some insist she is a frost giantess with flesh of living ice and white-blue icicles for hair. Others state she is a hrimwisard of unearthly beauty. Yet others insist they saw a vile hag, her demeanor as cold as the wintry realm she rules. Whether these were illusions, proxies, or the real thing none can say for sure.

From whence the Ice Queen came is equally a mystery. Until the rising of the Winter Palace 125 years ago she appeared in neither legend nor song. A favorite tale sung by skalds tells how a priestess of Thrym journeyed deep into the Hellfrost. She wandered so far in the terrible realm that she crossed into Thrym's divine realm, whereupon she knelt before the winter god and vowed eternal loyalty. In return, Thrym blessed her with immortality and an array of powers over ice and snow. Clerics of Kenaz oft point out that in doing so Thrym showed his contempt for the Compact, but the skalds remind them that if the story is true, then Thrym's actions occurred in the heavenly realms, where the gods have free rein to do as they wish.

The story is popular, but it is not the only origin story. Those who believe she is a frost giantess simply hold she is one of the true frost giants, creatures of old who lost a great war against the gods and who dwelt in the deep frozen realms long before the Icewall rose and the Hellfrost came. Her beauty and powers lead others to name her as a fey noble of the Unseelie, powerful, terrible beings without equal in the mortal realm. While it is true Witchwood of old was home to several fey nobles, none took any of the titles the Ice Queen uses. A small few dare to claim she is beyond fey, and that she is an actual minor god. A deity appearing on the mortal realm would be a direct and blatant contravention of the Compact, yet with Kenaz and Sigel missing, Scaetha locked in war against Hela, and the other gods devoted to their duties, perhaps, just perhaps, her existence has gone unnoticed in the heavens.

GEOGRAPHY

The outer extents of Witchwood appear no different than any other Low Winterlands' forest. Ice and snow blanket the ground and trees for much of the year, thawing only for a short spell in the summer. Even deeper in, the forest looks like a regular forest, albeit one swathed in near-permanent winter. An explorer could easily imagine he was in the Great Forest or a taiga elf realm.

Yet Witchwood feels different. Beneath the ordinary landscape lurks an indefinable something. The forest seems alive, not with animals and monsters, though such exist in abundance, but as a separate entity. The feeling of being constantly watched and examined is inescapable, though the scrutiny is neither overt nor malevolent. Snowy owls, arctic hares and foxes, and white squirrels, all natural residents of the Winterlands, seem to take an unusual interest in intruders, showing curiosity rather than fear. Of course, legends claim these are spies for the Ice Queen, a fact few who have entered the realm care to deny out of hand.

The greatest danger is not the orcs or ice trolls or frost giants, but the weather. In the blink of an eye the clear sky can be obscured by raging blizzards, freezing rain, icicle rain and hail the size of sling stones, and thick, freezing fog. Such events are seemingly supernatural, for weather can be extremely localized down to just a few square miles, leaving the rest of the realm untouched. The temperature can plummet is seconds, freezing exposed skin and causing frost to form in beards and hair.

FLORA OF WITCHWOOD

Entries marked "*" can be used in herbal remedies. The winter penalty to find these plants is removed, replaced with a –2 penalty in summer months.

Chill Thorn: Long, bone-white in color, and wickedly sharp, chill thorns are the most dangerous of Witchwood's flora. Anyone moving through a patch at greater than half Pace must make an Agility roll (–2 if running) or have a thorn break off and penetrate their flesh. Chill thorns quickly work their way toward the heart. The victim must make a Vigor roll every 10 minutes until either the thorn is removed (requires a single Healing roll at –4), he passes three consecutive rolls (at which time the thorn dissolves), or he fails a roll. A warming remedy rubbed over the entry point gives +1 to the Vigor roll, but provides no other benefit.

On a failure, the victim takes 2d6 damage each round for five rounds, ignoring all armor, as his body literally begins to freeze from the inside. Only a healing spell with a fire or heat trapping can cure this damage. Otherwise, natural Healing is required. Some

witchwood



Population: Unknown.
Ruler: The Ice Queen
Religion: Thrym
Imports: Wine
Exports: None

Iceberg Ferry
Temple
Ludogov
Jakelow R.
N
W
E
S
The Glistening Caves
Whitedeath River
Witchwood
Whitedeath Crossing
The Winter Pal
Witchwood
Var's Folly
The Mage School
anic e mountains
marches
The Frozen Fortress
Cave of Rending
The Mad Duke's Maze
Hammer Peak
The Battlefield
Kingsmead
Valley of Dreams
owns
Woodtown
0 10 25 50 100 200



Hearth Knights claim to have seen frozen zombies, their skin bristling with chill thorns, staggering through the frozen realm.

Icewood Needles: The pine needles from living icewood trees can be distilled into a thin, pale oil. Creating a single pint requires 20 pounds of needles and an hour to distil the oil (during which time it must be gently heated over a fire or coldfire).

A pint of icewood oil burns like regular oil, except it produces a coldfire flame and burns with a stark blue-white light.

Lady of Winter*: Shaped like a bluebell with light blue flowers and found only growing amid the pines of Witchwood's inner region, lady of winter can be turned into a masking brew (see Rassilon Expansion).

Snow Blossom*: A moss that grows on exposed rock. When in full bloom, which occurs in winter, snow blossom looks like fresh snow, so fine are the flowers. Carefully harvested and prepared, the flowers work as a numbing herbal concoction.

White Nettle*: A relative of more common stinging nettles. Differentiated only by its white flowers, boiling and chewing white nettle leaves work as an antitoxin.

White Rose*: Named for the color of the stems as well as the flower, white rose oil can be used to create an herbal soporific.

Witch Frond*: A mossy growth which hangs downward from trees like a gossamer dress. When properly prepared, it is a food substitute herbal brew. Much of Witchwood's native fauna can digest it raw, and it serves as their major food source.

Military

Although referred to as an uncivilized realm, Witchwood maintains a standing army and has access to countless barbaric auxiliaries, not to mention some special troops.

Serving as the Ice Queen's main organized army are 1,000 Tuomi cavalry known as the White Riders. Broken down into ten companies of 100 men, each led by a captain and with a hrimwisard and cleric of Thrym in their ranks, the White Riders are kept mobile along the borders with the Borderlands, the Drachenlands, and Chalcis.

They set up a temporary camp, hacking down trees to form a palisade, patrol the area for a week or two, enforce the Ice Queen's decrees among her non-human minions, then torch their camp, and move on. The captain and spellcasters are mounted on pygmy mammoths, the rest of the warriors ride snow-white horses. These horses, found nowhere else in Rassilon, are resistant to cold.

Serving as protectors of the Winter Palace are 300 frostborn warriors, at least 10% of whom have rudimentary hrimwisard training. They are known as the Winter Guard, both for their race, duties, and the color of their armor and tabards. When patrolling, the Winter Guard use snow leopards in the role of guard dogs.

The last permanent unit is the Blizzard Guard, a force of 50 female taiga elf bladedancers all of whom have advanced training as hrimwisards. Each member of the Blizzard Guard has an armored polar bear, equipped with a war saddle and magically bonded to the taiga elf (treat as the Beast Bond Edge). These elite warriors serve as the Ice Queen's personal guard, and are answerable only to her. They are never found outside the Winter Palace, for the Ice Queen has never been known to leave her fortress home.

In addition to these forces, the Ice Queen can call upon ice trolls, dire wolf-mounted snow orcs, ice goblins, and frost giants, as well as a number of Hellfrost dragons who roost just outside the border in the Granite Mountains, and at least three packs of frost wolves.

Although there are many other horrors, such as cryohydras, Hellfrost orms, coldfire salamanders and sprites, and snow wings, lurking in Witchwood, it is not known if the Ice Queen has any true control over them.

Major Locales

Although Witchwood is a realm of adventuring opportunities, the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* mentions very few specific places worthy of exploration. This section details a number of adventuring locales for worthy heroes.

THE BURNING TEMPLE

To the west of the High Moor, in an area now engulfed by Witchwood, stand the weathered remains of a temple to Kenaz, god of fire and the hearth.

The inhabitants of Witchwood, even the frost giants, avoid the site, and wisely so. The temple is aptly named, for the outer walls shimmer with a thin veneer of flickering orange-yellow flame, much reduced in intensity over time but capable of searing flesh nonetheless. The temperature fluctuates slightly, but it is never colder than a Hearthland summer day, even in the harshest winter. At night, the walls shed Dim lighting (–1), but only in adjacent squares.

The temple's outer wall is smashed and breeched in multiple locations, but the temple proper (a roofless, square structure with multiple chimneys), though cracked and weathered, remains structurally sound. Within the extensive basement was said to lie a fire locus of tremendous magnitude, the focus of the cult's activities here. Once it was viewed as a manifestation of Kenaz.

No gentle caress of the elemental realms formed the locus—this was a direct rip through the fabric of the planes, and at its core was a sliver of the Elemental Realm of Fire. Fire elementals of immense size and ferocity are said to walk the corridors and halls, incinerating any who trespass, regardless of their divine allegiance.

The temple was not sacked during the Blizzard War, nor were the vaults ever cleared after the event. As a major temple, it likely housed copious quantities of treasure and a sizeable stock of weapons, armor, and metal ingots. While the arms and armor may have rusted, some of the ingots may be salvageable.

While the locals avoid entering the site, the Ice Queen has given very strict instructions that the temple is to be watched at all times. Intruders are to be attacked before they enter the temple and their presence immediately reported back. The warmer temperature makes it an ideal refuge for intruders, and the temple's vaults have never been explored. Given the temple's importance, it may be a repository for fire-based relics, something the frost maiden is not keen to see wielded by her enemies.

The temple is known across the western lands. Skalds, ever ones to go for fanciful options, claim the temple was abandoned during the Blizzard War. The high priest stood his ground in the face of advancing Hellfrost dragons, shouting a curse into the howling north wind that if he died, his blood would set the ground alight. More likely the locus is the true cause of the burning walls.

Until its engulfment by the encroaching forest, it was a major site of pilgrimage for clerics of Kenaz. These days very few clerics make the journey, and the last recorded successful pilgrimage was over 60 years ago.

FORLORN KEEP

At the northern edge of the High Moor stands Forlorn Keep, a stone-built fortification of Anari design. Until 20 years ago it stood on Chalcis' border with the Drachenlands, but it now lies some 35 miles inside Witchwood. Erected by the Anari as a base from where their armies would futilely strive to pacify the Tuomi tribes, the fort has played an important role in Chalcis' history.

The garrison stood fast against the forces of the Liche-Priest, putting up such a valiant defense that the undead general eventually gave up his attack on Chalcis and marched west to sack Aspiria. During the Blizzard War, the brave but ultimately doomed garrison stubbornly held out to the last man, their sacrifice buying Chalcis time to rally her forces. Three sieges by Drachenlanders resulted in terrible losses, but the defenders refused to surrender. When reinforcements arrived in force, the surviving defenders led the counterattack. Troops from the keep formed the vanguard during the Orcblood War, fighting and dying to ensure victory over the marauding orcs.

