

EARTHDAWN

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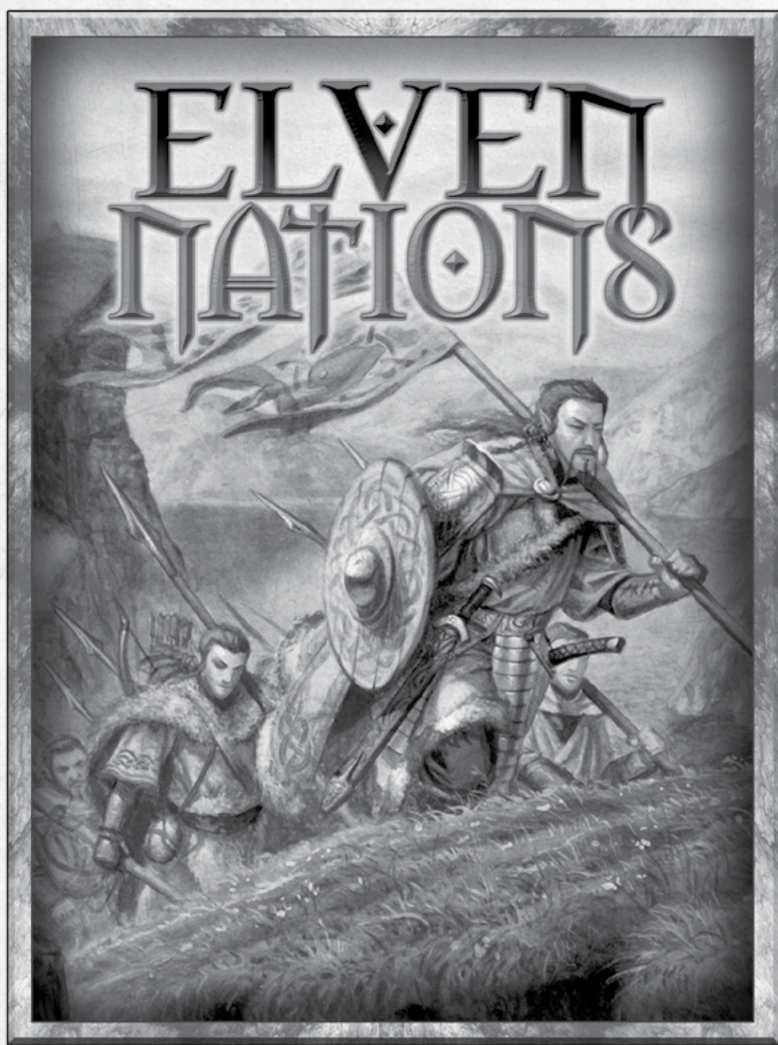
ELVEN NATIONS



AN EARTHDAWN — FOURTH EDITION — SOURCEBOOK

EARTHDAWN[®]

FOURTH EDITION



FASA GAMES INC. 2019



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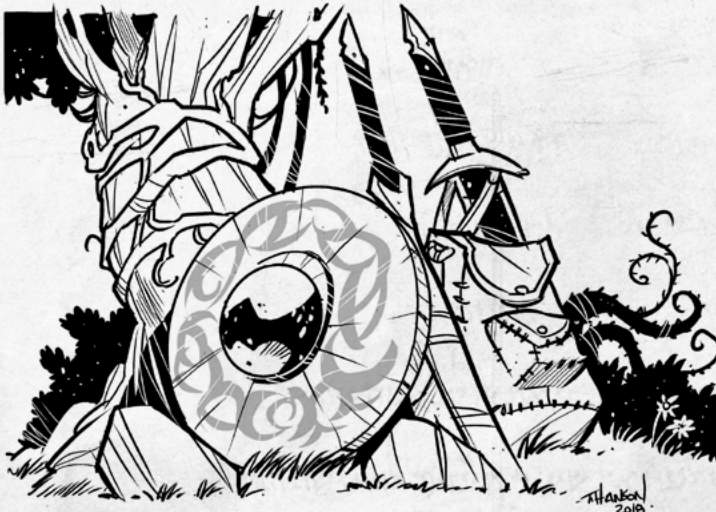


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BIRTH OF A LEGEND

From the journals of Alachia, Queen of Blood Wood

I saw the ones who came before us. They came from the four corners of the world and battled for dominion, but their competition was one of artistic and philosophical expression. Each of the four was unmatched in their homeland and sought capable adversaries to measure themselves against. Defeat would present someone worthy to serve with their talents, but triumph would signify the victor's rightful place to rule over the others.

The one from the north was strong and stout, a testament to the harsh lands of her birth. Her skin was pale white matched by her silk clothing, her hair shone like freshly minted silver, and her eyes were as red as the blood that drips from my body. She was first to appear, claiming our ancient home as her own. Her dance flowed as a leaf in the wind and her movements defeated any who challenged her.

The stranger from the east was tall and pure of heart. The light of the morning sun could be seen in her golden hair and tan skin, as the sparkle of her emerald eyes mirrored a forest canopy. Though not dissuaded by the graceful movements of her northern rival, the eastern challenger's talent lay in the strings of her lute. They both desired an honorable victory, agreeing to serve whoever could defeat the other in a contest of song and dance. However, their specialties were too great, and they reached a stalemate.

Darkness approached with the traveler from the south. The man's grey skin and yellow eyes sent a shiver up the spine of the other competitors, but his intentions seemed honest and the others accepted his bid to join the contest. The man from the south was a bit cleverer than his counterparts, for he knew he was outmatched by their arts. He proposed to break their stalemate through debate, for surely the three would not otherwise agree on a champion. The silver-tongued man stumped his peers with a philosophical quandary only he could solve. He laid claim to the land and dominion over all who would make it their home.

A final traveler arrived from the west to challenge the man, and she was truly a sight to behold. I have never seen a creature that matched her beauty and grace, nor do I expect I ever will. Her sunset red hair nearly reached the ground, framing her slender figure, and her piercing blue eyes could melt the iciest heart. The southern man's desire for her was so great that he accepted the late challenge to his throne for the privilege of having her remain in his presence. But he was no fool and hatched a plan to secure the newcomer's

fealty. Her late arrival required a more significant challenge to prove her right to rule. Her dance would need surpass that of the woman from the north, her flute would need defeat the music from the east, and her grasp of philosophy would need to solve his quandary. Fail any of these tasks, and the lord from the south would become her king.

The western beauty agreed to his terms. She gracefully out-stepped the maiden from the north, who bowed to her opponent in defeat. The nuance of her flute's song brought tears to the eyes of her eastern sister, a feat her rival's lute was unable to match. All that remained was to out think her would-be ruler. Not only did she move past the moral ambiguity of the issue with ease, she also pointed out a fundamental flaw in the solution the southerner had proposed. The woman from the west had surpassed each of her rivals in their talent of choice and, by the rules of the trial, declared herself their champion.

The man was furious, unwilling to accept the westerner's dominion over lands he felt were rightfully his. Enraged, he claimed no person should have been able to defeat his challenge. The woman from the west must have cheated, a dishonor that should not stand. How else could all three of them have been defeated? He exposed his true nature: he would rather burn a kingdom to the ground than serve its rightful ruler. Seeing this inside him, the others knew his continued presence would undermine the harmony they sought to create. Their combined strength was too great for him to oppose alone and, together, they cast him from their kingdom.

With the southerner ousted for his hubris, none remained to oppose the western beauty's claim to the land. The artists from the north and east pledged to serve her will, naming the woman their queen. She humbly accepted the title and pledged to keep the area free from darkness for as long as her dynasty remained. In service of this promise, the queen prepared to bring forth powerful magic.

She sent her two subjects in search of materials, for the land was barren and unable to protect itself. "Bring me anything that will grow", she said, "and we will bring forth our great protector." The queen began inscribing a ritual circle into the center of her domain. She worked tirelessly for seven days and seven nights before the inscription was complete, by which time her followers had returned with a handful of acorns between them. The queen took the acorns and planted them among the mystic runes. "The pattern is strong, but incomplete. You must bring more" she proclaimed.

Days passed before the maidens returned once again, each with a dozen acorns in hand. The queen had expanded her design into several additional ritual circles. As she wove the acorns into her spell, I could feel its power growing. It felt familiar. Safe. Like home. After the queen finished her work, she took the remaining acorns and magically grew them into saplings. She told her followers to plant these young trees in their lands to give back for the bounty they took.

With her preparations complete, the queen conducted her ritual. She instructed her followers to join their patterns together. Pulling together their magic from the north, east, and west would fuel the spell through the millennia to come. The maiden from the east wove her threads, causing sprouts to pop from the acorns planted across the circle. Her northern sister added her strength and a pale blue glow emanated from the runes. The oak sprouts spread into the surrounding soil and intertwined with each other. The queen added her western spirit to the spell, which I could feel was much stronger than that of her followers. Her energy caused a magnificent oak to burst free from the saplings cultivated just moments before.

The queen's expression turned somber as she turned to address her subjects. "This oak will protect the land, but its birth does not come without sacrifice. I must leave and bear my burden alone. But do not be sad, for I will always be a part of its heart. Should the land ever need a true queen, I shall return." Without pausing for a reply, the beauty from the west disappeared into the trunk of the great oak that now stood at the heart of the land.

I awoke at that moment, uncertain of why these events had appeared to me. What seemed like ages of history came to me in a span of hours, but this was no mere dream. Does this vision carry a lesson, or has the wound to our forest's heart driven my imagination wild? Is this the lingering influence of the Scourge or is Oak Heart sending these images to me in desperate need of help? Was this even a vision of the past, could it instead be our future? It felt so real, yet most of the fears I dream of these days do so as well. Still, the possibility that this vision was the birth of Wyrn Wood's heart merits further consideration. Be it intervention or intuition, I believe someone is trying to tell me something.

Four challengers from four directions. Were these elves, cities, nations, or something far less tangible? The man from the south, his presence was different. I feel a shred of it lingering even now, though how or why I do not know. The woman from the north, I could see the disappointment in her eyes upon her losing dominion. I could feel the passion for power burning brightly in her heart. I wonder, would she have been content to serve had the queen stayed? The eastern musician seemed the opposite, for I believe her unwavering willingness to serve the rightful queen. A rare trait indeed.

I felt an undeniable kinship with the western beauty. Only a queen willing to sacrifice everything to protect her people could understand the burdens I've endured. My actions, thought terrible, were necessary. There can be none who disputes this fact. Our survival carries a price we must continue to pay, for we can only follow the path before us. Blood Wood is our heritage, but it must not be my legacy.

The acorns are an interesting symbol. Do they represent those from Oak Heart itself? The ritual is a troubling notion. Do the rumors from afar have more merit than I first thought? I must keep a closer eye on my wayward subjects, for I cannot allow them to steal the seat of my power. Removing Oak Heart from Blood Wood would undoubtedly spell the end for us all.





ELVEN HISTORY

THE SHARED HISTORY OF THE ELVEN NATIONS

Like the members of any Namegiver race, elves can vary widely in their personalities and values. In general, however, the elves are a species constantly looking backward to see a path forward. Elves are raised hearing legends of the unified Court of Wyrn Wood. They are told of simpler times when things were pure. When, precisely, these simpler times ended varies from culture to culture and can become a heated debate in mixed company.

Some claim the abrupt death of queen Dallia ended the golden age of the elves. Some claim it was the ascension of Failla and the Separation. Still others believe it was the mysterious circumstances around Alachia's rise to the throne that marked the beginning of the end. Some even assert it was only the Ritual of Thorns, enacted during the Scourge, that tore elven culture asunder. Only Queen Alachia and her most sycophantic followers claim the Court is still unified and true.

While every group of elves has a personal history in which they place great stock, they also share a common history. Seemingly all elves still tell tales of before the fall of Dallia, and they tell similar tales of the origins of the first elf and the founding of the Court.

The Tale of the First Elf

A legend as transcribed the writings of Liandra, the traveling elven Troubadour

In the days of long ago, so long ago that even dragons cannot recall them, the mighty tree Oak Heart came into the world. Oak Heart was beloved by the Passion Jaspre and Jaspre gave it all the good gifts of life - sunlight, soft rain, gentle breezes to make its leaves sing, and rich soil to make it grow. With these gifts, the great tree and the Passion were very happy together.

But, even then, the world was wide. Jaspre knew that other places in it needed his blessing. He knew that he must go out into the world and bring the gifts of life to all. But to do so he would have to leave Oak Heart behind. The thought of parting with his beloved tree shook the Passion to his very core. Without Jaspre for company, Oak Heart might sicken and die of loneliness before he could return. And so, he gave Oak Heart some of his own magic, that it might raise an entire woodland around itself. Surrounded by growing

things, amused by the antics of wild beasts, and sung to sleep by sweet-throated birds, Oak Heart would be happy enough until Jaspreet came back from his wanderings.

And so Oak Heart raised up Wyrn Wood and, for a time, was as happy as anyone could wish. Yet soon the tree began to miss Jaspreet. No bird or beast or tree spirit was a match for the Passion's company. Birds and beasts could tell no tales, and the young tree spirits had no more sense than tiny children. And so Oak Heart grew lonely, withering a little in sadness with each passing day.

When Jaspreet returned and saw Oak Heart's brown leaves and shriveled branches, he wept a river of tears for his thoughtlessness. He embraced the great tree tenderly, restoring it to life with his touch. "I will make you a true companion," he promised Oak Heart. "One who knows you as I do, who understands you as I do. Though I must leave you often to roam the world, you will never be lonely again."

Jaspreet called upon the Passion Astendar to aid him, and together they fashioned the perfect companion for Oak Heart. "She must be beautiful," Astendar said, "and must sing more sweetly than any bird."

"She must have true understanding," said Jaspreet, "that she may weave tales to beguile the time."