For all its history of steadfast defense, its defenders could do little but watch as the trees of Witchwood crept ever closer. Two decades ago, the fort, considered unconquerable by many Chalcians, was finally captured by denizens of the frozen realm.

Where sheer might could not prevail, magic won the day. A powerful spell, some say cast by the Ice Queen in person, froze and then shattered the outer wall. Thundering frost giants, snarling winter wolves, and howling snow orcs stormed the gap, slaughtering the defenders without mercy. By the time Chalcis' general learned of the attack, the fort had fallen. A counterattack was proposed but ultimately abandoned, for scouts had reported the breech in the great wall was plugged by blocks of dense ice. Chalcis' greatest fort was now in the hands of her enemies.

Forlorn Keep remains garrisoned by orcs and frost giants. Each winter, when biting winds and driving snow keep Chalcis' defenders in their barracks and forts, the barbaric garrison sallies forth, raiding villages and farms at will.

Duke Howel knows the keep is a major threat, for should the forces of Witchwood ever launch a full invasion it would serve as a primary base. He also knows that sending an army against the fort would require a long march through Witchwood, a trek likely to cost many lives. He is also fully aware that each year the keep lies deeper and deeper in the frozen realm. Unless action is taken soon, it will be unassailable. But where an army might fail, a band of assassins and saboteurs might prevail, and the duke has enough money to hire the best.

THE FROZEN FORTRESS

The northern foothills of the Granite Mountains extend into southern Witchwood. Here the Lakeflow River has its twin heads. Along the eastern arm, several springs well up through ancient cracks in the stone, their waters merging and flowing downhill through a valley far wider than their meager waters would warrant.

As one carries on further into the mountains, the valley narrows and the walls tower ever higher. Eventually one discovers the reason for the wider valley downstream. Up ahead, the entire valley floor is coated in a sheet of ice, the water locked into solid mass, its surface rippled as if flash frozen. Here lies the true source of the western arm of the Lakeflow, though its waters have not flowed in many centuries.

Rounding a bend, explorers cannot help but stare in awe at the site ahead of them. Dominating the end of the valley is a huge fortress of black granite, the stone worked with such precision it appears made of a single slab of monumental proportions. The valley widens here to a distance of over 400 feet, the black walls touching both sides, seemingly molded into the living rock for no joins are visible.

At the base of the fortress are multiple arches. Once, water flowed through these from a lake concealed behind the vast granite wall, tumbling down the mountainside to form the Lakeflow. Today, only ice sits in them. What waits to be discovered is whether the great lake from which the water flows is also frozen solid.

Gaping window slits, as soulless as the walls they breech, gaze impassively down the valley. Were archers present, anyone approaching the dark entrance to the fortress, a colossal set of stone doors reached by a steep set of steps surrounded by the frozen river, would be a pincushion before advancing more than half the distance. Yet no arrows fly, for the Frozen Fortress has long been abandoned.

Like many such places there are countless rumors and stories concerning the Frozen Fortress. Many believe it is the work of frost giants, erected either during or shortly after the Blizzard War, for such is its scale that no other race could possibly have erected such an edifice. Others say frost dwarves created the fortress as a dam across the valley long before the war, abandoning it when humans began to explore the region. Some tales relate to a powerful elementalist, a master of earth and water, who sought to prove his power by crafting an eternal monument to his art. Devoid of markings, inscriptions, and furnishings, at least in areas explored so far, whoever or whatever built the fortress left no clue to their identity.

Similarly, the reason why the river froze is much debated. A powerful enchantment, a fell curse, the presence of an ancient Hellfrost dragon which slithered into the fortress as a juvenile and grew to monstrous size (no one questions what it ate to grow to such size), and the presence of a major temple to Thrym are all popular but unverified suggestions.

Few have entered the Frozen Fortress, and those who did made little progress in exploring its vastness before being driven out by fierce white-skinned orcs, ice trolls, and other horrors. Indications are something powerful rules here, but exactly what that something is has yet to be discovered. Perhaps some things are best left mysteries, and sleeping dogs, as the Saxa say, should be allowed to lie.

THE GLADE OF FROZEN DEATH

Within the confines of Witchwood is a large clearing. Remarkably lifelike ice statues stand, crouch, or lie here, placed without pattern or aesthetic value.

The local tribe of snow orcs shuns the glade, going no further than its boundary, for it is said to be cursed. One legend says the glade is the Ice Queen's private retreat, the statues victims of her icy kiss or stare. While blizzards howl, it is claimed the frigid queen walks the glade, stroking the statues and talking to them as if they can hear her words. Another says the area is home to a Hellfrost basilisk, whose gaze can turn a creature to ice.

It is quite likely that animated ice statues number among the sculptures, guardians set in place to ensure trespassers regret their intrusion. Some may even be rarer entities—ice golems or ice elementals, bound by ancient magic to remain in the glade.

THE GLISTENING CAVES

Many dangerous creatures dwell in the confines of Witchwood. Most of these are solitary hunters and easily avoided, but there is one area even the Ice Queen's soldiers fears to tread, for here lurks a large colony of Hellfrost spiders. Although the hairy spiders hunt amongst the trees, they lair and store their frozen meals in a labyrinthine cave system—the Glistening Caves. The spiders have no taste for inorganic matter, and the slick, icy cave floor is strewn with objects carried by their many victims.

Some skalds claim the spiders are another tool of the Ice Queen, left in peace to roam freely as a deterrent to intruders. Others say they were housed in the cave as guardians, though what they might be watching over is anyone's guess. Perhaps, as some sing, the cave system extends to beneath the Winter Palace. If true, this is perhaps the best way to travel to the capital, for once underground adventurers need have no fear of being spotted by patrols (although it is not a place for arachnophobes).

Others tell tales of an immense, bloated, brood mother that lives in the dark depths of the lowest caves—a monstrous spider whose sole purpose is to spawn the next generation of Hellfrost spiders and who is fed on minions of the Ice Queen who fail in their duties.

RED BOAR DELL

Witchwood is rent by innumerable dells, though few are of any great depth or width. One dell of interest to explorers hoping to survive the harsh climate is inhabited by a unique species of boar.

Visibly, they can be easily distinguished by their coarse red hair and bright red tusks. When roused to anger, they display a far more unearthly heritage—they burst into flames. This doesn't harm the boars, but it is hot enough to burn the flesh of other creatures who come into contact with the enraged boar. A hunter who manages to kill one quickly discovers they have a third distinct trait—their flesh is pre-cooked, meaning it can be eaten straight off the bone without the need for a fire.

The species is commonly known as "Kenaz's boars." One story says that swine from his celestial herd escaped and somehow found their way to the mortal realm, though why they settled in Witchwood is unknown. Another says that Kenaz let them loose in Witchwood to taunt the Ice Queen and give her enemies adequate food.

The cult of Kenaz holds that whatever the nature of the boars, they are sacred animals, not mundane beasts to be hunted for food or sport by mortals. A follower of Kenaz who harms one of the creatures has committed a minor sin. It is a major sin to eat of their flesh. A follower who hunts a boar purely for sport has tainted his soul with a mortal sin.

VAR'S FOLLY

While many lamented the rise of the Winter Palace and the growth of living icewood trees, some took it as an opportunity. An enterprising priest of Var invested substantial profits in the formation of a fortified village not far from the frozen core. Back then Witchwood extended only 100 miles east of the Whitedeath River, and the heartland was far more accessible.

Icewood trees were felled and transported to Karad Noshrek, the dwarves paying handsomely in glittering gems and gold ingots for the precious wood. The village grew to a small town on its profits, the citizens became enamored of importing expensive luxuries, and the temple to Var became a major trading post.

One winter's night, a lone figure wrapped in a pale blue cloak approached the main gate and ordered the settlers to leave or face destruction. None took the threat seriously, for the town had a large garrison and strong fortifications. Then the blizzard came. Food ran low, and still the wind howled and the snow fell.

The resident cleric of Kenaz, bribed by the cult of Var to appease the growing voices of discontent, bade the townsfolk to stay, vowing that Kenaz would protect them. However, the settlers saw only death on the horizon and decided to abandon their homes. Despite the threat of a slow, cold death, so greedy were they that they fled carrying as many of their expensive possessions as they could. Slowed by their precious burden, none made it far before freezing to death in the howling winter storm.

By the time the storm ended, Witchwood had grown at supernatural speed, completely engulfing the town. Skalds claim the huge temple of Var, its vast treasury full of gems and storerooms bulging with trade goods, remains intact, as do the richly appointed homes of the citizens. They are also quick to add that Var's Folly, as the site has become known, is haunted by the shades of its former citizens, whose lust for material wealth prevented their souls from traveling to the Afterlife.

WHITEDEATH CROSSING

The Whitedeath River runs fast and true from south to north through the center of Witchwood, its icy waters continuing on through the Drachenlands and into Serpent Lake. Powerful magic keeps it from totally freezing even while it runs through lands as cold as the Hellfrost. Turbulent and carrying dangerous ice floes, there is only one ferry (and no bridges) along the entire length.

A small fort, constructed from huge blocks of solid ice by frost giants, stands on each bank. Garrisoned in each fort are two score veteran snow orc warriors responsible for guarding the crossing. On the Winter Palace side live two lesser frost giants, dumb brutes used for their muscle and as extra guards as required.

The ferry is a colossal raft made of icewood and covered in Hellfrost dragon scales. It is connected to a rope as thick as a man's arm, which spans the river. When someone wishes to cross, the two giants mount the raft and haul it through the choppy water. Ten orc warriors from the fort also board the raft. Once the travelers have been safely delivered, the raft is swiftly returned to the east bank.

An alchemical coldfire *blast* device is attached to where the rope fixes on the east bank. Activated by smacking it hard, the spell is designed to destroy the rope, preventing foes from using the ferry. Such is the danger of Witchwood that it has never been used in anger.

PERSONS OF NOTE

While the Ice Queen is a frosty enigma, a little more is known about other inhabitants of Witchwood.

EGINHARD FLAMEHAIR

Eginhard is not a native of Witchwood. A strapping Saxa with long flame-red hair and beard that blows in the wind like licks of flame, Eginhard is actually a paladin of Kenaz. The last survivor of an expedition sent to slay the Ice Queen, the hero has been

trapped in Witchwood for the last five years. Each time he tries to leave, fierce blizzards drive him back into the forest. Since he cannot leave, Eginhard has made it is his goal to make as much trouble for the Ice Queen as possible. Despite his miracles being harder to invoke, Eginhard has cut and burned his way back and forth across Witchwood, leaving scores of dead orcs, goblins, and giants in his wake.

The Ice Queen knows of Eginhard's existence, and it is her will he never leave her domain. Rather than deliberately send troops to eradicate the pest, she has decided to leave him to his own devices to see how long one cleric of her hated enemy can survive. This is not just sport for the queen, but a valuable exercise in intelligence gathering, for what one cleric of Kenaz can achieve would be multiplied if others with his drive and tenacity decided to invade Witchwood.

Ghost Wolf

A male taiga elf, Ghost Wolf carries the illustrious title of Lord Protector of Witchwood. Consort to the Ice Queen and commander of the armies (except the Blizzard Guard), Ghost Wolf is a skilled bladedancer, a very talented hrimwisard, and a shrewd diplomat. For all his power and position, he remains a servant, and has no authority to speak on behalf of his liege.

He is never seen in public without his cloak, made from the fur of a frost wolf lord who dared speak back to the Ice Queen, and a pair of black ice long swords.

Many tales are told of Ghost Wolf beneath the ice-clad trees. That he slew a frost wolf lord is well known, but he is also credited with the deaths of over 20 clerics of Kenaz, a dozen Sword Knights, a frost giant jarl who plotted rebellion, and an unknown number of other creatures whose loyalty to the Ice Queen was judged questionable. Whether the stories are true or not, none can say. However, his very presence is enough to quell sedition.

The Ice Queen's Herald

The Ice Queen rarely leaves her frozen palace and never ventures beyond the forest's borders. When she has need to deal with outsiders or communicate with her scattered minions, she invariably despatches her herald. Like all heralds, its words are considered those of its master. While it most often refers to itself as a herald, it has also used the titles Ice Queen's Mouth and Ice Queen's Voice.

As with its queen, the herald is an enigma. Those few foreign emissaries who have stood in its presence describe only its voluminous pale blue cloak, for absolutely nothing of the person can be seen beneath. Many believe it has no earthly form, being a fell spirit of winter summoned into service by the Ice Queen. More fanciful tales hold that it is the living will of the forest's ruler, separate in form yet joined in mind. Of course, it might just as easily be a frostborn or hrimwisard.

Regardless, the herald's gender, assuming it actually has one, is unknown, hence the use of "it." Even its voice, as gentle as falling snow when at ease and as terrible as a raging blizzard when roused, is asexual.

Whatever its origin, the herald is no lowly lackey. Its robes are of the finest quality and trimmed in polar bear fur. It has unlimited access to the Ice Queen, though whether it is truly free to speak its mind in her presence is unknown.

WHY COME HERE?

Although not as expansive or cold as the Hellfrost, or indeed the High Winterlands, Witchwood is a microcosm of ice and snow, inhabited by a queen who seeks no traffic with outsiders and among whose minions number many fell beasts. So what can lure adventurers here?

* Orders. Hearth Knights, fire elementalists of the Convocation, and clerics of Kenaz and Sigel are all beholden to their respective organizations. While not at their masters' beck and call like lapdogs, they are expected to follow orders.

While followers of Kenaz and Sigel may enter Witchwood to wage battle against the icy, Thrym worshipping denizens, the Hearth Knights are more interested in intelligence gathering. Whether the Ice Queen is a power of good or evil has yet to be determined, and so for now the Hearth Knights urge caution. Some junior Hearth Knights request permission to venture here in preparation for advancement to Sword Knight, or simply to test their mettle and resolve in the hostile realm.

Fire elementalists belonging to the Convocation might be sent here as a test to see if they are worthy of promotion or as part of their final exams. Others come here voluntarily to test their powers against the inhabitants, or on quests to discover more about the supposed "fifth element."

Clerics of Thrym may be ordered here to serve the Ice Queen for a short period, negotiate a treaty (perhaps to secure allies for a raid on Aspiria or Chalcis), or even spy on the ruler of the frozen realm or steal a relic from her grasp, for trust is a rare commodity among servants of the evil gods.

* Service. In a party comprised mainly of frostborn, hrimwisards, and clerics of Thrym, the heroes may seek out the Ice Queen as a patron. While campaigns involving a powerful sponsor can quickly devolve into an endless series of orders, robbing the heroes of much free will, there is also plentiful opportunity for letting the characters have a free hand.

For instance, the Ice Queen may grant the heroes stewardship over an area of forest. Though given orders to expand the realm, protect it from intruders, and gather intelligence on their neighbors, they are left alone to rule as they wish, even being allowed to venture forth on other quests. Only rarely does the Ice Queen interfere directly in their affairs, though she keeps a careful eye on her underlings.

* Exploration. Before the Ice Queen came to Witchwood, it was a minor forest, a strip of green along the Whitedeath River, barely 50 miles long and 20 miles deep. As the forest has expanded, it has gobbled up swathes of northwest Chalcis and devoured a much of the Drachenlands' southeastern provinces. Long abandoned towns, villages, castles, and temples, home now only to vile creatures, dot the landscape. The secrets and treasures they may hold are a lure to many adventurers.

Adventure Seeds

* An Aspirian nobleman and vintner has heard rumors that grapes grow in the core of Witchwood. Stories claim the grape produces a crisp, clear white wine of exquisite taste and bouquet. Naturally, the grape is also impervious to any level of cold.

Knowing that cultivating these grapes could give his ailing vineyard a much needed boost, and ruin those vintners currently fixated on conventional ice grapes, he hires the heroes to enter Witchwood and bring back as many viable vines as they can carry. Are the grapes a reality or just a storyteller's yarn?

* An herbalist hires the party to deliver him a living chill thorn bush. He has heard of the deadly thorns and desires to create a more effective herbal cure. The herbalist is actually an assassin, perhaps a cleric of Niht, and he wants to cultivate the plant for its lethal thorns. Should the heroes succeed, they may be called upon later to deal with a spate of unusual murders—all the victims have frozen to death from the inside out.

* Divinations from the cult of Kenaz have revealed the existence of unusual elementals in Witchwood. They require skilled adventurers to accompany a number of their clerics. The heroes are required to locate and engage the elementals in combat, while the clerics study the creatures' strengths and weaknesses for future reference.

* Duke Howel of Chalcis, King Halgroth V, Lord Marshal Jaufre Humbert, or some other important dignitary asks the heroes, who should have Glory 150+, to act as heralds to the court of the Ice Queen. What message the dignitary desires to communicate to the mysterious maiden should be decided based on the GM's campaign. After surviving the hazards of the outer forest (a herald's standard meaning little to a hungry troll or Hellfrost dragon), the adventurers must deal with the intrigue of the royal court, a court where one wrong word could spell instant death.

WITHERED LANDS

The dark realm known as the Withered Lands has been a thorn in the side of the living since its founding. Permanently shrouded in mist and corrupted by the endless necromantic magic invoked there, it is a land rightly shunned by the living. All save the cult of Scaetha, that is, for this unhallowed land is their preferred hunting ground.

RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Withered Lands.

* **Abhorrent to Life:** The Withered Lands seem to detest life. All *healing, greater healing, regeneration*, and *succor* spells incur a –1 penalty, as do natural Healing rolls and rolls to create any form of healing herbal brew. No healing herbs grow here.

* **Gloomy:** It is a realm where even the strongest sunlight filters through as only a dim glow, and at night it is darker than pitch. The ambient lighting is Dim (–1) during bright days and Dark (–2) when it is cloudy. At night, it is always Pitch Dark (–4).

* **Nightmare Realm:** Knowledge of what dwells here, the deformed landscape, strange noises, and permanent shroud of fog give a –1 penalty to Spirit rolls to resist Fear. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others.

* **Necromantic Energy:** The entirety of the Withered Lands counts as a graveyard for the purposes of characters with the Disciple of Hela Edge.

* **Tainted Land:** Survival rolls to catch game or find potable water incur a –4 penalty.

* **Undead Realm:** Mundane creatures like wolves and rats can be found here, but all have the Undead special ability.

ATMOSPHERE

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* briefly describes the landscape of the realm, but it says little of the atmosphere within the vile territory.

Whereas the Liche Lands of Old feel wrong in subtle ways, the Withered Lands are a full assault. Just crossing the misty border is a trial, no matter how many times the journey has been made. Shadowy forms of gnarled, sickly trees seem to move in the swirling mist, their branches beckoning the unready to their doom.

Stepping through the mists, which cling and cloy like spectral tendrils, is to step into a nightmare realm. Here lurk no sly terrors, memories of a bygone age of undead rule vaguely hinting of the undead, but open manifestations of damnation.

Impaled corpses, often dismembered, are left as grisly warnings that the living are unwelcome here. One may find a headless corpse impaled on a stake, its arms pinned outward carrying warning signs, or stumble across a tree, its boughs sagging with severed heads. The wind carries the unmistakable stench of carrion and decay, sickening the stomach of even veteran clerics of Scaetha. Within a day, clothing is impregnated with the same odor, and with no fresh water anywhere in the Withered Lands it is impossible to remove the taint.

Shadows dance on the periphery of vision and faint, mocking voices whisper continually. Some are nothing but figments of the imagination, given semblance of life by one's own fears, while others are deadly adversaries, biding their time to attack or spying for their undead masters. Ruins cling to hilltops or lie in valleys in the Black Heath, sickly, twisted vines crawling over the stonework, which glows faintly with an unearthly pallor.

The mist conceals many terrors, and attacks, while rarely overpowering are frequent. Snatching enough sleep to be fully rested is a luxury, and even recovering from lesser fatigue can be difficult. Those who survive they sojourn stumble out tired of flesh and weary of soul, often nursing injuries that refuse to heal properly within the accursed land and smelling of death. It is an experience few ever forget, and even fewer wish to repeat.

ARMY OF SCAETHA

The cult of Scaetha claims to have the Withered Lands encircled. Such claims are gross exaggerations of the reality of the situation, designed to appease the inhabitants of neighboring lands and prevent them from panicking. The line of steel and faith is too thin to provide an effective deterrent should the undead strike in force. Fortunately for the civilized races, they seem reluctant to do so.

The cult's largest fortification is at Deathwatch, a castle in the Freelands. Since their entire focus is on the Withered Lands, the population of the fortress is detailed here.

* The clergy of Scaetha. Nine disciple paladins, 40 normal paladins, ten disciple priests, and 40 normal priests.

* The Deathdealer mercenary company. The elite Deathdealers maintain a force of 100 heavy cavalry, 100 heavy infantry, 50 archers, and 50 specialists (a mixture of mages, scouts, skirmishers, huscarls, thieves, and other troops assigned to duties as required).

* Mercenaries. Four heavy infantry, three light infantry, two heavy cavalry, and four light cavalry companies, each of 100 men.

* Healers. Of the 50 healers stationed here, six are priests of Eira, five are paladins of Eira, and ten are Sisters of Mercy. Of the others, three-quarters honor Eira, while the rest are worshippers of Scaetha. All are skilled in herbalism and the clerics are trained alchemists.

* Support staff. The remaining 300 inhabitants are support staff—cooks, armorers, blacksmiths, carpenters, stable hands, scribes, and such like.

PRAYER TO SCAETHA

Below is a traditional prayer to Scaetha made before entering the Withered Lands. Typically, odd numbered lines (indicated in italics) are spoken by the senior cleric of Scaetha, with the even numbered lines spoken en masse by all those about to enter the accursed realm. As is normal for the cult, prayers are affirmative statements, rather than pleas for assistance. By tradition, the prayer ends by striking one's weapon against one's shield rim or armor twice, then shouting the name Scaetha. This is repeated four times, the volume increasing each time.