"She must dance, as the wind dances in the leaves," Astendar said.

"And she must move where she will in the woodland, so that she can see all that is and talk of it," said Jaspreet. "But she must also be part of Oak Heart, and always come back to the tree. And she must listen with all her being to whatever Oak Heart tells her."

The Passions then took some of Oak Heart's own life and made a tree's companion from it, that they might be part of each other. They gave the companion beauty and grace beyond that of any living bird or beast. They gave her a curious mind, so that she might Name things and tell tales of them and desire to know all things good. Most important, they gave her a listening heart, that she might live in perfect harmony with Oak Heart and Wyrn Wood. When the Passions had finished, there stood before them an elf maiden - as lovely as the stars, as wise as the earth, and as kind as rain in springtime. The Passions Named her Caynreth, the First Listener of Harmony.

They brought Caynreth to Oak Heart, and the tree was so joyful that it burst into riotous flower. Caynreth embraced Oak Heart's vast trunk, while a shower of white petals drifted down upon her. And from that day, tree and elf were of one heart. No matter where Caynreth went in the Wood, she always returned to Oak Heart and shared all she had seen and learned with the tree.



Though Oak Heart could not move and dance with its beloved companion, it carried her in its spirit and shared all her joys and sorrows. Jaspree had kept his promise. And so do the elves of Wyrms Wood to this very day.

The Court and the First Queen

Whether Caynreth's origin is history or legend, it is clear that elves have lived in the Wyrms Wood from time immemorial. Long before the dwarves founded Throal, and longer still before the scholars of Thera, the elves of Wyrms Wood grew and prospered. Though similar elven settlements existed elsewhere in the world, those of Wyrms Wood gradually came to see themselves as more truly elven than their kin. They took the presence of Oak Heart as a sign of their specialness and came to define elven nature in terms of the legend of Caynreth. Namely, that to be most truly elven meant to serve the needs of Wyrms Wood and reaffirm their bond with it. One elf, Melyora Nahai'ir, was profoundly influenced by this belief and acted on it in a way that unified and transformed the elven people. She declared herself to be her people's first queen.

No history known to modern-day Barsaive reaches back far enough to truly speak of Queen Melyora. Legends of her abound, however, and all of them depict her as gifted with unusual wisdom, beauty, and magical ability. She is said to be directly descended from Caynreth, and therefore able to commune with the spirit of Oak Heart in a way that no other elf could. This special sensitivity to the primal tree's needs and desires, coupled with formidable magical gifts and personal charisma, led the elves of Wyrms Wood to follow her wholeheartedly and support her establishment of the Elven Court.

Most legends speak of the Elven Court as existing a thousand years before the founding of Throal. In keeping with Queen Melyora's desires, the Court was not a seat of power in the traditional sense. Though the queen used her magical talents to grow a magnificent palace, the Elven Court was neither citadel nor fortress. Nor was it even a great city. Like other elven settlements throughout Wyrms Wood, the Court existed in harmony with its surroundings. Its inhabitants raised their dwellings from the woodland itself, taking care not to harm the delicate balance of nature. They devoted themselves to various arts, from woodcarving to poetry to magic, because they believed that the Wood loved beauty. Guided by Queen Melyora, whose every pronouncement they treated with the reverence due to the Favored of Oak Heart, the elves of the Court developed customs and traditions that they believed expressed the truest depths of elven nature.

The ways of the Court soon spread throughout the forest. As Queen Melyora's reputation for wisdom grew, elves from outside the Wyrms Wood began to follow her example. During Melyora's long reign, the Elven Court she had founded became a light to all the elven nations, the embodiment of elven nature in art, craft, custom, dress, language, and way of life. Elves from all over the known world found the Elven Court so attractive that they traveled to Wyrms Wood and settled there. The descendants of many such emigrants

grew to prominence in subsequent years, founding the noble families known as ranelles that exist in the Wood to this day. It was during this period that the Elven Court find its staunchest ally in Sereatha, the City of Spires. With Sereatha came the love and adoration of the entirety of the Western Kingdoms.

After her exceedingly long and prosperous reign, Queen Melyora "departed from the world". The unusual manner of her death is another point on which all known legends agree. With several of her most trusted advisors and associates gathered around her in the very heart of Wyrn Wood, she told them that she must join with the spirit of Oak Heart and leave this world behind. Queen Melyora advised that they would know her successor, she said, by a sign from Oak Heart; if the tree approved of their chosen queen, it would give them a clear omen of blessing. Her final declaration was that her people should not grieve for her but celebrate her passing. All of her subjects were to spread their memories of her and cherish the time they had been given together. Then, bidding her favorites farewell, she walked up to Oak Heart's trunk and lightly rested her palm against the wood. The wood parted under her touch like water around a rock, leaving a hole just large enough for the queen to step through. She entered the hollow trunk and vanished. "Never to be seen again in this earthly plane of existence."

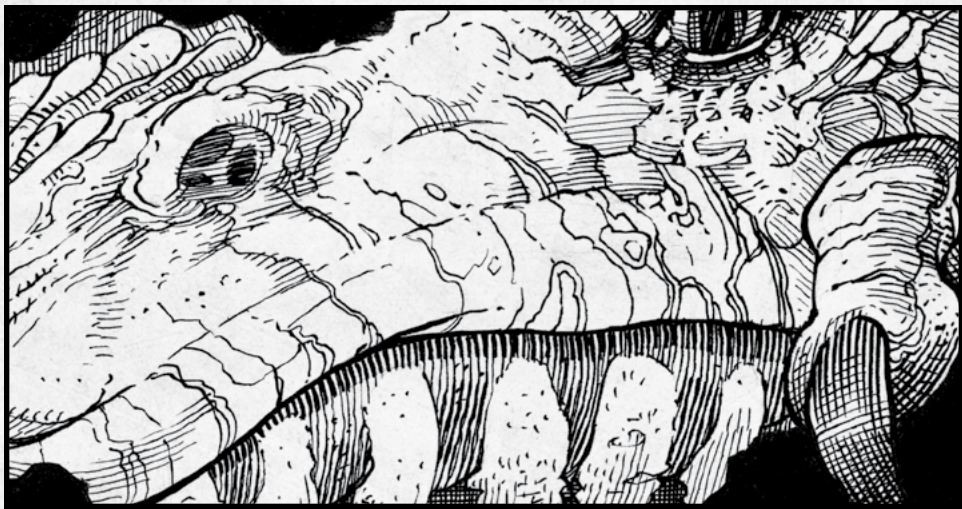
Wealth and Prosperity

For at least three centuries after Melyora's passing, the Elven Court prospered under the guidance of its sovereigns. Queen succeeded queen in relative peace and order, and the Elven Court achieved greater and greater brilliance in all the arts known to civilization. But the Court was not without its challenges.

Several legends from this time speak of a war between the elves and the t'skrang. Scholars believe that, during this protracted conflict, the elves of Wyrn Wood established shipyards and became masters of river combat. For the first time in their history they faced an outside threat. They fought to secure their borders and prevent unwanted incursions for generations and, eventually, secured the respect of the entire known world.

After establishing firm control over Wyrn Wood, the Elven Court once again looked to spread their grace elsewhere. Throughout the land elven realms grew and thrived, and new elven settlements were founded across the world. The settlements became towns and the towns became cities, but their ties to Wyrn Wood remained strong and vital. The Western Kingdoms grew more unified with each passing year. Together the kingdoms dubbed themselves the *Gwydenro*, the Queen's Land, and established a smaller Court that they might better serve their distant queen.

Not all distant nations were as eager to follow the queen's edicts, however. Different peoples and their cultures inevitably mingled with some elves, particularly those living in lands much different from Wyrn Wood. Between contact with foreign influences and the natural development of local customs, certain elven nations gradually drifted further and further from the ways



of Wyrn Wood. During the reign of Queen Dallia, the issue of this creeping independence came to a head in the realm of Shosara.

Of Ships and Disputes

Surrounded on three sides by the Gwyn Sea, Shosara depended on that body of water for survival. Shosarans lived off the sea's bounty, fishing and gathering various underwater plants much prized by many of their neighbors as medicines and delicacies. Certain Shosarans also gathered True Water, which the Gwyn Sea held in abundance. Shosaran fishers and gatherers therefore needed ships suited to plying the open sea. The Elven Court of Wyrn Wood had no need of seagoing ships, and so could offer Shosaran shipwrights no guidance. The Shosarans were forced to look to their neighbors for inspiration.

As news of these unique Shosaran vessels spread, it caused only mild concern. Certain shipwrights and wood carvers renowned enough to have influence at Court complained that the Shosaran vessels violated the spirit of elven unity by differing from custom, but others regarded the differences as insignificant. Concern turned to scandal when it was discovered that these changes had not been wholly conceived by elven tradesmen, but instead built to emulate the humans of nearby Khistova. The elves of Shosara were accused of allowing elven culture to be tainted by foreign influences - an unforgivable slight to Wyrn Wood and the Court's position as the avatar of elven ways.

The queen's advisors agreed unanimously on one point: Shosara had committed a grievous error and must be punished accordingly. The question of exactly what action to take divided them. Some called for a temporary cessation of trade, to remind the Shosarans of just how vital Wyrn Wood was to their prosperity. Others called for banning Shosaran artists and craftsmen from the Court, as they had shown so little respect for true elven arts. A few voices called for the most extreme penalty: Separation, the formal sundering of ties with the Elven Court.

Against the wishes of many of her courtiers, Queen Dallia made an unprecedented decision. She chose to visit Shosara, to see its people first-hand before passing her final judgement upon them. Separation, she argued, was worse than death. She claimed that to condemn an entire nation of elves to such a fate without being certain they deserved it was unjust and unworthy of a true queen.

Queen Dallia's plan caused enormous consternation throughout Wyrn Wood. No queen had ever left before and the prospect terrified commoner and courtier alike. Yet, such was their reverence for the queen's judgment, none openly opposed her. Many pleaded with her to change her mind, convinced that no good could possibly come of this "cursed Shosaran venture." But Dallia remained adamant. She made the necessary preparations and, accompanied by ten of her finest elven warriors, set out for the northern colony.

As it turned out, the doomsayers were right. The few available eyewitness accounts differ in exact details, but all agree that Queen Dallia and most of her escort were slain by the Great Dragon Alamaise less than two days' journey from Wyrn Wood's borders. Explanations for this act range from punishment for unspecified crimes that the elves allegedly committed, to sheer bloodthirsty malice. All of the accounts paint Queen Dallia as heroic in some fashion, and the dragon as a villain. One popular legend depicts Alamaise as murdering Queen Dallia for refusing to acknowledge him as the true ruler of the elven people.

Succession and Separation

For two years, the Elven Court remained without a ruler. Few elf women in Wyrn Wood believed themselves worthy to fill Queen Dallia's shoes, and Oak Heart gave no clear sign of favor to those candidates who presented themselves before the assembled Court. Then, in the first month of spring, runners brought word that the Lady Failla of the Western Kingdoms was approaching. The sheer size of her well-armed entourage gave rise to feverish speculation among the courtiers and other nobles of the ranelles.

Upon her arrival, Failla went out of her way to comfort her peers. She left half her entourage billeted in small villages in the fringes of the forest and traveled on to the Court with a much-reduced honor guard. She presented herself to the senior courtiers with courtesy and deference. A vision had led her to Wyrn Wood, she said, to claim the empty throne and bring stability to the troubled people. But she knew such visions could be delusions sent by the trickster Passion Vestrial. She would therefore abide by the Court's judgment. If they saw no clear sign from Oak Heart when she presented herself before the tree, she vowed to go quietly back to her realm's capital city of Sereatha.

The following dawn, Lady Failla stood before Oak Heart and the senior nobles of the Court. She bowed to the tree, and "with great reverence, much befitting a humble suppliant, asked the Tree to give a true sign if she should be a queen or no." After a moment or two of silence, a full-grown oak leaf dropped from the tree and brushed the top of Failla's head. So early in the

spring, Oak Heart's leaves had scarcely begun to bud; for a fully formed leaf to appear was a miracle. The courtiers took it as such, and further proclaimed that the leaf - which should not have grown until high summer - symbolized the "glorious summer" that would come with the new queen's reign. And so, Lady Failla ascended the Rose Throne amid much rejoicing.

There was no such rejoicing in Shosara, however. All too soon, Queen Failla showed the northern elves just how different she was from her predecessor. During her time in the Western Kingdoms she had ardently adhered to the ways of the Elven Court. Under her stewardship, the city of Sereatha had been dubbed "the Little Court" for its strong likeness to the Court at Wyrn Wood. As Queen of all elvenkind, Failla refused to tolerate even the slightest difference of custom between the Elven Court and other elven realms. For Shosara, whose people had dared borrow customs from humans, there could be no mercy or forgiveness. Only one penalty fit the seriousness of their crime: Separation.

Over the vehement protestations of the resident Shosaran ambassador and the ranelles with Shosaran ties, Queen Failla declared the errant northern kingdom forever sundered from the Elven Court. All elves were to sever their connections with Shosara, and the ambassador was given a day and a night to leave the Wood. Even the queen's own most favored advisor, the renowned scholar Elianar Messias, could not sway her from her course. When he publicly and adamantly opposed the Separation, Failla banished him from Wyrn Wood for a hundred years. This Separation has never been undone and some believe that this momentous choice signalled the beginning of their Court's fall from grace.

From Separation to Schism

After the Separation, the shared elven history comes to an end. Many elves, especially those of Barsaive, remained true to Failla and Wyrn Wood. Fear of Separation worked, for a time, and kept many colonies loyal to the Court. Shosara, now adrift, was forced to find its own path forward. Elianar Messias survived his hundred years of exile but chose not to return home to his queen. Instead, he discovered the Books of Harrow and founded Nehr'esham, the village that would one day host the seat of the mighty empire Thera.