I shall walk in the shadows that others may walk in the light
For my faith guides me in darkness
I shall not succumb to fear of flesh, mind, or soul
For my faith is my strength
I shall brush aside the hand of Death
For my faith is my armor
I shall cut down my enemies
For my faith is my weapon
I shall not be wearied by sleep or weakened by hunger
For my faith succors me
I shall fear not the death of my flesh
For my soul is pledged to Scaetha (non-Scaetha worshippers use the name of their patron deity)
I shall show no mercy to the enemies of the living
Death to the damned!

OTHER FORCES

Encircling the Withered Lands on the Freelands' border are 20 motte-and-bailey castles. Four contain temples to Scaetha, while the rest house only shrines. Each is garrisoned by three to five paladins, a similar number of priests, a single mercenary company of 100 men, and a dozen non-combatants. Of the clerics, typically only one is a disciple, and he or she serves as the commander.

Located between each one at a distance of roughly five to ten miles, depending on the terrain, are signal towers, simple affairs garrisoned by a single cleric of Scaetha and ten mercenaries. Their sole purpose is to alert the forts to any undead incursion into the Freelands. Royalmark, which shares a border with Darkwood, maintains its own defenses, though the cult of Scaetha does now have a presence in the kingdom.

In times of desperate need, the clerics can call upon the inhabitants of the Freelands to provide troops. Such an act requires advanced notice, however, for the communities are widely scattered, and given the propensity for the militia to flee in the face of an undead horde, the call is only made in dire circumstances.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in the Withered Lands, many others exist. This section delves into some of the other dark locales of the dread realm. These should be considered active adventuring sites, ones your heroes can explore right now.

BLOOD MIRE

Situated in the bottom of a steep-sided valley, Blood Mire is a stretch of weed-coated, dirty-brown water from which black rushes sprout in tangled clumps. Swarms of vicious, biting carrion flies hang in the air like miniature dark clouds, while bloated undead leeches swim lazily through the inky, peat-stained water in search of prey. Swollen, black stained corpses, ensnared in the thick layer of weeds, litter the landscape. Most are simply what they seem, unfortunate victims of the mire's deadly denizens, but others are animated guardians, ready to strangle those who intrude with the very vines that hold them bound. Passage through Blood Mire is the only way to reach Taxmagulus' black tower. Its dangers are well known to Scaetha's clergy.

DEATHSPIDER HALL

Located amid the sticky, black trees of Darkwood, Deathspider Hall is a site sacred to both Hela and Spiðari, goddess of spiders. Before the Withered Lands consumed the forest, the temple served only the latter goddess. Here cultists and giant spiders would pray to the goddess, offering supplication and sacrifices to feed her bloated form. When the liches rose to power, cultists of Hela stormed the temple, slaying the former occupants and reanimating them as undead guardians.

Reaching the temple is an arduous trek, for the surrounding forest is swathed in spider webs, and all manner of undead giant spiders scuttle through the dark boughs, waiting to drop onto unsuspecting prey.

The dark, red stone of the temple is draped with webs, in which dwell swarms of bloodthirsty undead spiders. Even the cultists of Hela take their lives in their hands when entering the temple, for no sooner are the webs covering the entrance removed than the spiders spin them again.

On the surface the temple appears rather small, spanning just 100 feet to a side. The walls, now cracked and pitted with age, depict images of spiders overlaid with graffiti honoring Hela. At the far end lies the main worship hall. Here stands a three-dimensional spider web carved from stone, in the center of which has been added a human skull. Although Spiðari remains honored by the Hela cultists, actual cultists of Spiðari are not welcomed here—the dual worship serves only to pacify the temple's vile mistress.

The temple extends beneath the forest floor, a network of rough-hewn caverns and natural chambers stretching for many hundreds of feet in all directions and covering six distinct layers. On the bottom layer lives the true mistress of the temple, a giant spider of truly monstrous size and wicked intellect, now undead following a lengthy and costly battle, but no less devoted to Spiðari. She serves the Dark Triumvirate not out of loyalty, but in return for living sacrifices.

Some clerics of Scaetha claim to have encountered zombies, which when hacked open release a swarm of undead spiders. While such tales are treated with an air of skepticism, if true they would indicate the undead spider-queen is still producing young, albeit undead ones.

HALL OF THE PALE LADY

This dark and brooding structure, formerly a grand Saxa feasting hall, stands inside southern Darkwood. Although intact, it is a faded remnant of its glory days. The colored paint has peeled and the wood is rotting, the tapestries that line the inner walls are stained with mold, and the stench of death and decay hangs heavy in the air. Faded it may be, but it is not deserted, and it still plays host to great feasts.

The musty hall is home to the Pale Lady, a vampire of great power, and her vampiric cohorts. Sheltered from the sun by the boughs of Darkwood and the permanent fog, the fiends feast on the blood of victims brought to them by undead servants, who haunt the trade road, and living agents (some willing, some thralls) within neighboring Royalmark. The remnants of their grisly meals—chunks of decaying flesh, marrow-sucked bones, and pools of congealed blood—litter the hall. While the vampires dine, dirges sing tales of the Liche-Priest's might and his imminent rebirth.

Theories abound as to the nature of the Pale Lady. Some skalds and scholars claim she was spawned by the Liche-Priest, whom she served as a consort before abandoning him in the final battle. Others say she was a Saxa noblewoman of great beauty and arrogance who was enticed into undeath by the dark power of the three dread liches when the Withered Lands were created, a priestess of Hela who willingly accepted eternal life, or a cleric of Scaetha who was captured, tortured, corrupted, and converted.

HELA'S GARDEN

No sane person eats anything found in Withered Lands, especially the plants. The remote area of the Black Heath known as Hela's Garden is a poisoner's paradise. Among the many deadly plants one can find are crypt moss (knockout; +1), death weed (lethal; +0), hag's wort (venomous; –1), hagbui's beard (paralysis; –2), Hela's rose (lethal; –4), liche finger (venomous; –1), and nightshade (venomous; +2).

GM's Notes: Entries in parentheses are the type of poison the plant a skilled herbalist can brew up using the plant followed by the rarity modifier (as named plants, this is fixed). Eaten untreated in small quantities, these plants have their potency reduced by one level. For instance, lethal becomes venomous. Knockout herbs are harmless until properly prepared. Larger quantities affect the unfortunate diner as listed. All the listed plants have a base Vigor modifier of +0 if consumed untreated by a herbalist.

KING'S HILL

King's Hill stands ten miles inside Darkwood, a stone's throw from the edge of the trade road that runs through the gloomy realm. A truncated cone measuring 100 yards in diameter and 30 yards high, the hill is artificial, raised by some forgotten culture. Its regular shape is unusual, but were it not for the colossal statue that stands on its flat summit, the hill would go unnoticed, another hill covered in thick, tangled vegetation.

The statue rises 50 feet above the summit, its feet and lower legs lost to black clinging vines. Crackled and weathered by the passage of untold centuries, the remaining features are clearly male (it has a short beard) and those of a warrior. In his left hand he holds a

round shield, its rim pitted and chipped by the endless battering of wind, rain, and frost. His right hand clutches a long sword, the arm bent upward so the sword extends across the shield, in the manner of a warrior banging weapon on shield. Across the figure's brow the faint remains of a circlet.

Who the figure represents is unknown. Few travelers tarry long in Darkwood, there are no writings proclaiming his name, and skalds' songs, many of which predate the Blizzard War, make no mention of such a hill. Perhaps, it is surmised, the man was so well-known in life that no name was necessary. Clues to his identity may lie within the hill, for at the base, facing due east, rise two tall stone pillars. The faint remains of carvings depicting boars and dragons are just visible beneath the thin layer of lichen that clings to the surface. Between the stones is a dark, brooding opening.

No records or stories speak of explorers ever having penetrated the interior, though it is likely generations of Scaetha's clerics have ventured into its depths in their hunt for undead. That the cult has not made its findings public fuels the imagination of those who believe the hill is a vast tomb stocked with glittering jewels and chests full of coins. Believers claim that as protectors of the dead and being vehemently opposed to tomb robbing, the cult would not report any finds of ancient burial treasure, so as to deter thieves. Thus, treasure must lie within simply because the clergy have not mentioned its existence. The logic is flawed, but cannot be verified without investigation.

There is certainly a small stash of treasure on the edge of the trade road facing the opening. Fearful that the hill is home to some powerful hagbui, superstitious (or perhaps just wise) travelers leave a coin or two as an offering, hoping that their supplication will show they are not robbers. If there is an undead lurking within, he evidently has no desire to add to his wealth—the coins date back to the founding of the trade road, and amount to several thousand gold scields (mostly in silver coins).

MEAD HALL OF THE DAMNED

Located ten miles east of the Necropolis of Princes stands a grisly mead hall. Whereas the Saxa raise their halls of wood, this monstrosity is constructed of human bone, the daub a mixture of rotting flesh and congealed blood. Tiles of taut, desiccated flesh line the roof. The great doors, made of the same material as the walls, are emblazoned with green glowing runes of death and suffering.

This is the mead hall of a powerful hagbui calling itself Aethling Gautrek Starkadsunu. Born in –402, Gautrek was a Saxa prince, but sold out his people during the early days of the Anari invasion in return for keeping his title and lands. A tyrant and sadist, Gautrek, now a puppet ruler, spent his days engaging in debauchery and depravity until his assassination.

Condemned to the Abyss for his sins, Gautrek was released during Hela's madness. Drawn back to his corpse, which was buried in the Necropolis of Princes by his Anari masters, he waited out the centuries, unable to leave the vicinity of his tomb until Angtharinax rose to power and severed the bonds that held him some 90 years ago.

Now able to travel freely, Gautrek erected a mead hall from which to rule once more. Here the walls echo with the mournful ballads of dirges, while lesser hagbui (also freed of their tomb bondage) and zombie huscarls drink blood from bone goblets and rip chunks of flesh from roasting captives.

Gautrek, released by Angtharinax to serve as a general, has reverted to his old ways since the liche's disappearance. While he dines and engages in disgusting acts, his black knights are left to command his troops.

NECROPOLIS OF THE PRINCES

In days of yore, the Saxa erected burial mounds on the hills of Meadow Heath, laying their heroes and rulers to rest with their grave goods. Standing amid swathes of brightly colored flowers, the tombs were not a fearful place, but one where the living could give respect to the dead and where skalds retold epic poems and songs to honor the memory of those lives had ended.

THE SOUL LANTERN

During the war against the Liche-Priest, the fledgling cult of Scaetha carried before it the soul lantern. This relic, which some say was bestowed upon mortals by Scaetha with the backing of the other gods, resembled nothing more than a mundane lantern save for the arcane runes of death, evil, and imprisonment engraved on the shutter.

When lit, the lantern shed a green light (filling a Cone Template). Skalds sing that at the moment an undead was slain, the bearer would open the shutter to illuminate the corpse. Timed correctly, the evil soul that inhabited the undead would be drawn into the lantern rather than escaping back to Hela's realm to await a new host body.

What became of the soul lantern is not recorded in any verse or song. Its last recorded appearance was in -29 IR, when the army of light drove into the modern Liche Lands. After being used against a powerful liche, it simply vanished from the stories. Some believe the cult of Scaetha has it safely locked away in a hidden fortress-temple in preparation for the day the Liche-Priest awakens, and that their frequent quests to find it are a ruse to keep their enemies wrong footed. Others claim it was lost in battle or stolen by agents of the Liche-Priest in the final days of the terrible war, and its true whereabouts are unknown.

The mortal races have much to fear if the latter is true. While the soul lantern imprisoned evil spirits, it did not destroy them. Should a necromancer ever learn how to break the mystic runes, then all the souls held captive would be released at once. Such an act committed in a burial place could raise an army of undead in an instant.

The necropolis gained a reputation for being haunted shortly after Hela's madness. Although it was still used to inter the dead (a practice that took generations to die out), mourners did not linger long and the hills no longer rang with skalds' voices. It was only after the awakening of the three liches that the site truly became a realm of fear and terror, shunned by the living.

Covering dozens of square miles, the necropolis comprises hundreds of circular mounds. Some stand alone atop the flattened hills, while others are clustered together in groups of two, three, or four, often among familial lines. The tombs of the lowest-ranking dead are simple mounds. More important dead were interred in mounds encircled by a ditch and bank. Those of the kings, princes, and powerful heroes were adorned with prayer stones, menhirs telling of their glorious deeds, or statues of the deceased.

Fitted with strong stone doors and lined with thick blocks of stone and roof lintels, the cairns were intended to protect the dead from tomb robbers. Today, these same strengths have transformed each tomb into a fortress. Many, but not all, for the clerics of Scaetha clear a tomb or two each year, are home to petty and royal grave wights.

The smallest tombs contain only a single circular or square burial chamber, while the largest are divided into as many as a dozen separate areas.

The tombs are a lure to adventurers and clerics of Scaetha. Although the risks are great, the rewards are many. Gold and gems, something the cult of Scaetha desperately needs to pay its mounting mercenary payments, lie here in abundance. But this is not the true lure—the oldest tombs date back hundreds of years before the rise of the Anari Empire, to an age when relics where more common (though by no means plentiful). Possessed by kings and heroes, it is likely many of the tombs still hold these most precious of objects.

SCAETHA'S HOLD

Believed to be a myth, the result of hallucinations, Scaetha's hold is a ruined castle somewhere in the Black Heath. Those who claim to have visited the site insist it is protected by a powerful spirit, a servant of Scaetha, and thus affords safe shelter in the damnable realm. Scaetha's hold is very real, as is its guardian. The ruins are a sacred site.

When the liches first made their presence felt a disciple of Scaetha, Eulogist Bronwyn ap-Tamar, and her band of paladins occupied the site, intending to hold it against the emerging undead. Vastly outnumbered, they failed. Believing she had failed her goddess, Bronwyn asked to be allowed to remain on the mortal realm as guardian of the site, maintaining it as a sacred place to Scaetha as penance for her failure. Scaetha agreed, though left Bronwyn the option of journeying to the Afterlife when she felt her duty fulfilled.

Spirit Name: The White Watcher.

Ambience: Whereas the Withered Lands reek of death, within Scaetha's hold the unhallowed atmosphere is held at bay. The aura of the cursed realm still hangs here, but its effects are diminished.

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d10.

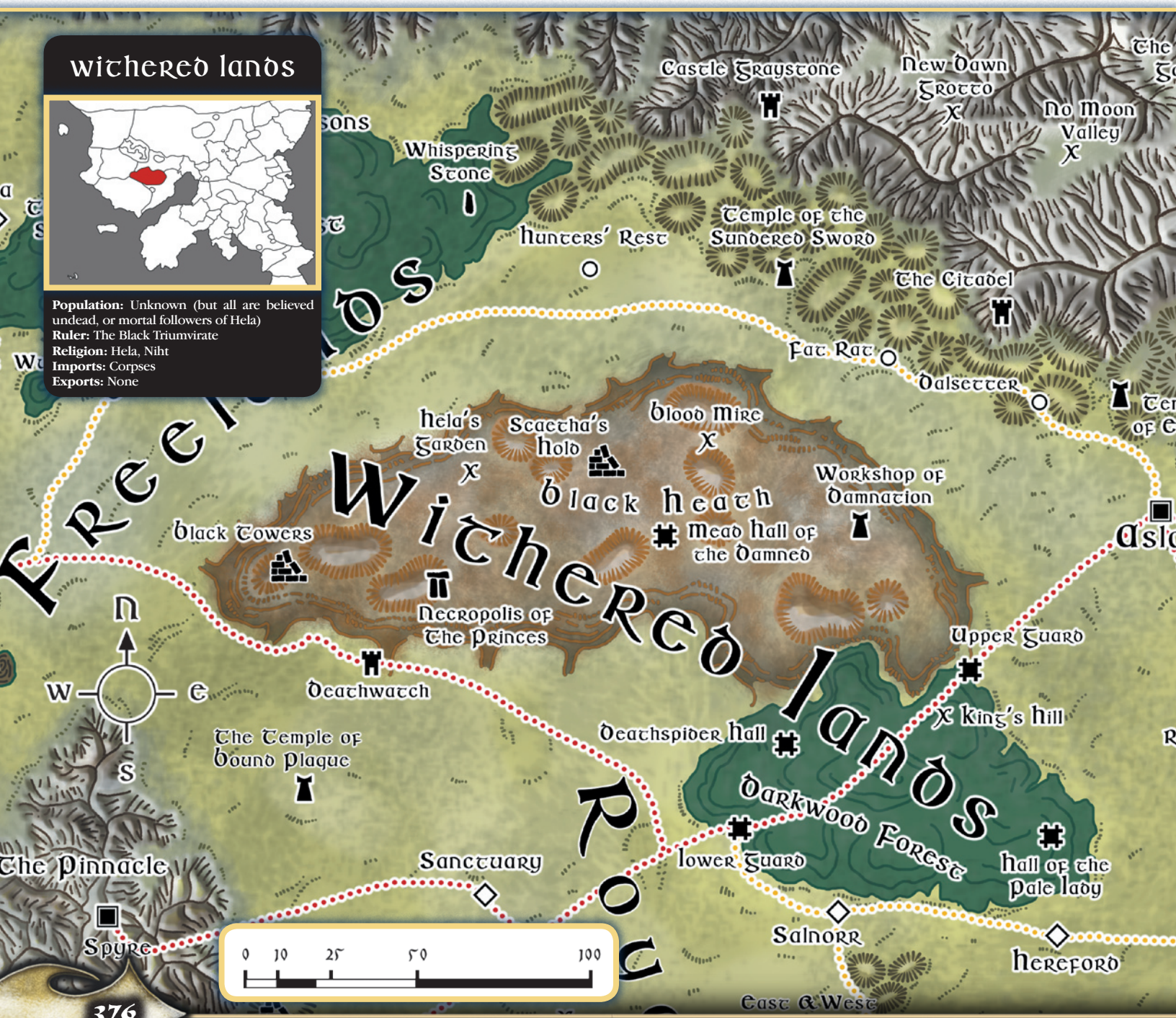
Communication: None usually. If living visitors pray to Scaetha, a faint, ghostly voice is heard joining in with the holy act.

Sacrifice: Prayers to Scaetha must be uttered on entering the site, otherwise the *warding* and *sentry* spells do not function. These must be repeated each dawn, and take one hour.

Powers: The entire site is surrounded by a permanent *warding (undead)* spell. At night, a ghostly sentry clad in antiquated plate armor patrols the perimeter. Treat this as a *sentry* spell cast with a raise. Despite walking a large area, the spirit's senses extend in all directions simultaneously. Neither power can be *dispelled* or *negated*.

While within the confines of the outer wall, the Abhorrent to Life, Nightmare Realm, and Necromantic Energy realm rules do not apply.

Finally, if a follower of Scaetha (cleric or laity) gives up a benny here, they may gain the Champion, Favored Foe (Undead), or Holy Warrior Edge for 24 hours, ignoring all requirements. While each Edge can be gained only once in any 24 hour period, spending multiple bennies allows the hero to pick more than one edge.



WAILING WATCHERS

An encounter rather than a true locale, the wailing watchers are the undead's early warning system. Each watcher is an animated corpse, impaled on a stark stake and tethered in place with strands of sinew. On detecting a living creature, they emit a high-pitched wail, which carries for many miles. Each wailer's scream carries a unique pattern of notes, allowing intelligent undead and other wailers to identify the wailer and zero in on his position. If the first wailer's scream reaches another wailer, it adds to the cacophony, adding any previous identify notes to indicate which wailer detected the intruders.

Treat a wailing watcher as a zombie, but with Notice d8 and the Infravision special ability. Impaled and tethered, they cannot move, attack, or defend themselves, and so have Parry 2. Any of the zombie variations in the *Rassilon Expansion* can be applied to a wailing watcher.

WORKSHOP OF DAMNATION

While every temple of Hela works to gather corpses and raise undead, Hela's minions within the Withered Lands have turned the practice into a production line.

A major temple to Hela, the workshop has the capacity to produce undead on an industrial scale. Corpses are brought here by cultists, smuggled through the lines of Scaetha's clerics guarding the borders, dug up from the burial grounds in the Withered Lands, or gathered from foolish explorers in the dark realm, and reanimated as undead by living clerics of Hela.

The whole structure, a ramshackle stone ruin formerly a small castle of Anari design, is devoted to necromancy. Aside from a few chambers necessary for housing the cultists, every room is a chamber of death. Most are simple affairs containing just stone biers, on which corpses are prepared for reanimation. Others hold sacred texts, are stacked with animated undead awaiting deployment, or contain cells where live captives are kept before their rebirth.

Swarms of malevolent ghosts and shadow wights, bound here by powerful charms, provide security. The cult of Scaetha has tried to storm the workshop dozens of times, yet has been unable to penetrate the spectral defenses to any great degree. The current plan is to avoid a full frontal assault, and instead use a small team to penetrate the interior and close down the unhallowed site.

NOTABLE PERSONS

The three liches of the Dark Triumvirate are the most powerful undead currently known to be active, with Angtharinax widely regarded as second in power only to his dark master, the Liche-Priest. In addition to their standard Special Abilities, each should be given unique abilities based on their specialty.

ANGHARAD, MISTRESS OF BONE

The only female member of the Dark Triumvirate, Angharad, like all three members of the dark circle, was a human cleric of Hela who learned the rite of becoming a liche. Her transformation into a liche left her devoid of flesh, though it did not diminish her mental faculties. She is sometimes referred to as the Fleshless Queen.

By all accounts she was a master necromancer, second only to Angtharinax, though one whose powers were limited to fleshless skeletons. She has spent the centuries engaged in the creation of new forms of skeletons and the search for a means to extend her powers to other forms of undead. At one she has proven a genius; at the other she has failed repeatedly.

Some skalds and sages claim she and the Witch Queen were rivals for the Liche-Priest's attention, though most audiences doubt the undead are capable of anything approaching love. More than one scholar has argued the two hags are the same being, Angharad being the liche form of her earlier Witch Queen incarnation. The pair is attributed similar powers, but the cult of Scaetha refuses to accept this as firm proof.