These actions of Elianar's incensed Queen Failla, and the Court has always held a disdainful view of Thera. In part, it was the Court's enmity that drove its actions during the Orichalcum Wars. It was certainly this enmity that drove Queen Alachia to forbid the use of Theran techniques during the Scourge. And, due to that forbiddance, the elves of Wyrn Wood were forced to enact the Ritual of Thorns, creating the tainted forest of Blood Wood. This complete loss of the Court is a loss of a cultural touchstone to every elf, whether they would admit to that fact or not.

ELVEN SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

Millenia ago, when Wyrms Wood bloomed and its people stood united, they constructed a core set of beliefs that was meant to guide an elf's life from cradle to grave. Elves loyal to these beliefs were simply referred to in the elven tongue of Sperethiel as *Mistishsa* or "Followers."

For a time, all true elves followed this set of beliefs. Eventually, elves began to break away from the Court to forge their own path. In doing so, they altered the beliefs of the Follower to better suit their needs. These hundreds (if not thousands) of splinter groups are collectively referred to as the *Dae'mistishsa*, or "Free Followers," while those that held true to the old tenants were referred to as *Sa'mistishsa* or "Strong Followers."

There are also elves who have separated from Wyrms Wood so totally they have entirely abandoned their old traditions. The first two groups refer to the third as the *Nal'mistishsa*, "Lost Followers." Those that Follow feel a comfort in the plan set before them and find it difficult to imagine a life among the Lost. Most view these *Nal'mistishsa* with pity, imagining how bereft they must feel. Others, like the nobles of Sereatha, look upon the *Nal'mistishsa* with disdain. As elves too ignorant or slothful to understand and honor their ancient history.

The beliefs of the *Sa'mistishsa* have been collected in many texts and are easily emulated by those with an interest. While the beliefs of the *Dae'mistishsa* are myriad. A single village's beliefs could vary so wildly as to barely be recognized as a Follower on the Path. Every traditional belief of the Strong Followers is challenged in some way by at least one sect of Free Followers. While all sects of *Dae'mistishsa* have broken from traditional doctrine to some degree, the roots of their beliefs are typically still similar and nearly all Followers can recognize the traditions of those from different sects.

The Way of the Follower

Traditionally, elves are taught from birth to contemplate and understand. It is drilled into them that they must understand both themselves and the world around them. To the outside observer, this drive to understand can foster the illusion of the dispassionate, analytical, and indifferent elf. In truth, elves bring deep feeling to all that they do. However, while other races demonstrate their feelings with action, elven traditionalists do so through devotion and discipline. At the very core of this devotion is belief in the Wheel, a never-ending journey of discovery. This journey is an individual trial put before every elf and it begins before an elf takes its first breath.

The Rites Surrounding Birth

As with all Namegivers, elves value the birth of a new life beyond all other things. To an elf, the arrival of a new Follower along the Wheel of Life is cause for great celebration. From the moment of quickening, the expectant mother is showered with gifts and loving attention by all her kindred. The sacred rites of birth, however, do not begin until the tenth month of pregnancy.

In this final month before the expected birth of the child, the closest kinswoman (or dearest friend) of the mother-to-be comes to live under her roof. This woman is known as her *dresner*, or “assistant”, and aids the expectant mother and fulfills most of her duties in the household.

At the time of birth, the *dresner* and the midwife escort the expectant mother to the birthing room. Once the door to the birthing room is shut, none but these three women may enter until the child is born. While they labor to bring the child into the world, relatives and friends begin the ritual known as *Ar’laana*, or “the Wait”. These favored ones gather in the expectant family’s home and pass the time telling tales and singing songs of the awaited child’s ancestors. They also invent fanciful stories of the child’s future exploits. To represent the child’s first steps along the *Draesis ti’Morel*, “the Wheel of Life,” every elf present during the *Ar’laana* adds some ornament or stitchery to a pair of boots crafted for the coming infant.

Once the child is born, the midwife takes them to the father. Whether presented with the child during day or night, sunlight or storm, the father carries his infant son or daughter out of doors and shows the new youngling the sky. As he holds the child up to the elements, the father announces the birth of a new Follower to the world.

On the Ritual of Passage

When an elf reaches the age of twenty years, they enact the Ritual of Passage. Completing the Ritual of Passage transitions a carefree elf child from the center of the Wheel into a fully formed Follower of the Path, ready to begin their Journey around the wheel.

The Ritual of Passage takes place in two stages, with the first stage beginning seven days before the elf’s twentieth birthday. From dawn until dusk on that day, the elf fasts, partaking in naught but water. At dusk the elf goes out into the woods to sleep. Before slumber overtakes them, they turn their thoughts to what they wish to make of their life. Throughout the night, the elf dreams of their future. They return home with the dawn and begin to make some item that represents their dreams. An elf who dreamed of becoming a healer might make a medicine pouch, an adventurer might make a weapon, and so on. Whatever the item, the elf must finish it by sunrise on their birthday. As they work, the elf thinks of their vision and discovers within themselves their new adult Name.

On the elf’s twentieth birthday, the second stage of the Ritual of Passage takes place. The elf and their guardians travel to a secluded place deep within the forest (where they are joined by other family and friends). The elf speaks in turn to each Namegiver present, thanking them for the love and guidance they gave throughout their childhood. Before them all, they declare themselves an adult no longer in need of protection and tells them their new Name. Each of the others present speak the elf’s new Name, thereby welcoming them formally into the adult community.

In many settlements, the fasting day and the night of dreaming in the forest is combined with a challenge or test of courage. If the elf fails such a test, they must wait a year and a day before beginning the Ritual of Passage again.

Of the Journey and the Wheel of Life

A Follower sees all life as a journey of discovery, change, growth, and ascendancy. Upon reaching maturity, every elf treads a metaphysical pathway represented by the Draesis ti'Morel, the Wheel of Life. The Wheel contains five Paths, each corresponding to a different stage of life. As an elf ages, their journey along the Wheel leads them through each Path until they return to the Wheel's heart. At this still center of being, they prepare their spirit for ascension into the metaplanes, to the mystical place known as *Tesrae ke'Mellakabal*, the Citadel of the Shining Ones.

Each Path represents ever-greater spiritual maturity. The Paths, in order, are as follows: *Mes ti'Meraerthsa*, the Path of Warriors; *Mes ti'Telenetishsa*, the Path of Scholars; *Mes ti'Cirolletishsa*, the Path of Travelers; *Mes ti'Perritaesa*, the Path of Sages; and *Mes ti'Raeghsa*, the Path of Lords.

As an elf walks along the Wheel, they are said to be Following one of its Paths. They Follow each Path in order, from *Mes ti'Meraerthsa* to *Mes ti'Raeghsa*. It is up to the Follower to determine when they are ready to move from one Path to the next. The journey down each Path is expected to take decades and a sense of enlightenment and understanding is said to herald the time of transition.

After completing a Path, but before transitioning to a new one, the Follower enters the *Chaele ti'Désach*, the Days of Change. During this time, the elf is encouraged to examine the bonds they forged on their Path and determine if they have a place in their future. During this time of introspection, traditionalist elves often step down from their responsibilities and frequently leave their spouses. Leaving these old associations behind is recognized as a difficult task, and such choices are typically met with deference and respect. If the Follower was an adept, they must leave behind their old Discipline, though they may attempt to begin one anew.

Each Follower is meant to tread the Path of Lords before their death. In practice, few elves manage to reach this fifth and final Path before passing. It is believed that any elf who dies before completing their journey can still manage to find their place in the Citadel of the Shining Ones as long as they were suitably dedicated in their Journey.

Of the Different Paths

For each of the five Paths that lead to the transformation and ascension of the elven spirit into *Tesrae ke'Mellakabal*, seven specific associations are sacred to Followers. These associations are: colors, regalia, elements, hours, age, Passions, and Discipline. These associations range from personal reminders to social identifiers; from profound symbols of deep meaning to practical necessities

A Follower displays their Path in the colors of their clothes, so that others may know their Path and show them the respect due. Sigils, symbols, designs, jewelry, and sacred objects also show a Follower's Path. The specific regalia chosen can vary from Follower to Follower. Each Path has a certain element associated with it: Earth, Air, Fire, Water, or Wood. These elements and anything made of them are of great significance to a Follower of that element's Path. Certain times of day have meaning for Followers of a given Path; during these sacred hours they must perform a special Path ritual similar to an adept's karma ritual but focused on the Follower's Path. The brief ritual, a mere ten minutes in length, reinforces the Follower's dedication to their Path. The age associated with each Path serves as a guideline to the time of life at which each elf should reach a certain Path. Many reach a given Path earlier than the given age, some reach it later.

It is believed that a Passion guides the Follower in their journey along each Path. Some Followers choose to devote themselves to the relevant Passion for their Path and become questors during their Journey. Those that choose to pursue this more difficult Journey are known as *Beletre*, the Passionate, and are revered for their dedication.

The final association, that of Discipline, is a complex matter and the most fundamental breaking point between Strong Followers and Free Followers. The looser Dae'mistishsa frequently believe that any number of Disciplines are acceptable for an adept who would follow a given Path, provided the adept keeps the goals of their current Path at the front of their mind. The Sa'mistishsa believe there is one Discipline, and one Discipline only, that is acceptable on each stage of the Journey. To partake in another is to undermine the Wheel entirely.

Of course, few Namegivers are capable of becoming adepts and fewer adepts are flexible enough to understand the views of all Disciplines. For this reason, traditional followers may spend decades without a Discipline only to begin a new Path and uncover a power within them that had remained dormant. Alternately, they may transition from being a powerful adept to a humble and seemingly mundane member of society. Only upon reaching the final Path, the Path of Lords, do traditionalists allow their adept Followers to partake in all of the Disciplines they may have mastered during their Journey.

Mes ti'Meraerthsa, The Path of Warriors

The colors of the Path of Warriors are dark earth shades such as black, brown, gray, or deep red. Such a Follower's regalia often include clothing cut along sharp lines, embroidery or jewelry designs with hard edges and angles, and swords or other weapons. The element of this Path is Earth, and its hour is Midnight. After the Ritual of Passage (p. 21), each Follower begins down this Path and may walk it at any time between his coming of age and his sixtieth year. The Path of Warriors belongs to Thystonius, Passion of Valor and Conflict. The Sa'mistishsa associate this Path with the Warrior Discipline.

The Warrior's Path tests an elf's physical strength and abilities. While following this Path, each elf discovers the limits of their body. Emotions rule over reason, and instinct reigns over intellect. As the Follower walks this Path, they learn of the wonders and dangers of the world. They have little time for philosophy and debate, acting and reacting too swiftly for thought. To complete the Path of Warriors is to understand the results of following your instincts and the strengths and failings of being a reactionary creature.

Mes ti'Telenetishsa, The Path of Scholars

Those treading the Path of Scholars wear bright, rich shades of red and yellow. Favored regalia includes rich embroidery, textured artworks, and symbols of fire or the sun. The element of this Path is Fire, and its hour is Dawn. An elf begins to Follow this Path between the ages of 60 and 120. Floranuus, Passion of Revelry, Energy, Victory, and Motion, guides a Follower's steps on this Path. It is associated with the Elementalist Discipline.

The Follower who walks this Path begins to explore their inner nature. The Scholar's Path is not a call to introspection, but an exploration of the reasons behind action. The Follower of this Path examines purposes, defines motives, and reveals intent. Though they still act in the physical world, they act with deliberation and purpose. Along this Path, the Follower begins to perceive much of the inner workings of the world and their own, inner self. To complete this Path is to understand purpose and drive both in yourself and in the world around you.

Mes ti'Ciolletishsa, The Path of Travelers

The colors of the Path of Travelers are light shades of the sky and river, especially blues, whites, and greens. Favored regalia include dramatic, flamboyant artworks and designs as well as both musical and writing instruments. The element of this Path is Air, and its hour is Midday. An elf commonly walks this Path between the ages of 120 and 180. Astendar, Passion of Love and Art, watches over this Path. Its Discipline is the Troubadour.

The Follower who walks this Path moves from the inward soul to the outward world. While in the Mes ti'Telenetishsa, the Follower explored the inner relationship between thought and action, along the Traveler's Path the Follower discovers the relationship between actions or between expression and inspiration. As they walk this Path, they begin to touch upon the deeper patterns that link all things in the universe. Many Followers of the Mes ti'Ciolletishsa find themselves near centers of power or deeply involved in adventure. In places of power and peril, the Follower can see many connections in the physical world through tales, song, and legends. To complete the Path of Travelers is to understand how drives force the world to shift and change and how every action is in truth a reaction to those who came before.

Mes ti'Perritaesa, The Path of Sages

The colors of the Path of Sages are rich and deep, such as dark blues, red, and black. Favored regalia include symbolic, abstract works of art, especially those that incorporate detailed designs and mystical symbols. The element of this Path is Water, and its hour is Sunset. An elf commonly Follows this Path between the ages of 180 and 240. Jaspree, Passion of Growth, guides Followers of this Path. The accepted Discipline is the Wizard.

The Follower of the Sage's Path turns inward once more, finding the inner world far more complex than the outer one. The Follower begins to explore the inner connections between all things. Allowing them to see patterns and define truths once hidden. The cycles of nature become clear, and they begin to understand the true workings of the world. Revelations abound as the Follower perceives the hidden causes behind seemingly unconnected events. Along this Path, the elven spirit re-emerges and begins to move toward the center of the Wheel. Completing the Path of Sages is a deeply personal moment, but it is said those who complete this Path understand the things that must be and the things that may be, with the wisdom to tell the difference between the two.

Mes ti'Raeghsa, The Path of Lords

The colors of the Path of Lords are silver, gold, and bronze. Favored regalia include embroidery and artwork of simple designs that include deeply significant personal symbols. The element of this Path is Wood, and all hours are sacred to it. An elf commonly treads this Path between the ages of 240 and 300. This Path belongs to Mynbruje, Passion of Justice, Compassion, Empathy, and Truth. All elves accept all Disciplines as associated with this Path.

The Follower of the Path of Lords achieves true harmony, bringing the body into balance with the mind. Having achieved mastery of themselves and the world they inhabit, all the world's mysteries are the Follower's to ponder and control as they seek the final balance of self and spirit. Once they have achieved this balance, the gates to the metaplanes will open, so that they may make the final journey to Tesrae ke'Mellakabal.

Mes ti'Raeghsa is a Path of great calm, but also of great power. The Follower uses all that they have learned to prepare themselves for entrance to the Citadel of the Shining Ones. One cannot know when the gates to Tesrae ke'Mellakabal will open and beckon, so the Follower must always be ready. When their spirit is taken from its physical vessel, the Follower has completed his Journey along the Wheel.

On Rituals Associated with Death

Where many races regard death as a tragedy to be spoken of only when necessary, elves believe the spirit of a fallen elf lives on in another form. For this reason, elves speak often and with joy of their dead brethren. Though elves do see sadness in death, the sorrow is for the living, who will miss the

physical presence of the loved one who has gone before. It is a gentle grief and carries no fear of death with it.

Many aged elves anticipate their deaths and spread word of their impending demise, so their families and friends may gather and prepare. It is customary for the dying elf to make a gift of one of their pattern items to someone in the youngest generation of their family. This gifting symbolizes the faith the oldest generations place in the youngest to uphold elven traditions and customs. A young elf who receives such a gift regards it as a precious heirloom. To lose it, or worse, cast it aside, is a fearsome omen of calamity.

Since the passing of the first Queen Melyora (p. 15), the passing of any elf is followed by the Ritual of Everlife. The ritual takes place at midnight, in a place far from any habitation. Each participant holds a single, darkened source of light. Beginning with the mate of the deceased (or their closest living relative) each participant shares a favorite memory of the departed. As each speaks, they activate their light source. Once all have spoken, the mate steps into the center of the softly glowing ring of light and speaks of the tales of the deceased they will share with others, and which heirlooms the deceased has chosen to pass on to their descendants. Once the mate has finished speaking, all extinguish their lights as they speak aloud the deceased's Name in unison. In the renewed darkness, all participants leave the ritual site, none speaking a word to another until the dawn.

THE NEXT COURT

Before the Scourge, there were dozens of elven colonies throughout the region with ties to the Elven Court of Wyrms Wood. However, the growing tensions between Queen Alachia and the Therans led her to outlaw the Empire's offered Rites of Protection and Passage. This chaotic time saw many nations of elves turn their backs against their former protector for fear their culture would crumble under the coming terrors. These powers struggled to find a method for survival without the support of the Wood, and few managed to weather the Scourge with their strength intact.

From those dark days, only three nations with claims to the Elven Court remain.

The Courts of Today

The former vision of Wyrms Wood lies twisted on the northern fringe of Barsaive. Blood Wood stands in its place, ruled by a Queen who believes her method of protection was the path that any elf would have chosen in her stead.



The Wood claims to be the enlightened Court they always were, and the Ritual of Thorns is merely the course that all elven culture is destined to follow.

To the northwest, beyond the Grand Cataracts and the Wastes, the traditionalists of the Western Kingdoms contest their former Queen's claim. They view the Ritual of Thorns as an abomination, and its effects irrevocably corrupting. With the loss of Wyrn Wood, the Western Kingdoms claim it is their responsibility to unify the remains of the elven people. What once was the Queen's staunchest vassal has risen to be perhaps her greatest military threat.

Even more distant, in the chaotic northern lands on the shores of the Gwyn Sea, Shosara has re-emerged from the Scourge stronger than ever before. They point to their Council of Princes and their allied Free Companies as examples of their adaptability. When they look at their history, they see a guide for how the elves must move forward. They view the path of the Western Kingdoms as a step back and the Ritual of Thorns a fate worse than death. Instead, they counsel for the elven people to move forward and cast aside old traditions that have long since lost their usefulness.

Of Hearts and Minds

Each of the three nations struggle to gather supporters beyond their respective domains, but each also faces unique challenges. Most view Blood Wood as fallen and corrupt, the legends of the Western Kingdoms quickly give way to haughty and elitist nobility, and the beliefs of Shosara seem alien and mercurial. Despite these three very different qualms, each nation seems to be pursuing the same method of cultural persuasion. Each seeks to control the Elven Court's ancient symbol of unity: the great tree Oak Heart.

The Queen of Blood Wood has sealed away the legendary Oak Heart, restricting access to only a trusted few. When confronted on the widespread rumor of the corruption growing out from the Forest's Heart, she dismisses the concerns claiming that, in time, her protection over the forest will prevail. The Steward of the Western Kingdoms has decreed the old tree forever lost and claims to be cultivating a fresh and uncorrupted growth. The High Prince of Shosara has stated his belief that a new tree could only find purchase in their distant soil.

Whatever the truth, the three nations are pouring significant resources into reclaiming the scattered acorns of Oak Heart. While this has yet to publicly yield any results, the elves of the world watch with a mixture of optimism and fear. They hope for a day the Court might be unified, and fear for what that unity might cost them.





THE KINGDOM OF THORNS

The Elven Court at Wyrn Wood was established thousands of years before the Scourge and came to define all that was best in elven nature. The center of elven culture and wellspring of elven influence throughout the known world, the elf queen's court served as the measuring stick against which all elves and elven nations measured themselves. The role of the Elven Court remained unchallenged until the reign of Failla, who Separated Shosara from the Court's favor for failing to adhere to established traditions.

The Court lost face again with the coming of the Scourge. When Queen Alachia refused the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage, a great schism divided the people of Wyrn Wood. Many of Alachia's subjects turned their backs on the Court and sought shelter elsewhere. When it became known the elves of Wyrn Wood had taken refuge against the Horrors in the Ritual of Thorns, reNaming their beloved forest Blood Wood, the other elven nations felt Alachia had betrayed their very nature and destroyed the Elven Court. The struggle for ascendancy between the elves and the blood elves, and the fundamental dichotomy now dividing their natures, is at the center of what it means to be a blood elf.

HISTORY

In response to growing unrest caused by the Separation, Queen Failla established the office of *consortis*. Eight councilors, one for each of the trees that made up the Palace, would be drawn from the ranelles still loyal to Wyrn Wood. The consortis were to be the queen's most trusted advisors and would have a voice with far more weight than any other member of the Elven Court. The most powerful ranelles immediately began vying to fill these coveted positions. Queen Failla believed the infighting would disrupt any chance for unity among any remaining dissidents, quashing the prospect of further rebellion. However, her next decision would prove unpopular enough to overcome the distraction the consortis provided.

The Queen's Warders petitioned to build a permanent settlement of their own where they could devote themselves to the magical arts and train their apprentices. Queen Failla granted this request and gave them permission to build wherever they wished. They chose the Forest's Heart. It was an ideal location: sparsely populated and blessed with an abundance of True wood to fuel their experiments.

Arianna, leader of the Laryskova ranelle, strongly protested the Warders' choice. She had been petitioning to expand her ranelle's Royal Patent to harvest and sell True wood to make up for the loss of its Shosaran trade. Allowing the Warders to settle the Forest's Heart would cost the Laryskova that portion of their business and tear the ample True wood supplies from them in one blow. The Laryskova had already made sacrifices out of loyalty to their sovereign and Arianna did not believe they should have to do so again.

Making matters worse, the leading voice in support of the Warders was Kenlyn Escalanas, the aging leader of the Escalanas ranelle. As a young man, Kenlyn had rebuffed Arianna's affections. She had never forgotten or forgiven the slight and to see the Escalanas favored over her ranelle was an insult Arianna could not forgive. She accepted the queen's judgment with barely concealed anger and retreated to her family home in the Wood's southwestern regions.

No more inclined than Arianna to suffer an insult quietly, Queen Failla exacted a slow and subtle revenge against the Laryskova for daring to oppose her. She revoked their Royal Patent to trade in True wood and granted it to the Blood Warders upon completion of their settlement.

Over the next few years, as the Laryskova tried expanding their trading activities, Queen Failla ruled against the majority of their petitions. The Laryskova most often came into conflict with the Carithasca ranelle, an up-and-coming family of minor nobility. Failla supported the Carithasca in virtually every dispute, ruling in favor of the Laryskova just often enough to keep them from giving up completely. With its trade greatly reduced and new opportunities restricted, the once-proud Laryskova ranelle grew poorer and less powerful with every passing year. Meanwhile, the Carithasca family gained increasing wealth and influence. After Kenlyn Escalanas received Failla's blessing for the marriage of his granddaughter Milina to Seosamh Carithasca, eldest grandchild of the Carithasca matriarch, Arianna could take no more. With the backing of her family, and several minor ranelles jealous of the great families' grip on power, she began plotting revenge against the sovereign she now deemed unworthy.

The rebellion began not with military action, but a weapon far more effective in the Elven Court: rumor. Arianna Laryskova had been among those who witnessed Queen Failla's acceptance by Oak Heart, an experience which she used to spread the story that the sign of approval had in fact been a warning of things to come. Rather than a glorious summer under Failla's rule, the falling leaf actually symbolized the unnaturalness of Failla's reign. With her as queen, life would fall away from its accustomed order. The longer she was allowed to remain on the throne, the more things would fall apart. The Separation of Shosara and the banishment of Elianar Messias were two glaring examples of this encroaching chaos. No elven kingdom, and certainly no elf of Messias's sterling reputation, had ever been so ill-treated by any sovereign in Wyrms Wood's history.

Those already uneasy with these events found this negative interpretation all too plausible, especially when they contrasted Failla's cold pride with Dallia's warmth and graciousness. From the minor ranelles, the rumors quickly spread to the common folk, and even into the ranks of the other great ranelles. Though they said it only in whispers, voices all over Wyrn Wood began suggesting Queen Failla should no longer occupy the Rose Throne.

Pleased with the success of her rumor campaign, Arianna gathered her loyal warriors and waited for Failla's next move. She believed the queen would not give up the throne without a fight but hoped to keep the bloodshed to a minimum. To her surprise, Failla gathered the entire Court (including Arianna) and announced her intention to step down. The queen, with immense dignity, told the assembled courtiers Oak Heart had spoken to her in another vision and told her to leave this world. If the elven people no longer appreciated the magnificent queen Oak Heart had chosen for them, the great tree would take back its gift. Furthermore, Oak Heart had sworn to teach the elves a lesson for their ingratitude. Queen Failla then dismissed the Court and was never heard from again.

The only account of Failla's passing comes from Rhethys Escalanas, widely acknowledged as her most valued consortis. As Rhethys tells it, the queen set off to the Forest's Heart that very night, walked into Oak Heart's hollow trunk, and disappeared. Oak Heart then spoke to Rhethys, telling him the rightful queen of the elves would appear on the Rose Throne in the morning. In great distress, Rhethys rushed back to the palace, where he spent the rest of the night pacing in his bedchamber.

As the first light of dawn filtered through the trees, he summoned the other consortis and told them his story. Skeptical at first, they accompanied him to the throne room and found the Rose Throne occupied by a stranger. A tall, strongly built woman sat staring at them with cold, gray eyes. As the glint of sunlight sparkled off her platinum-colored hair, she looked at each of the courtiers, as if to measure their inmost worth. She then spoke: "Greetings. I am Liara, Queen of Wyrn Wood."

The Iron Queen

Those who had opposed Failla for her "unjust acts of tyranny" soon came to see her reign as a golden age compared to Queen Liara's. Where Failla had been primarily concerned with enforcing absolute unity on the elven realms



outside Wyrn Wood, Queen Liara turned this relentless insistence on conformity against members of the Elven Court itself.

All who had sided against Queen Failla, from the chief instigators to the lowliest tradesman, felt the sting of the new queen's wrath. Many minor noble families had their lands taken from them. Others found their heirs barred from making advantageous marriages or receiving hereditary posts at Court. Some were even imprisoned. The worst fate, however, befell the Laryskova ranelle. Queen Liara banished them from the Wood, down to the smallest infant, and confiscated everything they owned save the clothes on their backs. She spread the Laryskova wealth among several loyalist ranelles but gave the most substantial portion to the Carithasca family. This gift vaulted the Carithasca into the ranks of the great ranelles, where they remain to this day.

The Orichalcum Wars, which erupted midway through Liara's reign, provided a brief respite to the beleaguered folk of the Wood. While Liara demanded even more unquestioning loyalty from her people, the presence of a common outside enemy united them behind her where fear of her wrath alone could not. The elves of Wyrn Wood were not aggressors in these wars but defended themselves against attackers who mistakenly regarded the Wood as easy pickings. Formidable magic combined with scores of crack archers decimated enemy armies and kept the Wood inviolate. Meanwhile, elven ships patrolled the Mothingale River and held pirates at bay. The great shipyards at the southern edge of the Wood, which lie in ruins today, were built during the Orichalcum Wars and produced at least a hundred mighty sailing ships, of which the fabled *Mallornica* is the only one remaining.

Wyrn Wood emerged relatively unscathed from the Orichalcum Wars, but the conflict had one consequence whose terrible repercussions no one could have foreseen. Either shortly before or shortly after the wars ended, Queen Liara found evidence the Theran Empire had secretly backed several assaults against Wyrn Wood. Though the details of this evidence have been lost to rumor, it roused the queen to fury. Liara had previously allowed the Therans to trade with the Wood to support the Court's increasing need for orichalcum. The notion they would sponsor attempts at armed takeovers was enough for Liara to forbid all dealings between elves and the Therans. Any elf who willingly violated this decree would be banished from the Wood and permanently barred from setting foot in it again. At the time, Liara's subjects greeted her action with virtually unanimous support. Unfortunately, the policy would have consequences in the future.