ANIEL, THE REVERED MOTHER

Few within the cult of Scaetha have ever set eyes on the Revered Mother, and even fewer outside the cult even know of her existence. A crone of immeasurable years, many believe she has existed long past her allotted time.

Aniel dwells in the deepest level of Deathwatch (in the Freelands), never venturing from her chamber. Her single room is shrouded in darkness, lit only when a rare visitor comes calling. The darkness does not bother the crone, for she is blind. Where her eyes should be are empty sockets, seared closed by runes of seeing and death branded into her face. Many claim these injuries were self-inflicted.

Aniel maintains the fabled Register, a record of all the escaped souls the slayers of Scaetha have returned to the Abyss. Her chicken-scratching writing fills page after page, and the ledger is remarkably accurate, yet no one visits to tell her the names of the slain. Whatever strange gifts she possesses allows her to know the names of the dead without outside interference.

What many find disturbing about the Register is not her unerring knowledge of events far from her presence and the names of souls originally sentenced to the Abyss millennia ago, but the fact the book dates back to the first days of the cult and the writing of every page is identical.

Some who see the writing wonder if the Revered Mother is actually a divine minion of Scaetha or the Norns, not an aged Tuomi as she claims. Strangely, though, the old woman has shown no particular adherence to any religion.

Aniel's secondary role is to read the Book of Shadows, a legendary prophecy written down before the fall of the Liche-Priest. The book appears blank, for it is said the Liche-Priest drained the knowledge from the pages so as to hide whatever future the prophecy decreed. Some say he did this out of rage, for the revelation spoke of a way to slay him. Others insist it was done to conceal the date of his return, for the Liche-Priest knew his first attempt to dominate the continent was doomed to failure.

Aniel, however, has the gift to read the blank pages, though only with great difficulty and strenuous effort, which leaves her tired for weeks at a time. No translation of the prophecy exists, and Aniel claims one can never be written, such is the unending power of the Liche-Priest's enchantment.

ANGTHARINAX, LORD OF THE DEAD

Although the Dark Triumvirate rule jointly, Angtharinax is widely regarded by Scaetha's cult as being the most powerful of the three liches and arguably the greatest undead since the Liche-Priest.

Beloved above all other Hela cultists serving the dark master, he learned his dark arts directly from the Liche-Priest, supposedly studying necromantic arts unknown to other necromancers before or since in the lands of Rassilon. No one knows if he held the position of priest or paladin in life, and some even dare to suggest he was neither, but instead practiced an unknown form of necromantic magic.

During the war against the Liche-Priest, Angtharinax was known to have personally interrogated dozens of captured mages of all types. What secrets he may have learned remains a mystery, though investigations of his deserted tower have revealed he studied aspects relating to the raw nature of magical energy. Unfortunately, no living mage has been able to decipher his musings, calculations, and experimental records.

The liche's recent disappearance has the cult of Scaetha more worried then they care to admit. That he is not slain is a firm fact, for his name has not appeared in the Register. Wherever he lurks, the cult has vowed to end his reign at the earliest opportunity.

SETHIKHOPSHJEF, FOREIGN EMISSARY

A recent visitor to the Withered Lands, Sethikhopshjef is an emissary from the land of Hekata, a kingdom of old located in the blistering desert realm of Al-Shirkuh. He describes himself as a liche-wizir, the latter word roughly translating as "counselor," and

claims to serve an entity known as Faro-Apophis, a being whose power reportedly exceeds that of the Liche-Priest. The emissary's existence is currently unknown to the cult of Scaetha. Were they to discover his presence, they would undoubtedly expend resources to learn more about him.

Sethikhopshjef appears as a withered, skeletal husk with pale, gray eyes devoid of any warmth. He wears bronze armor decorated with powerful runes of protection. Serving as his bodyguards are *mummia*, a slow, lumbering form of undead wrapped in incense-impregnated bandages.

Sethikhopshjef has had several meetings with the remaining two liches, though little progress has been made. Angharad and Taxmagulus are suspicious of their undead guest, who speaks of the Liche-Priest as if he knew him in person. Their demands to be taught the ways of creating *mummia* have met with resistance, Sethikhopshjef wanting a firm alliance between the two realms before any information is shared.

Taxmagulus, the Undying Shadow

Taxmagulus, also known as the Specter King and General of the Damned, served Hela as a paladin. The few records which survive from the age of the Liche-Priest indicate he was a senior general, despite being flesh and blood, commanding great legions of undead soldiers and black knights. It is commonly held he achieved liche status before the fall of his hellish master.

While no cleric of Scaetha has encountered the liche and lived in the last century, diaries from before this time seem to imply Taxmagulus wears a billowy cloak, with no physical features discernible beneath save for his gauntlets, armor, and helm. The most popular theory is that Taxmagulus has somehow devoured his own body to fuel powerful enchantments, and that he now survives by sheer willpower. More cynical clerics, less prone to give their foes any more powers than can be proven, claim the shadowy form is nothing more than an illusion. Whatever the truth, Taxmagulus is widely held to be a master of incorporeal undead.

As with Angharad and the Witch Queen, it has been suggested Taxmagulus and the Black Marshal are one and the same. Some claim this is impossible, as a cryptic passage dating from that era hints that the Specter King gave order to the Black Marshal, making it impossible for them being the same entity.

Why Come Here?

The distant Liche Lands are a realm haunted by deep-seated memories and fears. By comparison, the Withered Lands are crawling with active undead, including three of the most powerful servants of Hela still walking the mortal realm. Similarly, the former lands appear largely mundane, no different to those neighboring them save in a few isolated places, whereas the latter is a twisted realm of shadows and madness. What drives a hero to seek adventure in such a dark and sinister realm?

* Duty. Duty is similar to being ordered, though it relies more on the hero making an active decision of his own volition rather than being told by superiors.

Clerics of Scaetha are expected to partake in an annual crusade into the Withered Lands to hunt down and slay undead. They may refuse, though the penalty is committing a major sin and thus loss of all miraculous powers for one week. For some, a distant posting means compliance is simply not possible. These unfortunates have little option but to suffer the sin, pray for those undertaking the crusade, and slay some local undead as penance. Scaetha is not a petty goddess, however, and those unable to complete their crusade because they are on official cult business that keeps them away from the Withered Lands suffer only a minor sin.

* Glory. An orc is evil and a menace to society, but undead are affronts to the gods and slaying them is the mark of a righteous and gods-fearing hero. Those seeking quick glory need look no further than the mist-shrouded Withered Lands, for here undead exist in abundance. However, tales of adventurers defeating powerful undead are few and far between for good reason.

* Orders. The Orders Hindrance is a tool GMs can employ to ensure characters take part in adventures, but it is not a crutch he should rely on too frequently. The only people ordered into the Withered Lands with any regularity are clerics of Scaetha. Characters indebted to the cult of Scaetha may well be called upon to serve in the Withered Lands, something they must always keep in mind when promising favors to a cult of undead slayers.

* Passing Through. The fastest way from Heligioland and the northeast Freelands to Coglelund and the Magocracy is through Darkwood. While travelers may encounter undead, such encounters are rare, especially if they are traveling in a heavily protected caravan. Venturing off the road is foolhardy, for the constant mists and dense vegetation make it very easy to become lost, and here the undead hunt with impunity.

* Treasure. Although the Meadow Heath was never heavily populated, it does contain plentiful burial cairns. The tombs of nobles and heroes, they likely contain ancient treasure hoards. Many are also likely still occupied by the animated remains of the dead.

* Seeking Death. Player sometimes tire of their characters. Some seek nothing more than a quiet retirement, perhaps so they can return to the character later in the campaign. Others want to go out in a blaze of final glory against impossible odds. For those who favor the latter, the Withered Lands present an ideal opportunity. The one downside is that the character may still return to the campaign, only as an undead servant of the Dark Triumvirate.

Adventure Seeds

Whereas adventures in the Liche Lands may be tied to ancient ruins with a rich backstory, adventures in the Withered lands are more likely to be raids against relatively new undead centers of power. While a simple hack-and-slash tale can be fun, try to work the adventure into the greater story of the world.

For example, a temple to Hela isn't just a site to be cleansed, but a veritable production line animating zombies and skeletons in preparation for an invasion of the Freelands or Royalmark. By defeating the resident necromancer, not to mention scores of lesser undead, the heroes actually save the neighboring realms from a potentially devastating attack. Such stories give the players the satisfaction of having achieved a notable goal, rather than just slaying another bunch of monsters.

* The cult of Scaetha knows the liches possess a powerful army, one more than capable of sweeping their cordon aside. What puzzles the cult is why the liches have not unleashed it. While many clerics argue that the dark liches are quarrelsome and thus none of them can muster enough forces to secure victory and guard against attacks by their peers, a growing number suspect something far more sinister—that the undead are launching just enough attacks to keep the clerics and the surrounding lands occupied while they gather their strength. The big question is, what will be the stimulus for the armies' unleashing? The only way to find out is to gather intelligence from inside the Withered Lands.

* The Undying Shadow has created an infernal device capable of transferring damned souls from Hela's realm into living mortal bodies, drawing out and imprisoning the victim's soul in the process. Tracking down his apparatus and releasing the trapped souls may be assigned to the heroes by the cult of Scaetha, or they may learn of the transference by accident and venture into the Withered Lands of their own volition.

* A powerful heahwisard claims he might be able to decipher Angtharinax's arcane studies. Unfortunately, many of the writings he needs to study remain in the liche's tower. He refuses to enter the Withered Lands without an experienced escort. Once at the tower, the mage turns on his protectors, seeking to destroy them and their arcane works. Is he a secret servant of Hela or is there something more sinister behind his actions than ridding the world of a few heroes?

* A senior paladin has fallen in battle in the Withered Lands. One of his companions survived the conflict and returned with the news. Shamed by leaving his comrade behind, he has vowed to return for the corpse before it can be defiled and seeks allies willing to brave the haunted realm.

Appendix: New Organizations

This appendix introduces three new organizations, two of which have an associated Professional Edge. Refer to the Professional Edges section of the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* for more information on Edges marked "*."

Custodians of the Great Shrine

The Custodians of the Great Shrine are holy defenders and warriors. Most of those tasked with defending the Great Shrine are Guardians, who serve their term and then return to their normal lives. A small few take holy vows that imbue them with divine power and set them on a new course. This section is concerned only with the latter.

Custodian of the Great Shrine*

Requirements: Novice, Finnar, Spirit d6+, Strength d6+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d6+, must worship Eira, Eostre Animalmother, Freo, Thunor, or Ullr, cannot be a cleric

While fighting within 12" (24 yards) of a sacred place, temple, or major shrine dedicated to Eira, Eostre Animalmother, Freo, Thunor, or Ullr, irrespective of his actual patron, the character gains the benefits of the Champion Edge.

Additionally, once per day, a Custodian may pray to his patron deity to grant him spiritual aid. He may cast his deity's signature power, using his Spirit in place of Faith. Where a deity grants a choice of powers, the Custodian counts as a paladin.

The hero becomes susceptible to the sins for his deity. Because non-clerics don't have Faith, the penalties for committing sins are different than for clerics.