In the years after the Orichalcum Wars, Queen Liara stamped out the last remnants of Failla's dissenters. Her draconian measures restored order but drew little distinction between minor variations of custom and genuine acts of defiance. The Wood was pacified, but at the cost of its people's spirit. This sullen mood soon affected elven realms throughout the world. Accustomed to revering and emulating the Elven Court, its decline left them emotionally and culturally adrift. Before long, the creeping malaise emboldened Shosara to send envoys to their fellow elven nations, with the shocking suggestion that

perhaps some other realm should take up the Elven Court's mantle. They didn't dare name themselves, but the implication was clear. Before any elven kingdom could muster a response, however, word came that Wyrms Wood had a new queen.

A Queen for the New Age

From a scholar's point of view, Alachia's rise to the throne remains disturbingly vague. The circumstances of Queen Liara's passing remain equally mysterious. Whatever the truth, the elves of Wyrms Wood welcomed their new sovereign with open arms. Alachia declared her determination to rule through love rather than fear, a promise she amply fulfilled across the next few decades. The elves of Wyrms Wood rewarded her kindness with an outpouring of personal affection not shown to any sovereign since the days of Queen Dallia. Songs of the period rhapsodize at length about Queen Alachia's delicate beauty, incomparable grace, and boundless compassion toward all living things. For all her charm and graciousness, however, Alachia made few genuine changes. The expectation to demonstrate loyalty by adherence to the smallest detail of custom remained as strong as ever.

In one of the greatest ironies of history, the queen determined to rule her people through love ended up fracturing the very unity she had hoped to nurture. The splintering of the elven nations, known as the Schism, shattered bonds between and within the world's elven realms. No kingdom was spared, not even Wyrms Wood. The cataclysmic threat of the Scourge, combined with Liara's anti-Theran policies, precipitated a tragedy whose consequences continue to this day.

The Rites of Protection and Passage

During Queen Failla's reign, Elianar Messiah discovered the Books of Harrow. These ancient tomes warned of a calamity called the Scourge, an impending invasion of the physical world by ravening monsters from another plane. According to the books, these so-called Horrors would descend upon the world and ravage it, causing unspeakable suffering and violent death wherever they went. Elianar and several like-minded scholars concluded the Scourge was genuine and could not be averted. Powerful magical protection was needed to guarantee the world's survival.



Over several centuries, these magicians and their descendants developed the Rites of Protection and Passage, whereby the world's people could build underground shelters and seal themselves behind magical wards no Horror could breach. This same passage of time turned the community of scholars into the mighty Theran Empire. Having lost sight of their original goal for survival, Theran greed caused them to demand a price for their magic. Every kingdom, city, or town that accepted the Rites of Protection must also acknowledge the Empire as its ruler.

With signs of the Scourge growing more frequent, and lacking any viable alternative, kingdom after kingdom gave in to the Theran demands. Queen Alachia, however, refused the Theran envoys' proposal. She declared the elven people needed no "spurious protections peddled by pretenders to skill in sorcery." The elves would rely on their own magic to keep the Horrors at bay and threatened to expel from Court any elven nation that submitted to the Therans.

At first, the elves had every confidence in their own magical gifts, believing Queen Alachia and her Warders would devise some way to protect them. It seemed, however, their faith was misplaced as the Warders and other prominent magicians found themselves exhausting one method after another. As the Scourge drew closer, more and more elves began to have second thoughts. Slowly but surely, elves throughout all the kingdoms defected to the Theran Empire. Queen Alachia responded to this Schism with the unwavering tenacity she has become known for. Those who questioned her decision, even trusted advisors and friends, were immediately banished. Eventually, the Warders' efforts produced an alternative they believed would protect the elven people from the coming terrors.

A Kingdom on the Edge of Madness

The Queen's Warders devised a number of powerful spells to raise a gigantic wooden kaer around the Forest's Heart. This seventy-five mile long structure was made of living trees grown so close together that nothing could squeeze between them. Reinforced by magical barriers, the Warders believed this kaer an impenetrable defense. Upon its completion, Queen Alachia magically disassembled her magnificent palace and, together with the Wood's entire population, moved inside the shelter to wait out the Scourge.

For roughly two hundred years, the wooden kaer stood against the Horrors' onslaught. Unbeknownst to those inside, however, the greatest threats to their kaer had yet to manifest on the physical plane. At the height of Scourge, the most powerful Horrors were unleashed throughout the lands of Barsaive. A number of them turned their attention to Wyrms Wood's kaer and began to break down the protective enchantments. As Horrors began to slip past the barrier, the Warders continued their experiments to find ways of repelling these would-be invaders. Desperate times called for reckless actions and many of these experiments resulted in fates worse than those they were designed to prevent.

During one experiment, the Warders discovered the potential of blood magic. By using a blood-magic ritual to alter the Forest Heart's pattern, the Warders managed to purge a single Horror. Kethos Escalanas, one of the most powerful magicians at the queen's disposal, reasoned a similar spell on a larger scale might serve to protect the entire Wood from the remaining Horrors. He conjectured the True pattern of every elf in the Wood could be used to lay the foundation for a massive ritual that would create permanent wards, but the spell would need to inflict permanent pain and disfigurement to prevent the Horrors still outside from devouring their woodland home. Queen Alachia was unwilling to accept such a high toll at that moment, forcing the Warders to continue investigating alternative options.

As the shelter continued to weaken, more and more Horrors penetrated and attacked its residents. One Horror slipped past the defenses and nearly claimed the queen's life. The tragedy was prevented by the gallant actions of Kellimar, an exolasher who slayed the creature at the cost of his own life. With the memory of this near-fatal attack and the weight of all who had fallen in the Court's defense on her mind, Alachia came to a fateful decision. With the kaer crumbling around her ears, she decided the terrible price of the ritual her Warders believed would save the elven people was worth paying. She gave Kethos her permission to proceed, ensuring her people's survival and enacting a permanent transformation on their home.

The Ritual of Thorns

Kethos Escalanas created the Ritual of Thorns, an earth-shaking rite of blood magic designed to protect the elven people and the entirety of Wyrn Wood. Alachia's one condition was that no one but she and the Warders could ever know the true extent of the ritual's cost for fear a second Schism might result from the plan to alter the essence of the Wood itself. Kethos cast his spell with the help of other Warders, carefully integrating its two parts into a seamless whole. As they cast the ritual on each elf, the Warders wove a thread to the forest's True pattern. Only the threads of the elves who survived strengthened the pattern of the Wood, forcing the Warders to balance the need to complete their task quickly with ensuring the survival of at least a slim majority of the population.

After the necessary majority of the elves in the kaer had undergone the first ritual, the Warders cast its second part. Wyrn Wood ceased to exist; it was replaced by Blood Wood, Named for the blood magic used to save the forest's people and for the blood the elves would feed the forest. Conscious of their new role, the Queen's Warders also took a new Name, calling themselves Blood Warders to reflect their responsibility for saving the Wood and the Elven Court from the Scourge.

The Ritual's first part, referred to by the Blood Warders as the Personal Ritual, is all that most people know of what had been done. A combination of Elementalism and blood magic, the spell allowed the Warders to merge a plant spirit with the True pattern of every elf. The shock of this merging and the

agonizing trauma of the thorns killed nearly a third of the Wood's population during the Ritual's initial casting. Of the children subjected to the Ritual of Thorns in the years that followed, approximately 1 in 10 died, a statistic that holds true today.

The most visible result of the ritual was the thorns that sprouted from under the subject's skin, creating wounds that would never heal and constantly drip blood onto the ground. The unending pain caused by these wounds effectively immunized the Namegiver against the Horrors, as many of them could only feed off suffering they created themselves. The thorns also had another purpose: to draw the blood that would feed the magical wards raised by the second part of the ritual.

Known among the Blood Warders as "the reNaming," the second half of the Ritual remains a closely guarded secret. The reNaming altered the True pattern of the forest forever, transforming it from Wyrn Wood to Blood Wood. Blood Wood's pattern was an entirely new shape, warding it from the Horrors. To enact such formidable magic, the Warders needed far more power than they alone could raise. Only blood could maintain the barriers that kept the Horrors from devouring every last tree and leaf in their home. Blood given drop by drop from every elf in the aptly named Blood Wood.

The Wood absorbs the blood that drips from the elves' thorns onto the ground. Many areas of the Wood are so saturated with blood it occasionally pools on the forest floor. The Blood Warders incorporated this constant flow of blood into the reNaming, which served to fuel the ritual when it was first cast. This blood continues to renew the wards that were put in place to this day and have kept Blood Wood free from the Horrors for the past three centuries.

When Queen Alachia announced the plan to cast the Ritual of Thorns, she did so with great sorrow, publicly weeping for the tremendous sacrifice she was asking of her people. Their queen's obvious distress convinced the elves of Wyrn Wood their survival depended on this ritual and that no other method remained. Though they deeply regretted the events that led to what seemed like an abomination, the elves submitted to the Ritual of Thorns out of loyalty to their queen and Court. Unaware of its true extent, Wyrn Wood's inhabitants accepted permanent agony as the price of survival.

Only the Blood Warders understood the implications of the Ritual of Thorns when it was cast. Both halves of the Ritual were necessary for either to be effective; if one part of the Ritual ends, Blood Wood and its people would be destroyed. The constant supply of blood to the Wood sustains the wards against the Horrors, but it also sustains the True pattern of the Wood itself.

Dawn of the New World

Protected by their fearsome magic, Blood Wood and its inhabitants survived the rest of the Scourge. As soon as it was safe, the elves ventured out of the underground shelters they had hastily dug to assess the state of their once pristine woodland. Much of it still lived, though little was undamaged. Appalled at the Wood's injuries, Queen Alachia ordered her Warders to start

working to heal the vegetation. The Warders once again used blood magic in the service of their queen. They planted seeds and fed them with drops of their own blood, causing saplings to spring up overnight and young trees to reach their full growth in a single day. As her own crowning achievement, Alachia regrew her palace and re-established the Court around it. Within months the Wood had been restored, at least on the surface. The number of Warders who had exhausted their lives in service to their queen's command numbered in the dozens, further adding to the toll taken from the Elven Court.

For some time, Blood Wood remained isolated from the rest of the awakening world. The elves themselves were too busy rebuilding their homes and reviving the forest to send scouting parties, and few outsiders cared to travel so far from their homes in the years immediately following the Scourge. Eventually, however, travelers did come to see what remained in the area once known as Wurm Wood. Upon discovering the state of the area, most visitors had trouble hiding their shock and revulsion. As tales of the tragedy spread across the new world, all but a hardened few felt pity for the horribly disfigured elves. Alachia, furious the world dared judge her people so harshly, forbade all but the most limited contact between the blood elves and the outside world.

Near-total isolation remains the Court's official policy, but over the past several years practical considerations have loosened these restrictions. Several of the great ranelles wish to resume the profitable trade interrupted by the Scourge, a grievance Alachia has no desire to see the Court unite against her over. She also sees some advantage in keeping herself informed of events outside the Wood's borders. To that end, the queen employs emissaries to Throal, Urupa, Travar, and other places. Some observers believe Alachia intends to reassert her lost authority over the Western Kingdoms and Shosara, a pursuit not aided by a policy of total isolation. Whether she can persuade her former subjects to accept a thorn-pierced queen remains open for debate.

Blood Elves in the Modern Age

Blood Wood is currently home to roughly 60,000 elves. Nearly half this population lives in small nomadic communities, ranging from as few as thirty to as many as one hundred people. These tribes live off the land as hunter-gatherers, moving to new camps every few months. Most nomadic villages travel between four or five campsites, practicing careful conservation of resources in accordance with elven traditions and common sense.

The rest of the blood elves live in permanent towns and villages throughout the Wood. Most of these settlements, which can be as few as fifty to as many as five thousand residents are affiliated with one of Blood Wood's noble families. The leaders of each of the five great ranelles (see *The Great Ranelles*, p. 95) make their homes in the largest of these towns spread across the various regions of the forest. The blood elves craft their homes and other buildings from woodland materials, sometimes with the aid of elemental magic. Most permanent structures are built next to and between trees, constructed of branches and trunks with thatches of woven leaves as roofs. These buildings

often look as if they grew along with the rest of the forest, a testament to the careful craftsmanship put into every structure.

Wealthier residents frequently employ the services of high-Circle Elementalists to build their homes inside the trees themselves. Some of these homes are built within the trunks of especially large trees with chambers underground among the roots. Other homes are built into the branches of the largest trees, rising as high as forty feet from the ground. Larger homes have been known to spread out over several trees close to one another, with footbridges connecting the buildings. Skilled craftsmen can make it difficult to distinguish the house from the trees' natural growth.

Wherever they live, many Blood Elves have begun to privately question the need to maintain the Personal Ritual now that the Scourge has passed. These elves remain ignorant of the true extent of the Ritual of Thorns, unaware doing this would be disastrous for both themselves and Blood Wood. Removing the plant spirits from their patterns would do irreparable damage to the True pattern of the Wood and every Blood Elf that did so. Likewise, the elves cannot simply stop performing the Ritual. If the supply of blood to the Wood is cut off, the Wood's True pattern will begin to unravel. Even attempting to undo the damage by performing the reNaming again could be disastrous. The Warders performed so many spells and blood magic rituals in the years before the Ritual of Thorns that it is virtually impossible to untangle the knotty web that makes up the Wood's True pattern. The act of reNaming is never without ramifications and the Warders cannot predict the results of casting yet another massive ritual to alter Blood Wood's pattern.

Queen Alachia understands she must maintain the status quo to hold onto her power and influence, and this knowledge colors every decision she makes. Alachia does not consider the price of survival too high, for she knows the Elven Court and the seat of her authority would no longer exist without the blood of her people. She cares for their suffering but craves the power she possesses through their loyalty even more. Though the Ritual of Thorns cannot be reversed, Alachia has recently come to believe it may be possible to heal the Forest's Heart, thereby ending the corruption and repairing the Wood's True pattern. If that can be accomplished, the day might come when the Personal Ritual is no longer necessary, but that decision will be Alachia's alone.

THE ELVEN COURT

The Elven Court is the social, cultural, and spiritual heart of Blood Wood. From her magnificent palace, Queen Alachia rules the elves of the forest, as her predecessors did before her. The Court is a place of heartbreaking beauty and wrenching pain, where visitors and natives alike marvel at the terrible majesty of Alachia's land.

The Elven Court was originally formed to serve as a cultural and spiritual guide for elven nations throughout the world. Those outside Wyrn Wood obeyed edicts from the elven queen not from political pressure or fear

of reprisal, but from cultural and historical precedent. In those days, to be reprimanded by the queen was a stigma most elves would strive to avoid. To be Separated, such as the northern nation of Shosara, was a punishment so severe many elves would rather die than suffer it.

Over time, the Elven Court took on the functions of a more traditional government. Since the reign of Queen Failla, the Court has taken dominion over mundane matters like trade between settlements, border defense, and territorial disputes between different villages or noble families. Out of necessity, a crude form of representational government has emerged, with the consortis and other courtiers representing the people of Blood Wood at the Court.

Each settlement in Blood Wood has at least one representative, generally a community leader or elder, who makes requests or offers suggestions to the courtiers who represent their interests at Court. Some settlements, usually those of importance to a prominent ranelle, have additional representation separate from its leadership. In theory, this system allows each village a voice at Court. In practice, however, most requests and complaints brought by the representatives never reach the queen's ear.

This fault in the system has not prevented the Court from insisting, with the queen's endorsement, that the settlements help shoulder the burden of maintaining "their" government. Each town or village under the Court's domain must assist with maintaining trade routes, defensive outposts, and the Blood Warders. The requirements vary according to the community's size and prominence. Most of the nomadic tribes give only token support, while larger settlements like the towns of Araouane or Letheran often pay considerable sums into the Court's coffers.

Court Hierarchy

As queen, Alachia rules absolutely over Blood Wood and its denizens. Privileged to have access to the queen are the consortis, the eight most prominent advisors who represent the major ranelles of Blood Wood. Next most influential are the Blood Warders, the court magicians responsible for ensuring the safety of the Wood and the maintenance of its traditions. Beneath them are the exolashers, the queen's personal guard. Though they wield relatively small political power, their connection and proximity to the queen allows them to influence more than the common folk realize. The current crop of exolashers also benefits from a strong alliance with Erithander Talshara, one of Alachia's most trusted advisors.

To those unfamiliar with the inner workings of the Elven Court, Alachia may appear to rule solely through her people's adoration. While the elves of Blood Wood love their queen, this love contains a healthy dose of fear below the surface. Openly questioning the queen's authority is all but unheard of at Court. The unspoken threat of banishment or Separation keeps the few dissenters from taking direct action against Alachia. The consortis and Blood Warders serve as a limited check to her authority, but the queen's deft

manipulation of personalities and positions largely undercuts that minor independence.

Alachia handpicks each elf that serves as consortis, Warder, or exolasher. She uses these positions to balance the ranelles against each other, preventing any of them from gaining too much influence or forming strategic alliances contrary to her wishes. By selecting and appointing elves loyal to her above all else, Alachia can ensure her goals remain ever-present in the minds of the Court.

In addition to the consortis, Warders, and exolashers, the Elven Court is home to countless other courtiers: pages, grooms, scribes, maids, and so on. It is considered a great honor to be selected to work at Court, so much so that even children of the most prominent families are quick to accept the lowliest position. Queen Alachia also employs musicians, poets, artists, and dancers to entertain her courtiers and honored guests. For most, the opportunity to be so near the center of power is the realization of a lifelong dream. Even those who disagree with some of Alachia's policies are honored to be chosen.

In theory, advancement through the ranks at Court is based on individual merit. In practice, from the pantry to the council chambers, nepotism and favoritism are the order of the day. Often, the ability to curry favor with one's superior is the most essential skill. The occasional ambitious individual can gain notice through outstanding deeds alone, but those who rise most frequently do so by knowing when to say the right things to the right people.

The Balance of Power

An untrained eye might see little depth to the Court's politics. Queen Alachia's rule over her subjects seems absolute, allowing scant opportunity for political maneuvering. The truth is the queen must ensure the loyalty of the great ranelles without allowing any one ranelle to gain undue influence or power.

Alachia uses the consortis to control and manipulate the ranelles. By awarding the position to those who desire it, she earns support and loyalty. Frequently changing the membership of the consortis forces the ranelles to compete for her favor, all but guaranteeing they will never work together against her. Alachia is also careful to balance the membership of her consortis between those who desire the position only to be nearer their queen and those who seek special favors.

Though the ranelles and consortis represent the greatest political power, most elves are more impressed by the magical prowess possessed by the Blood Warders. In fact, the Warders are equal in power to any other group of high-level magicians working together for a common goal (like the Denairastas in Iopos). The perception that the Warders' power is unlimited comes from several factors: their willingness to experiment with blood magic, the freedom of movement they enjoy in and out of the Wood, and their role in casting the Ritual of Thorns. Queen Alachia allows the Warders a great deal of latitude because she feels confident in their loyalty. They perform many important

tasks for the elves of Blood Wood, including missions she personally assigns them. The Elven Court serves as a constant source of rumors describing the Warders' latest acts of depravity. The Warders never contradict these tales, fueling the reverence and mystery that surrounds them.

The Elven Queen

Just as the Elven Court is the heart of society in Blood Wood, the queen is the heart of the blood elves themselves. She sits at the top of the Court hierarchy as the absolute ruler of her subjects. Traditionally a cultural and social icon rather than a conventional monarch, the queen guides and guards her people in return for their loyalty and love.

Officially, the elven queen cannot be deposed. Queens take the Rose Throne for life, and historically either died of natural causes, stepped down when they felt it appropriate, or—as in the case of Queen Failla—abdicated in the face of opposition. Only one queen in the Wood's recorded history has been killed: Queen Dallia, slain along with her entourage by the great dragon Alamaise. A military coup has never been attempted, which is not surprising given the exolashers' and Warders' unwavering support for the throne. Further, no formal procedure for appointing a new queen exists. Each new queen has either taken the throne with the backing of the entire Elven Court, or—as in Liara's case—become queen through prophecy.

Queen Alachia

Alachia has held the Rose Throne since before the Scourge and has continued to inspire an intense love from her subjects ever since. Her beauty is legendary, undiminished by the tiny thorns that pierce her delicate skin. In spite of her actions during the Scourge and the Schism, all elves hold her in awe. Unprotected elves and other Namegiver races seeing her often speak of being frozen in place with fear and desire. Even visitors who view all blood elves as corrupt are overcome with awe when meeting the Queen of Blood Wood for the first time.

Alachia hails from Sereatha, the City of Spires, in the Western Kingdoms. She first came to prominence at Court during Queen Liara's reign, despite having no affiliation with any of the Wood's powerful ranelles. Most elves believe Alachia has some relation to Liara's predecessor, Queen Failla, and



this apparent heritage brought a certain influence with it. Whether through royal lineage, natural charisma, or diplomatic skill, Alachia has been a force in Court politics since her earliest days in Wyrn Wood.

Alachia succeeded Queen Liara on the Rose Throne to wide acclamation. The Elven Court unanimously supported her claim to the throne and pronounced her the rightful queen just days after Liara's death. She is the Wood's longest reigning queen and presided over the darkest period in elven history. Her refusal of the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage shattered elven unity and the Ritual of Thorns widened the breach beyond repair. The blood elves see themselves as alone in the world, causing their wounded hearts to turn even more strongly toward their queen. Alachia underwent the Ritual along with her people and their shared suffering formed a bond far stronger than the legendary love of the people for "good Queen Dallia." By insisting only those who swore loyalty to her and the Elven Court were worthy to be elves, Alachia made her people see themselves as better than those who had abandoned Wyrn Wood. Even those blood elves who questioned the Ritual of Thorns accepted this interpretation. Alachia's sheer force of personality united her people in the face of agonizing pain and the world's condemnation.

However courageous her actions, they stem from something other than altruism or genuine love for her subjects. Alachia's primary goal is gaining and keeping personal power. Her extraordinarily long lifespan has given her a knack for playing the long game and she rarely makes decisions without carefully considering how they might affect her rule. She is a master at playing the Court's various factions against each other to maintain the delicate balance of power that best suits her. If a ranelle grows too influential for her tastes, Alachia takes steps to diminish them. Sometimes that only requires chastising a prominent figure, but she is willing to take the drastic action of dismissing a consortis if she feels it necessary. Every move is designed to keep her in complete control.

Though many mistakenly believe her ignorant of certain activities in Blood Wood, very little escapes Alachia's notice. Spies and informants throughout the forest keep her apprised of all but the most trivial news. Alachia allows people to believe her uninformed when it suits her, especially when the actions of senior courtiers may not meet with royal approval were they publicly known. The ongoing contact between Escalanas magicians and the Denairastas, the illicit trade in the Southern Fringe being conducted by the Carithasca ranelle, and various experiments undertaken by the Blood Warders without Alachia's prior approval are just a few examples of the secrets the blood elves believe they are keeping from their queen. Alachia knows of all these activities and allows them to continue because it suits her. Should she change her mind, she would not hesitate to stop the perpetrators and punish them appropriately.

Alachia is vain to a fault, but her vanity is not a weakness. She is no fool and centuries of intrigue have taught her discretion. The queen recognizes flattery for the empty thing it is, never allowing her vanity to overcome her

common sense. As Alachia sees it, her subjects should flatter her without the expectation of anything in return. She sometimes flies into rages when addressed with empty praises. Those who have seen such outbursts say that "only the Horrors are more terrifying." Those who hope to use her fury against her are likewise doomed to disappointment. Alachia has held power for far too long to allow anger to lead her astray.

Only a handful of Namegivers dare to claim they truly know Alachia, yet none would be wholly correct. The queen rarely confides in others lest she risk betrayal. She has pledged her heart to none who have courted her over the centuries, though she has kept several not-so-secret lovers. Those who endured her company the longest, none more than a few decades, had no political ambitions and just enough spirit to remain interesting.

Her one real friend is Ethenia Carithasca, a companion since their earliest days in the Western Kingdoms. Ethenia has given Alachia her wholehearted support and personal affection throughout the queen's political career. However, Alachia values even this friendship only as far as it helps maintain her position. She trusts Ethenia above all others because she knows Ethenia prefers to remain a power behind the throne, rather than sit on it herself.

From her patronage of the arts to her flair for manipulation, many at Court have noticed remarkable similarities between Alachia and Queen Failla. Both placed a high value on artistic expression. Since the end of the Scourge, Alachia has done everything possible to foster the development of blood elf culture. Those gifted at poetry, music, or other arts will find creating works in the Queen's honor garners them riches and privilege beyond their expectations. Few courtiers openly compare Alachia to Failla, however, for fear of angering the queen by suggesting she is merely following in another's footsteps.

Though she would never admit it, Alachia secretly wishes the elves had found a different method of surviving the Scourge. The creeping corruption of the Forest's Heart threatens to destroy the forest, along with Alachia's power. However, the queen is content with the choice she had to make. The shared agonies of the Ritual solidified Alachia's power by earning her the devotion of her subjects in a way nothing else could have.

Alachia is known throughout the Wood as an accomplished magician, but few realize her magical abilities go far beyond the common Disciplines studied by adepts the world over. She is a master of magical arts long lost to history, including ancient ritual magic and the primal magic of Naming. Like dragon magic, Alachia's magical talent is integral to her being. It infuses everything about her, from her otherworldly beauty to her control over the elven people. Alachia has also pursued several Disciplines during her long life. She is an accomplished follower of the Troubadour, Elementalist and Illusionist Disciplines, and likely trained in other magical Disciplines as well.

The Acorns of Oak Heart

Alachia has devoted years of personal research looking for ways to heal the Forest's Heart. Unlike the Seekers of the Heart, however, she knows Oak Heart's acorns will not serve this purpose. The acorns can be used to create a new Oak Heart but doing so would unravel the pattern of the current one tied into the reNaming. The potential consequences to Blood Wood and the elves tied to it through the Personal Ritual are catastrophic, so Alachia has been investing resources behind the scenes to keep the Seekers and other elven nations from gathering too many acorns. Under the guise of returning the Court's gifts to their rightful place, the queen has directed the Knights of the Thistle and the Carithasca ranelle to carry out this task.

Attributes

DEX: 7	STR: 5	TOU: 6
PER: 9	WIL: 10	CHA: 11

Consortis

Principal advisors and chancellors of the elven queen, the consortis are traditionally chosen from the five most prominent ranelles. Rarely, a commoner may be appointed to this prestigious post, most often to publicly snub another ranelle. Queen Failla, who created the consortis to defuse a potential rebellion, began with eight and gradually added to their number. Her successor, Queen Liara, kept anywhere from four to fifteen consortis at different times during her reign. Queen Alachia has so far kept the number consistent at eight: one for each of the massive trees that support the royal palace. Each consortis oversees a different aspect of the Court's government, though in many cases these duties overlap.