Minor: The hero loses the benefits of this Edge for four days.

Major: The hero loses the benefits of this Edge for two weeks.

Mortal: A mortal sin not only strips the hero of this Edge until suitable penance is made, but the hero cannot benefit (directly or indirectly) from the deity's spells until he seeks absolution. He still suffers any negative or harmful effects, though.

A character who changes patron deity or wishes to give up his Custodian status immediately and irrevocably loses the benefits of this Edge. In addition, he may never again serve as a Custodian.

History

Before the Blizzard War, the Finnar were only occasional visitors to what is now the High Winterlands. They would trade with the now lost cultures and fatten their reindeer on the lush summer grass and nutritious lichen. What protectors watched over their traditional shrines is long forgotten, for those lands are now behind the Icewall.

The Custodians of the Great Shrine were founded in the early years of chaos that followed the defeat of the Hellfrost armies. Though large bands of frost giants, goblins, and orcs still roamed the land, they quickly fled into the remote wilderness to lick their wounds and plot their revenge. Knowing they would not be returning home, and seeking to ensure the gods were duly honored, the Finnar erected the Great Shrine.

Since the Finnar have no written language and little reason to mark the passage of years, the exact date of the organization's founding remains unknown. Some scholars estimate it occurred sometime in the first two decades after the war ended, while others place it a much as half a century late. All agree that the Custodians have performing their sacred duty for over 400 years, though, making them one of the oldest continuously operating organization in Rassilon.

Structure

Custodians are not volunteers. Each tribe selects a handful of men and women to serve a five-year term. The selection is a delicate balancing act between serving the gods and the needs of the tribe. To send weaklings or too few members is an insult to the gods and risks bringing down their wrath (not to mention the scorn of the other tribes). To send one's best warriors or too many risks leaving the tribe defenseless.

As noted above, the organization is divided into Custodians and Guardians. By tradition, all members must serve at least one year as a Guardian. Many go no further, but some are struck by a desire to serve the gods with greater devotion. After taking holy vows to serve the main deities of the Finnar pantheon, they are accepted as Custodians.

Although clerics are not permitted to join the Custodians, they wield great authority over the organization. While serving at the Great Shrine, Custodians fall under the authority of clerics who share the same patron deity. Out of respect, Guardians with the same deity are subservient to Custodians.

Once a Custodian has completed his tour, he is expected to consider any request from any cleric of the Finnars' chief deities. He is under no compulsion to obey those not of his faith, but he must always remember that he has sworn a holy oath to defend the gods' shrines and sacred places to the end of his days.

Law & Order

They may be servants of the gods and greatly respected by the Finnar tribes, but Custodians, like clerics, are bound by the laws of the land as well as tribal taboos and customs.

While they have taken holy vows, they are not as rigid as those of the clergy. Given suitable extenuating circumstances, sins earned in the course of one's duties may be absolved completely or downgraded by any high priest of the Custodian's faith. This most often applies to Custodians of Eira. The Finnars' existence is precarious, for frost giants, orcs and Hellfrost dragons hunt them mercilessly. To kill one in the defense of a holy place is rarely treated as more than a minor sin.

Gods & Men

Despite being a religious organization, the Custodians do not honor a single deity. They are the protectors and servants of the major Finnar deities, and members may honor whichever of these deities they wish.

Emblem

The Custodians have a well-deserved reputation for loyalty and bravery. They do not skulk in shadows or disguise their membership. Regardless of his faith, each member wears a four-antlered holy symbol of Ullr, the Finnar's chief deity. The four antlers represent Eira, Eostre Animalmother, Freo, and Thunor, while the stag's head represents Ullr. Traditionally, the symbol is carved from the antler of a reindeer sacrificed as part of the ceremony when a Custodian takes his holy vows.

PLAYING A CUSTODIAN

Unless a character wants to be tied to protecting the Great Shrine for five years, even a starting hero is deemed to have served his term of service. Though you are now an itinerant, you remain a Custodian and thus a servant of the gods. You may be called upon to protect a temple, major shrine, or sacred place devoted to any of the Finnar's main deities.

COMBAT ADVICE

Custodians are protectors of holy places rather than people. It is important not to enter a protracted fight with just one opponent. Odds are the attackers will outnumber the defenders, and every round you are locked in combat with a single foe means his comrades have more opportunity to desecrate the holy site you are guarding. The best advice is to kill quickly and move on to the next opponent.

While skill with bows is not a requirement, many Custodians become proficient marksmen. If an enemy has been detected in time, archers can loose several arrows, weakening the enemy before melee occurs.

ADVANCES

As noted above, Custodians are likely to face overwhelming odds. Frenzy and Sweep should be taken as early as possible. Block and Florentine help offset your foe's gang-up modifiers.

While a shrine may be a single small object, sacred places may cover many acres and temples are usually large buildings. The ability to cover ground quickly allows you to respond to threats more easily. For this reason, consider taking Fleet Footed.

With attributes, look to Spirit and Vigor before Agility and Strength. You are no use to anyone if you are Shaken, scared, or intimidated, nor if you are suffering multiple wound penalties.

Custodians often find themselves subservient to paladins, who are both warriors and commanders. That said, sacred places and major shrines are for more common than temples in the Unclaimed Lands and they rarely have permanent clergy assigned to watch over them. Given the Custodian may be the most senior warrior present, picking up a few Leadership Edges never hurts.

NPC REACTIONS

A Custodian can expect a Friendly welcome among any Finnar tribe, with food and shelter being freely given. In return, the Custodian is expected to lend his arm in the defense of the tribe should it be required of him.

Among non-Finnar worshippers of his deity he can expect a Neutral response—the existence of the Custodians is not common knowledge outside the lands where Finnar dwell in large numbers. Once they learn what the character's role and responsibilities are, they usually improve to Friendly without requiring a Persuasion roll.

Frost dwarves and taiga elves are deeply religious. They may not share all the same deities as the Finnar, but they share the same enemies. As a result, they are Neutral (which is about as good as initial reactions get for these insular races).

EAST MARCH WARDENS

Throughout the period known as the Long Peace, scores of villages and steads sprang up in the Eastern Marches. With the orcs believed destroyed, the citizens got on with their lives. Few ever knew that keeping a close on them, and the orcs that still lurked in the mountains, was a small group of rangers.

EAST MARCH WARDEN*

Requirement: Novice, Smarts d6+ (if a native of Aspiria) or Knowledge (Area: Aspiria) d6+ (if not a native), Spirit d6+, Vigor d6+, Stealth d6+, Survival d8+, Tracking d6+

An East March Warden rapidly adapts to the local terrain and quickly learns its secret paths. When calculating his Overland Pace, he treats terrain modifiers as one level better (to a maximum of +1). Additionally, he can cast *sentry* using Spirit as his arcane skill die. Unless he has an Arcane Background, he can only maintain one *sentry* spell at any time. Lastly, he receives +1 to Tracking rolls when tracking orcs. This stacks with similar bonuses from other Professional Edges, such as Woodsman.

HISTORY

Until 323 IR, the Eastern Marches were part of the County of East March. Driven out by orcs, who sacked and destroyed the then capital, the count fled to Haringaard, a village on the western fringe. Although it was named as the new county seat, the village prospered little from the counts' presence—much of their land was now under orc dominion, depriving the nobles of tax revenues and trade income. For over a century, the County of East March was the poorest, and smallest, in Aspiria.

Little changed until 452 IR, when King Halgroth IV's crusade finally resulted in the orcs being driven back into the mountains. Desperate to rebuild the family fortunes, the then count, Lux's grandfather, offered parcels of land to anyone who wished to settle them. It proved a popular decision, for new arrivals flocked to take advantage of the promise of a new life and new pastures on which to their raise livestock.

The Eastern Marches were back in the hands of its hereditary count, but the noble was not about to sit on his laurels. While the court storytellers sang of a stunning victory, the count was at the final battle. The orcs had received a bloody nose, but they were far from a spent force. Unwilling to sacrifice his family's rekindled prosperity and status, the count founded the East March Wardens in 454, his last act before his death.

For 46 years they patrolled the hinterlands, their eyes forever scanning for signs of the orcs' return. When the orcs came they crashed upon the Eastern Marches like a terrible wind, emerging out of nowhere and smashing everything in their path. Had the Wardens not raised the alarm, it is likely the County of East March would today be in orc hands. As it is, Count Lux has managed to stem the tide.

While the army patrols the new border and the recently formed East March Runners conduct hit-and-run missions, the Wardens continue to serve as scouts.

STRUCTURE

The life of a Warden is not easy. They are required to operate anywhere in the Eastern Marches, often alone and for extended periods. With large swathes of the region already in orc hands, only those who with a detailed knowledge of the area and who are already proficient in surviving off the land and moving unseen are accepted into their ranks.

The Wardens have no official ranks. More often than not a Warden works alone, for a lone man has less chance of being detected by roving orc patrols. Younger members respect their elders and listen to their advice, but they are not under any obligation to follow their commands.

The Wardens are beholden to Count Lux. Unlike the Runners, who deal only with intermediaries, Wardens have direct access to the count. While Lux often issues orders, he does not micro-manage the organization—Wardens are expected to use their initiative.

GODS & MEN

The Wardens have three official patron deities—Freo, who grants them safe travels; Rigr, who provides them with keen eyesight; and Ullr, who blesses them with a hunter's stealth. While individuals may honor whatever benevolent deity they wish, the three cults mentioned above maintain close relations with the Wardens.

EMBLEM

The organization's emblem is a ram's head, this being the county symbol. Wardens with less than five years service wear a wooden

badge. Those with six to ten years service sport a silver badge. Anyone with more than ten years loyal service is awarded a golden ram's head.

These badges are rarely worn in the wilds, for the orcs have placed a bounty on the Wardens' heads. Members who wish to identify themselves to strangers use code words. They have also developed a set of secret signs that enable them to pass on detailed information in just a few scratches.

PLAYING AN EAST MARCH WARDEN

While the abilities of an East March Warden work anywhere, the organization is most suited to campaigning in Aspiria. Any serving member working in other lands should really justify why he has abandoned his kith and kin to the privations of the orcs.

It is possible a Warden might be sent on a long-distance mission to deliver a message to a distant realm or recruit new meat for the grinder. Since you are subject to orders, you may even find yourself sent to aid the forces of Vestmark in their struggle, either as a scout or, more likely, as an instructor in advanced survival techniques. Such an act on behalf of Count Lux could help cement a friendship should the orcs be defeated.

Regardless of where you end up, a Warden is at his best when serving as a scout in the wilderness. Given that tracking orcs is your specialty, anywhere they are present is going to give you chance to use your abilities.

COMBAT ADVICE

Your job is to gather information and live to report it back, not slay orcs. If you're alone, which includes scouting ahead for the party, and the opportunity presents itself, run away or hide until the danger passes.

If you must fight, use your woodsy skills to your advantage—stay hidden and use a ranged weapon (preferably a bow because of its range and quicker fire). Only your first shot is likely to benefit from the Drop, but if you can take out the enemy leader you might give his minions pause for thought.