Alachia's Allure

Alachia's wondrous beauty is far more than skin deep. She uses her mastery of magic to augment her natural appearance to create a vision of loveliness that keeps even the most jaded observer awake at night. All characters will be targeted by this effect upon first meeting Alachia, requiring them to make a Willpower (17) test. Even with a single success, the character is so struck by Alachia's beauty they can only respond when spoken to and can take no actions against Alachia or her servants. An extra success allows a character more freedom, but they still cannot act directly against the queen. With two extra successes, the character resists the effects and may act in any manner they wish.

Characters who fail the test become paralyzed with adoration and cannot take any action for 5 rounds. After this effect ends, the character acts as if they had achieved a single success. In addition, a character who fails the test retains a deep admiration for the queen that can only be overcome by two extra successes on a subsequent Charisma test against their Social Defense.

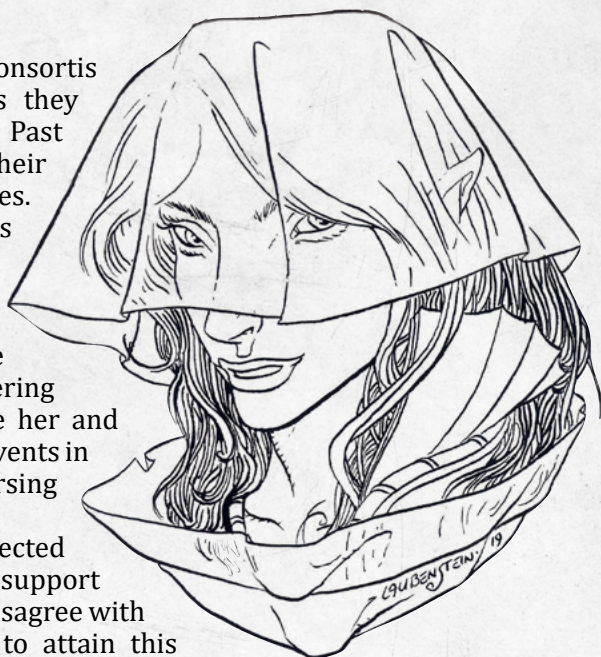
Since their founding, the consortis have served only as long as they remain in the queen's favor. Past queens frequently kept their consortis for several decades. In contrast, many of Alachia's consortis seem to have come and gone with the seasons. Those who retain their position for some time have learned to play the game, flattering Alachia just enough to amuse her and keeping her well informed of events in the Wood while discreetly pursuing their own agendas.

Alachia has generally selected her consortis from those who support her views, though some who disagree with her opinions have managed to attain this position. These advisors tend to have brief tenure, however, as the queen will often dismiss a consortis who was too quick to voice their own opinion. Long-time consortis pride themselves on their skill at judging the royal mood and influencing Alachia's thinking by speaking up with carefully considered words at just the right time. Despite its difficulties and risks, the chance of influencing the queen in their favor leads the ranelles to covet the position.

Blood Wood's isolation following the Scourge brought the need for more conventional government and administration. This also presented an opportunity to further appease the ranelles by expanding the role of consortis. Alachia has assigned each of her eight advisors an area to advise and inform the Court about. Specific duties are generally based on each individual's expertise and ranelle affiliation. Alachia has, in some instances, deliberately set up a consortis to fail so she might justifiably dismiss them. Though she has done so on whim alone, having a concrete reason to do so lessens the risk of turning her other advisors into enemies.

Seven of Alachia's current consortis are members or affiliates of the five great ranelles. The remaining one hails from the Rasher ranelle, a minor noble family native to the Western Border region. Of the five great ranelles, the Jae'Helastri and Carithasca each have two members among the consortis, while the Talshara, Daevenar, and Escalanas each have only one. Because the Rasher are known allies of the Escalanas, many believe that their presence among the consortis strengthens the Escalanas position.

As always, this particular assortment of consortis reflects Alachia's efforts to appease the more vocal ranelle leaders and maintain the balance of Court politics. The Carithasca earned their second consortis as compensation for



their unmet requests to open Blood Wood's borders. The Jae'Helastris gained their second appointment as a means of curbing their scheming. Many see the inclusion of the Rasher ranelle as a backhanded way of granting the Escalanas two consortis, though others believe there is more to it. The prominence of the Escalanas among the Blood Warders gives them considerable clout at Court and many question Alachia's motives for granting them more potential influence.

The Carithasca Ranelle

Haeleon Carithasca is the longest-standing member of the current consortis. Much more moderate than Carithasca's other consortis, Haeleon advocates opening the forest's borders gradually and only after convincing Alachia doing so is in her best interest. This approach has earned complaints from less patient ranelle members, but Haeleon's years of experience and the support of the ranelle's formidable matriarch have enabled him to weather such storms easily.

By contrast, Gealleon Sea'lish has only been consortis for a few years and is little more than a shrill mouthpiece for her ranelle's interests. Though all the consortis use their position to promote their own ranelle's desires, most also consider the overall good of Blood Wood. Gealleon puts Carithasca goals ahead of almost all other concerns. She wants the Wood's borders open immediately, if not sooner, and often argues with Haeleon over his incremental approach. Alachia finds their frequent disagreements amusing as well as convenient: by constantly being at odds, the two Carithasca reduce their own influence among the consortis.

Haeleon and Gealleon share responsibility for overseeing trade in the Wood and advising the queen on matters relating to it. Several of the minor ranelles who conduct the bulk of the trade in the Southern Fringe report to them, which the consortis in turn report to the Court. Haeleon has become adept at defusing the occasional awkward sessions in which the subject of black market activity arises. Both Carithasca consortis do what they can to keep the queen and their fellow consortis from ordering an investigation. The Carithasca ranelle stands to lose a great deal of profit should proof of their illegal activities come to light.

The Daevenar Ranelle

Conservative and closed minded, Tarin Daevenar uses his position to support Alachia's policy of isolation. He sees outside influences as inherently damaging to the elven people and is often at odds with the Carithasca over their petitions to open the borders.

Perhaps out of a perverse sense of humor, Alachia has made the insular Tarin responsible for overseeing relations with nations and powers outside Blood Wood. This duty regularly throws Tarin together with ambassadors from realms near and far, most notably Throal, Shosara, and Sereatha. Despite his dislike of foreign influence, Tarin has developed friendships with several

regular visitors. Among them Mirial and Eyorgicus, the children of Throal's Ambassador General, and Jorealla, the ambassador from Shosara. Tarin also oversees a small staff of ambassadors who represent Blood Wood's interests outside the forest. The best known of these emissaries is Geverian Half-Smile, who sees to a number of the Court's external affairs.

The Escalanas Ranelle

Orlando Escalanas resigned his position among the Blood Warders to serve his ranelle and his queen as consortis. His past associations make him an ideal advisor to the queen and other consortis on magical matters. He keeps in contact with the Blood Warders at Court, most often Aithne Oakforest and Nirame Jae'Helastris. He also keeps an eye on Blood Warder Preystia Tales, who is seeking a cure for the creeping taint. Orlando secretly sends regular reports of his findings to Kethos Escalanas, thereby keeping the ranelle's patriarch informed of Tales's progress.



The Jae'Helastris Ranelle

Larrin and Tiriamae Jae'Helastris have both held their positions for several years, the former since Mithran Jae'Helastris stepped down. Larrin and Tiriamae embody their ranelle's affinity for politics, playing the diplomatic game with ease and flair. They support or denounce petitions by other consortis as needed to ensure they maintain a strong influence over the balance of power between other members of the Court. This flexibility makes the Jae'Helastris the least consistent of the consortis, but also the least troublesome to Alachia personally. However, their inveterate taste for scheming does sometime cause the queen some inconvenience. Ever watchful of these born intriguers, Alachia has a number of spies in place to monitor Jae'Helastris activities at Court and elsewhere in Blood Wood.

The duties of the Jae'Helastris consortis complement their political skills. Larrin maintains lines of communication between the settlements of Blood Wood, keeping track of the nomadic communities' changing locations and also keeping in touch with permanent villages. A large staff of scribes and messengers, most of them fellow Jae'Helastris, aid him in these duties. He often

coordinates with members of the Carithasca ranelle, whose trade caravans frequently serve as a forest-wide messenger service.

Tiriame maintains relations between the minor and major ranelles. She mediates disputes between courtiers from different ranelles and ensures that each ranelle's concerns are brought to the queen's attention. Though Alachia only listens to those she wishes to hear, she nonetheless insists Tiriame keep her fully informed to keep up the appearance of equity among the Wood's noble families. Tiriame makes every effort to remain objective, but loyalty to her own ranelle often gets in the way.

The Rasher Ranelle

Tonnaer Rasher represents the Rasher ranelle, a minor ranelle from the Western Border closely allied with the Escalanas. The newest and least experienced of the consortis, Tonnaer has so far followed Orlando Escalanas's lead in most matters. In a recent private audience, Alachia encouraged him to keep his own ranelle's concerns and needs foremost in his mind. He has yet to follow her counsel in practice but has sought advice from his ranelle's leaders concerning just how far to support the Escalanas ranelle. Alachia has placed him in charge of researching the growing corruption of the Forest's Heart.

Though many courtiers see Tonnaer's appointment as a maneuver to benefit the Escalanas ranelle, the truth is otherwise. The ranelle's home village of Kelling is the closest permanent settlement to the Forest's Heart and Alachia finds the Rasher's expertise dealing with the hazards of that corrupted region invaluable. In addition to providing the queen with first-hand accounts of the Heart, Tonnaer's status gives his ranelle an opportunity to gain influence and keeps the Escalanas ranelle from dominating the gathering of True wood in the western woodlands.

The Talshara Ranelle

Representing the Talshara ranelle is Ilisa Willowby. She received the position in Rhisiart Talshara's place after he made several appalling social blunders at one of Alachia's private dinner parties. Though originally appointed consortis to teach Rhisiart a lesson, Ilisa has since proven a wise choice.

In keeping with longstanding tradition, Ilisa advises the queen on all matters pertaining to the security of the Wood's borders. Her duties put her in regular contact with Erithander Talshara, the leader of her ranelle, and Takaris Talshara, liaison for the Blood Warders. Her dealings with the two men have made Ilisa sharply aware of tensions between the Blood Warders and the Talshara concerning how best to defend Blood Wood. Maintaining the balance between them is a skill she is still working to master.

The Court and its Surroundings

The Elven Court and the area immediately surrounding the palace are among the loveliest places in Blood Wood. Alachia has ordered the Blood

Warders to maintain the area and keep it free from the twisted undergrowth covering the rest of the forest. The region referred to as the Elven Court is about fifty miles in diameter, centered on Alachia's palace. Nearly 15,000 elves live there, most in the numerous small villages surrounding the Courtyard and palace. The majority of these owe loyalty to one of the great ranelles, with the five largest villages serving as each great ranelle's home near Court.

The Courtyard

The palace stands in the center of a clearing more than three hundred yards in diameter, known as the Courtyard. Most Court activity occurs within the clearing's boundaries, as does as any reception held for visitors. Around the outer edge are large trees whose trunks contain the homes of the consortis, Blood Warders, and countless courtiers who see to the everyday running of the Court. In general, the higher an elf's place at Court, the closer their home is to the palace. The consortis live in elegant tree-homes right on the clearing's edge, all located within a mile of the palace. The humbler homes of most of the palace staff are located as much as two hours' walk from the palace.

Alachia's Palace

When the Horrors came, the entire population of Wyrn Wood relocated to the area around the Forest's Heart. Queen Alachia used powerful elemental magic to deconstruct the palace before her departure, leaving a clearing with eight oak trees where it once stood. After the Scourge ended and the Blood Warders began to regrow the forest, Alachia decreed the Elven Court would be restored to its former state. As the courtiers, consortis, and other Court residents returned to rebuild their former homes, Alachia once again used powerful magic to regrow the palace from the eight oaks.

The new palace resembled the old but included a few alterations. Most notable is the imposing stairway forming the entrance and leading into the Chamber of Voices. Formerly made of tree branches, the new staircase is built from the bones of elves who died during the Ritual of Thorns. Alachia immortalized them in the gleaming white staircase, which she publicly dedicated to their memory. None of the Blood Warders know exactly how Alachia restored the palace, but rumors claim she used an acorn from the legendary Oak Heart.

The palace rises eight stories high, towering over the forest's tallest trees. It stands within a circle of eight enormous oak trees, whose trunks and branches shape and support it. The branches intertwine, forming intricate designs that change as the trees grow. Between the trees, tightly knit flowering vines make up the palace walls. Some walls on ground level are paneled on the inside with a thin layer of polished wood, often in shades from deep brown to pale gold. The walls sport window openings covered with delicate spiderwebs that catch the sunlight and break it into rainbows. Floors are made of woven vines intertwined with the upper branches of the trees, and the doors between rooms are rose bushes grown thick enough to become solid. Each of the eight

foundation trees is as wide as a large building. The hollow trunks contain workrooms and entertainment chambers frequently used by the consortis.

THE OUTSIDE WORLD

For thousands of years the Elven Court ruled elves throughout the known world. Before the Schism and the Scourge, the queen and her subjects could command respect wherever they traveled. Alachia's refusal of Theran protections, followed by the Ritual of Thorns, has cost the blood elves this esteem in Barsaive and lands beyond. Alachia's deliberate isolation of Blood Wood from other realms reflects her personal rejection of a world that views her subjects as abominations.

Since the end of the Scourge, Blood Wood has had minimal ties with lands outside the forest. Alachia might have preferred no contact at all but is intelligent enough to realize that total isolation might leave the Wood vulnerable to unknown enemies. Therefore, she has allowed limited contact, mostly with nations and people in Barsaive, but also informally with the elven realms of the Western Kingdoms and Shosara. These contacts, tentative as they are, allow the queen to keep informed on events in Barsaive and beyond, so that she can deal with any potential threat to Blood Wood.