If you're forced into melee, try to get it over with as quickly as possible—you're unlikely to be wearing heavy armor or possess a swathe of Combat Edges (not if you want to be good at your job, anyway).

ADVANCES

There are two parts to being an East March Warden. First, they are expected to survive in the wilderness. You should take Woodsman and Ranger as soon as possible. The second part is stealth. Fast and Silent, Fleet-Footed, Lurker, and Steal Way are ideal choices.

Assuming you're part of an adventuring party and serving as the scout, Danger Sense and Pathfinder can both be useful. The latter Edge won't benefit you personally, but you're part of a team and members sometimes have to make sacrifices for the greater good.

Of course, you can't ignore combat altogether—sooner or later even the stealthiest hero is going to get spotted or blunder into an ambush. Ideally, it's best for you to use your stealthy Edges and run away as fast as possible. If you're in a party, you're probably not going to want to leave your friends behind. Two-handed weapons do better damage, but Strength is probably not high on your list of favored attributes. One-handed weapons allow you to use Frenzy and Sweep just as well as larger weapons, plus you can take Ambidextrous and/or Two-Fisted to double your base number of attacks.

If your campaign is set in and around the Eastern Marches, take Favored Foe (Orcs) at the earliest opportunity.

NPC REACTIONS

Your organization is barely known in the rest of Aspiria, yet alone in more distant lands. No matter what you call yourself, most people will see you as just another warrior or woodsman. A Neutral initial reaction is thus the most likely outcome.

Within the Eastern Marches you can expect a Friendly welcome from virtually everyone—there will always a few who will blame you for not detecting the return of the orcs sooner. Don't expect farmers and herders to join you on some foolhardy quest, though—even refugees will give you food and shelter, maybe even an alchemical device if they own anything that valuable, but they are not about to grab a spear and march to war.

MAGE-INQUISITION

Until a few decades ago the heahwisards were laws unto themselves, dragged to court only if their crimes threatened their feudal superiors. Since the reign of Adolphus V, the situation has changed, for now the activities of the heahwisards are scrutinized by an organization over which they have no authority.

MAGE-INQUISITOR*

Requirement: Novice, Smarts d6+ (if native to the Magocracy) or Knowledge (Law) d6+ (if not a native), Investigation d8+, Knowledge (Arcana) d6+, Streetwise d8+

Aside from the altered requirements, and the Connections and Orders, this functions as per the Investigator Edge.

HISTORY

The Magocracy is a feudal system, with power flowing from its font head, the Mage-King, down through the noble ranks. Under the old system, crimes committed in a specific domain were investigated and judged by the local nobility. Accusations of criminal deeds by the highest mage-noble in a realm or the Mage-King were handled by a vote of the Council Elect, if they were ever judged at all. For the most part, so long as the mage-nobles stayed in their own realms and didn't offend their feudal superiors, they were largely immune from prosecution—the words of peasants carry little weight in the Magocracy.

In 483 IR, Mage-King Adolphus V authorized the formation of the Grand Order of Mage-Inquisitors. Made up of diligent non-noble investigators well versed in the law of the Magocracy, the Mage-Inquisitors, as they would be known, had little interest in the affairs of the lower classes. Their focus was to investigate abuses of power by the heahwisards, so assuring citizens that no one was above the law.

Naturally, the mage-nobles were aghast, for this new organization removed privileges they had enjoyed since the foundation of the Magocracy. Many spoke out against the formation of the Mage-Inquisitors, but their existence was confirmed by royal charter, against which the Council Elect could do nothing. Those of high station accused the Mage-King of creating a secret police, a charge Adolphus denied. Anyway, he added quietly, what did law-abiding nobles have to fear?

STRUCTURE

The Mage-Inquisition, to use its more common name, demands a lot from its members. First, they must be proficient in the laws of the land. Second, they must understand the ways of magic. Third, they must be literate. Fourth, they must be talented investigators.

Race, gender, and nationality are irrelevant. The only firm rule is that no member may be a noble of any land (though he may be a Black Sheep). This prevents bonds of friendship or external alliances from swaying the inquisitor from his sworn duty. Non-heahwisard spellcasters are permitted. So far the organization has attracted only clerics of Hothar and Maera. By law, any persons accepted into the organization are freed from their feudal bonds. Since revenge is a strong motive, members are rarely assigned to investigate the House to which they were formerly beholden.

RANKS

The organization is headed by the Lord High Mage-Inquisitor. Each of the major domains, including Kingshall, falls under the jurisdiction of a Grand Mage-Inquisitor. In order to protect the upper

echelons from bribery, seduction, and assassination, the identity of the Lord High Mage-Inquisitor is known only to the Grand Mage-Inquisitors and the Mage-King. Grand Mage-Inquisitors are rotated to a new district every three years.

Under the organization's charter, these positions are elected ones. When the position of Lord High Mage-Inquisitor becomes vacant, the Grand-Inquisitors select his replacement. In theory, any member of the Mage-Inquisition can hold the post, but age and experience are usually the determining factors. When a Grand Mage-Inquisitor title becomes vacant, the Mage-Inquisitors in his current district elect the successor.

Beneath the Grand Mage-Inquisitors are the Mage-Inquisitors, those tasked with investigating crimes committed by the aristocracy. Despite the many rumors that they are legion, there are actually less than 50 currently operating in the whole of the Magocracy. To appease the nobles, the Mage-King ruled that Mage-Inquisitors must operate openly—any evidence they gained through disguise or guile would be inadmissible.

Beneath the Mage-Inquisitors are the Mage-Enforcers. They have the power to arrest any noble, but only on the express orders of their Grand Mage-Inquisitor. Many are ex-Arcane Hands, considered to old to remain in service by their former masters. Their talent at detecting and disrupting spellcasting was quickly seen as a major boon by the Mage-Inquisition.

Mage-Inquisitors may authorize an arrest without their superior's approval in one circumstance—if they witness a mage-noble committing a crime.

LAW & ORDER

Who watches the watchmen? In the case of the Mage-Inquisition, that duty falls to the cult of Hothar. All members are subject to periodic interrogations to ensure they are honest. Given that the only criminals they investigate are nobles, any member of the Mage-Inquisition found to have falsified evidence is charged with low treason, an offense punishable by 20 years hard labor. Covering up evidence is considered treason against the Mage-King, and thus punishable by death.

The cult also ensures all investigations are above board and all evidence is solid. In typical bureaucratic style, Mage-Inquisitors present their findings to their superior, who after perusing it decides whether the case should be dropped (for lack of evidence) or turned over to the cult of Hothar to be thoroughly checked. Assuming everything meets with the clerics' approval, the Mage-Enforcers are unleashed.

Even if a case is pursued and a suspect arrested, justice still follows feudal rules. Thus, the nobles still judge themselves. Now, though, all trials are conducted under the watchful eyes of the Mage-Inquisition, who expect justice to be served. Unfortunately for the Mage-Inquisition, witnesses remain the most commonly accepted evidence, and the word of the powerful always outweighs the word of the underdog.

Even in an organization so young, most members have already accepted that it is the Mage-Inquisition's existence that is a deterrent to crime, not the handful of successful of prosecutions they secure.

GODS & MEN

While members may honor any deity they please, Hothar is the organization's official patron. Regardless of their patron deity, members are expected to attend the festivities of the god of justice's high holy days. Many Mage-Inquisitors pay respects to Bragi, god of information gathering and, Sanngetall, god of truth. A few fanatics favor Jarngrímr, god of total obedience.

EMBLEM

All members wear a badge of office, a modified version of Hothar's holy symbol. Instead of balancing on a sword point, the scales rest upon a staff, the traditional symbol of the heahwisards. Grand Mage-Inquisitors sport gold badges, Mage-Inquisitor silver badges, and Mage-Enforcers bronze badges.

PLAYING A MAGE-INQUISITOR

With your authority limited to only one domain within the Magocracy (though the chain of evidence may give reason to travel and members are frequently transferred to new areas), Mage-Inquisitors are not suitable for every campaign. It is possible you could be sent into the wider world on a hunt for a suspect who has fled, but this can only be used once or twice. You are not judge, jury, or executioner—your sole role is to gather evidence of a heahwisard's crimes. Even Mage-Enforcers see little action—evidence gathering can take many months, and it may be even longer before you are given authority to make an arrest.

COMBAT ADVICE

While nothing prevents a Mage-Inquisitor being combat proficient, it is not your forte. You are unlikely to possess many Combat Edges or high Fighting dice. That doesn't mean you are useless in a fight, though. You hold positions of authority, and so can benefit from having Leadership Edges. You are also likely to be intelligent or have decent Intimidation, allowing you to use Tricks and Tests of Will.

Mage-Enforcers, like most combat types, need to take their foes down. Ignore the hired help and close with the heahwisard as quickly as possible—his spells can boost not only himself but his minions, making him the more serious threat.

ADVANCES

Mage-Inquisitors already possess the main Edge they require—Investigation. Boosting Intimidation, Investigation, Notice, Persuasion, and Streetwise, while not essential, while make your job much easier. Don't neglect Social Edges—Charismatic makes gathering evidence from witnesses easier, Connections opens up new sources of information, and Strong Willed will prevent you from being intimidated by a heahwisard or his hired thugs.

With Smarts likely your primary attribute, you're well placed to pick up Level Headed as early a possible. Even if you're not a combat type, being able to go sooner in the round allows you to either take an action or go on Hold and see what unfolds.

Mage-Enforcers should seriously consider being an ex-Arcane Hand—when most of your opponents are going to be wizards it can be a lifesaver, as can Arcane Resistance. The latter is a Background Edge, but if you're an ex-Hand you've likely been subjected to dozens of spells, possibly building up a resistance over time. Or maybe you learned secret signs that ward you from the worst effects.

Killing a suspect resisting arrest *might* be overlooked once, but make a habit of it and you'll end up on the wrong side of the law. Consider taking Brawler, and later Bruiser, for taking down suspects without hacking off their limbs. That doesn't mean you should neglect more lethal Edges—any heahwisard with something serious to hide is going to send all sorts of thugs after you and your Mage-Inquisitor.

NPC REACTIONS

Save for the power to hunt down and arrest suspects fleeing justice, Mage-Inquisitors have no jurisdiction outside the Magocracy. As a result, most people tend toward a Neutral first reaction. The cult of Hothar is likely to be Friendly, since in its eyes a criminal is a criminal, regardless of his nationality or social status.

It should come as no surprise that mage-nobles, even the honest ones, greatly dislike the Mage-Inquisition. None would be so stupid as to be openly Hostile (attacking an inquisitor would be a crime for which an immediate arrest can be made), but they are universally Uncooperative if any member of their family or an ally is being investigated. Conversely, they are quite happy to cooperate if a rival is the subject of an official investigation. In such cases they still favor Neutral reactions, becoming Friendly is a prosecution looks likely.

Not even the peasants are fond of them. Unless they are the actual victims of a crime by a heahwisard (in which instance they are Friendly or Helpful), they are fearful of legal reprisals (such as tax hikes). At best, they are Neutral, with a large minority leaning toward Uncooperative.

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