Kingdom of Throal

Officially, Blood Wood and Throal have nothing more than an open dialog, just as any friendly nation would have with its neighbor. However, the ascension of Kovar Maksei to the throne has caused Alachia to reevaluate Blood Wood's passive relationship with Throal. The past work of Geverian Half-Smile was able to cultivate a more favorable view of blood elf culture in the dwarven kingdom, so much so that the queen has seen fit to assign a blood elf emissary as a sign of support for their new ruler. The youngest granddaughter of Tarin Daevenar, Elynaril, received this great honor after years of pushing for her family to have a more prominent role in Court politics. Her presence in the kingdom of Throal has gone anything but unnoticed in the year since her appointment, with many of the noble houses wondering what seeds Alachia may have sown within their king.

Thera

The Elven Court maintains no official ties with Thera and refuses to receive Theran emissaries. Alachia finds Thera's claim of dominion over Barsaive and Blood Wood laughable, and she has stated repeatedly that consorting with Therans is punishable by banishment or even Separation. The Theran withdrawal from Barsaive after their defeat in the second war has further strengthened the queen's stance on this subject: "A nation unable to defend its holdings has no business taking them in the first place." The Carithasca have shown a certain interest in establishing trade agreements with Thera should Alachia ever open the forest's borders, but they are careful to keep even talk of it to a minimum.

Iopos

Past actions by the powerful and secretive Denairastas clan have given the Elven Court little reason to trust the rulers of Iopos. Their involvement in inciting conflict between Throal and Thera has not improved this opinion, causing Queen Alachia to view their ambassadors in a similar light to ones sent by the Theran Empire. This official disapproval, however, has not prevented members of the Escalanas ranelle from establishing contact with Jerleth, nephew of Iopan ruler Uhl Denairastas. Some members of this ranelle have even traveled to the city in secret and met with the clan's magicians. The chief instigator of these covert activities is Kethos Escalanas, who exchanges True wood and True earth for the Denairastas's research on ritual and blood magic. Since the assassination of King Varulus III, Kethos has insisted that all Denairastas representatives meet with him in Blood Wood. He prefers to keep as safe a distance as possible from any confrontations between Iopos and Throal.

Kratas

Though the Elven Court maintains no official ties with the City of Thieves, Kratas and Blood Wood are bound together by the continued presence of Vistrosh. A former Blood Warder, Vistrosh was banished from Blood Wood nearly thirty years ago and has lived in Kratas ever since. Numerous rumors shroud the reason for his banishment, leading some courtiers to wonder if this was actually a calculated move by Queen Alachia to install a hidden agent in the city.

Vistrosh wasted no time surrounding himself with some of the deadliest cutthroats and assassins in Barsaive, who both fear and admire him as a powerful magician and corrupted elf. Vistrosh's gang, Brocher's Brood, quickly became the chief rival of the city's most influential gang, the Force of the Eye, led by the venerable Garlthik One-Eye.

Adventure Idea

The Denairastas of Iopos have, in secret, hired groups of independent adventurers to assist them in their expeditions into Blood Wood. Posing as industrious traders looking to gather True Wood within the Wood's Western Border, Iopan magicians have made numerous successful trips to the Escalanas home of Letheran. The gamemaster may choose one of the following options for how one such mission would play out:

Option 1

The Denairastas use the adventurers as a distraction, who are hired to set off various traps defending the Wood's border. Their actions are meant to draw the Talshara wardens away from their usual patrol route and allow the Denairastas to slip in unnoticed.

Option 2

The Denairastas agents are mortally wounded by one of the magical traps as the group attempts to infiltrate the Wood's boarder. The adventurers are tasked with delivering an unstable magical object vital to the Escalanas's research on their own.

The Serpent River Aropagoi

The blood elves have more contact with the t'skrang of House Syrtis than any other Namegivers in Barsaive because of their joint sponsorship of Kaer Eidolon (p. 62). Relations with House Syrtis remain largely neutral. Both sides see Kaer Eidolon as mutually beneficial, but either would willingly dissolve this tentative alliance should the mutual threat presented by House Ishkarat fade. The Elven Court has almost no contact with the other t'skrang aropagoi.

Cara Fahd

Queen Alachia once pondered establishing formal relations with the ork nation of Cara Fahd. Given the orks' strong anti-Theran feelings, Alachia saw them as a useful pawn against the growing threat along Barsaive's southwestern border. Such plans were never put into motion, however, as the Throalic assault on the *Triumph* gave the queen a much more direct opportunity to ensure the security of Blood Wood from actions by the Theran Empire. With the stability of Barsaive restored since the end of the second war, neither Alachia nor Krathis have shown any interest in forging an alliance between their respective nations.

Haven

Though not a political power, Haven is important to Alachia and the Blood Warders because of the magical treasures to be found in Parlainth's ruins. Already, the efforts of Takaris Talshara and a group of hired adventurers have reclaimed the Everliving Flower for the Elven Court. The queen and her Warders believe that still more magical treasures and knowledge exist in the ruins for the taking. Recent visits to Haven by Blood Warder Fafedriel have frequently coincided with the activities of both Theran and Throalic agents in the area. Factions in the village believe several unexplained events during this overlap are too suspicious to be mere coincidences, though no evidence of blood elf involvement seems to exist.

The Western Kingdoms and Shoshara

While the Western Kingdoms and Shosara have shown no allegiance to Blood Wood since the Schism, Alachia has never lost sight of returning these territories to her domain. One of her most closely guarded secrets is the numerous ambassadors she has sent with offers to unite the three pillars of elven culture back under the rule of a single Elven Court. Sticking with tradition, the Court would be that of Blood Wood in Queen Alachia's eyes. Both have refused the queen's offer, choosing to instead focus their efforts on

defining what elven tradition means to themselves. These nations have made the small concession of regularly sending ambassadors into the Wood as a sign of respect to the current Elven Court. With long years of history between these nations, it is unlikely the ties that exist today will ever truly be broken.

Rumors of Protected elves appearing in the Western Kingdoms and Shosara have become more frequent in recent years, lending to much speculation within the Court of Blood Wood. Some believe Alachia is positioning her spies to raise more pro-Blood Wood sentiment in the general public of these nations. Others believe their activities have focused on recovering the acorns of Oak Heart, as these gifts of the queen have no place with those who have refused to follow Alachia's rule. Whatever the intended result, it is clear that the Western Kingdoms and Shosara will continue to play a part in shaping the future of Blood Wood.

The Kingdoms of Elves

Queen Alachia has, from time to time, sent out emissaries in search of other elven nations lost to her during the Scourge. Such expeditions have found little to no success in restoring these kingdoms to Blood Wood's domain, as the shock of seeing the blood elves for the first time has been a difficult obstacle to overcome. Pleased with the strides made in Throal by Geverian Half-Smile during the reign of King Neden, the queen has decided a subtler approach may be the key to reestablishing a dialog with these kingdoms. As an Unprotected elf and loyal subject of Alachia, Geverian appears to be the ideal candidate to foster the devotion elves once showed to the Wood from outside its borders.

Outside Trade

Queen Alachia chooses to ignore a certain amount of discreet trade with Namegivers outside Blood Wood. While the Talshara ranelle trades True earth to lands north of the Wood and the Escalanas exchange True wood for knowledge with the Denairastas, most of the black market trading takes place on the Southern Fringe between the elves and t'skrang stationed at Kaer Eidolon.

The goods most commonly traded outside Blood Wood are unique plants

Geverian has been sent to represent the Elven Court on numerous missions, both within and outside Barsaive. The nature of these "first contacts" have made it advantageous for him to employ adventuring groups for both travel and protection, as doing so with an entourage of blood elves draws too much unwanted attention. Gamemasters may use such missions to have their players travel to lands outside Barsaive, discover hidden kaers within it, or to cover-up the recovery of an important artifact.

or animal pelts that can only be found in the forest, as well as examples of unusual elven craftsmanship such as weapons or blood berry wine. Other highly sought items include the True earth and True wood found in the

northern and western regions of the Wood and potions created by the Blood Warders. So far, the elves conducting this trade have limited their operations, successfully avoiding notice from those blood elves who might object to such open disobedience of the queen's edicts.

Despite her steadfast rejection of political relations, Alachia has allowed small amounts of certain Theran goods to enter Blood Wood, mostly through the black market that operates out of Kaer Eidolon. She has as much of a taste for certain Theran delicacies as any at Court and is perfectly willing to break her own rules when it suits her convenience.

REGIONS OF THE WOOD

Overview

In addition to Alachia's Palace and the surrounding villages, Blood Wood is separated into four main regions: The Forest's Heart, the Northern Reaches, the Western Border, and the Southern Fringe. These areas are home to the primary blood elf population in Barsaive and are considered the domain of the Elven Court. Just outside the Southern Fringe is Kaer Eidolon, home to the largest number of blood elves outside the Wood's border. While the queen considers Eidolon to be under her control, officially it is jointly managed with the t'skrang of House Syrtis.

The source of Blood Wood's corruption is the region known as the Forest's Heart. This part of the Wood has twisted in on itself, feeding on its own agony. The typical sounds of forest life have been replaced by a terrible silence occasionally pierced by the hideous roars of beasts that stalk the region. These creatures, warped beyond most people's worst imaginings, prowl the Forest's Heart in constant search for prey. All but the bravest blood elves and Blood Warders shun this terrible place.

The Northern Reaches consists of little more than guard outposts and unsettled territory controlled mainly by the Talshara ranelle. The region covers everything from the northern border of Blood Wood, beginning just south of Goro'imri, down to just north of the village of Arralena. The Northern Reaches receive few visitors from outside the Wood, though they have occasional contact with other Namegiver settlements to the north.

The Southern Fringe covers the southern border of Blood Wood, starting at the far southwest corner of the forest and reaching along the eastern edge to just south of Da'seishta. For most visitors to Blood Wood without diplomatic credentials, contact with the blood elves takes place in the Southern Fringe. The leading ranelle of the Southern Fringe, the Carithasca, have used access to the Mothingale River to carry out their illicit trading operations with parties outside the Wood.

The Western Border meets the Southern Fringe at the far southwest corner of Blood Wood and runs along the forest's western edge to just south of the village of Goro'imri. Since it lies so far from the Elven Court, many elves assume the region will be the first to rebel against Alachia's isolationist

policies and establish communication with outsiders. On the other hand, the Escalanas ranelle who control this area takes its allegiance to the queen seriously and would never openly defy her edicts. Even so, many parties from outside Blood Wood have tried bargaining for access to the vast deposits of True wood available in these lands.

Kaer Eidolon, an outpost jointly manned by blood elves and t'skrang from House Syrtis, lies a few days' travel south along the Mothingale River from the southern border of Blood Wood. The outpost officially owes its existence to the expansionist aims of the t'skrang of House Ishkarat. Unofficially, Kaer Eidolon serves as the primary hub of illicit trade between Blood Wood and outside parties. This lucrative black market, the main source of foreign goods into Blood Wood, was largely created and nurtured by the Carithasca ranelle.

The Forest's Heart

The Forest's Heart is about one hundred miles across, bordering nearly every other major region of Blood Wood. Adventurers in the Forest's Heart may find themselves slogging through perilous jungle and blood-soaked marshlands, or blackened wastelands like the Blasted Heath. The Blood Warders' citadel, where long-ago Warders devoted themselves to discovering magical safeguards against the Horrors, now lies in ruins at the Heart's center. The shattered buildings, sundered foundations, and lingering despair surrounding the place are a testimony to the high price paid to survive the Scourge.

Deep beneath the Forest's Heart lie the kaers that once housed Blood Wood's population. All but a few entrances to these vast caverns and tunnels were sealed upon their abandonment. None who have entered the kaers have returned to tell of what can be found within, whether ancient treasures or lingering terrors.

The true extent of the Heart's corruption is one of the best kept secrets of Blood Wood. Queen Alachia has forbidden anyone to enter the Forest's Heart without her express permission, backing up this decree with guard patrols around the region's perimeter. Violating the edict brings death, assuming the guilty party survives the Heart's perils. Though she has said nothing publicly, Alachia has quietly made it clear she does not want outsiders to use knowledge of the Heart's true condition to support their arguments that blood elves are corrupted beyond redemption. Few elves know how the Heart became what it is, though many rumors link Alachia to the tragedy. Despite the royal ban, elves from all over Blood Wood frequently travel to the Heart in search of the precious True wood that grows there.

Adventure Idea

While rare, a number of family lines were eliminated from the Wood during their time within the wooden kaer. Fragments of these ranelles rode out the Scourge in other parts of Barsaive and have spent decades trying to recover the heirlooms passed down from their ancestors. With records of that time being kept away from outsiders, Unprotected elves from these lost ranelles have begun to send groups of adepts into the Forest's Heart to seek out these artifacts. Gamemasters can focus such adventures on gaining access to the area, exploring a ruined kaer within the Wood, or a combination of these two challenges.

Even more frightening than the condition of the Forest's Heart is its growth. The corruption is spreading further into the Wood, nearly three miles a year on every side. The Blood Warders claim they are working to halt the spread, but have not had any success. Residents of the southern settlements along the Lesser Mothingale wonder what effect the corruption may have on the river. Many villagers claim that the Heart is growing faster each passing year.

History

As each generation of the Queen's Warders sought greater magical knowledge, they began to push beyond the existing horizons of traditional experimentation. Several of their most talented magicians began testing the limits of blood magic, a dangerous undertaking they knew would exceed what elven culture considered natural. This drove the Warders to petition Queen Failla for a haven in which to research their spells and rituals away from those who would judge their methodology. Failla granted this request, allowing them to choose whatever site they desired.

The Warders chose the region known as the Forest's Heart, a sparsely populated area so thick with magical power most elves considered it a sacred place. True wood was plentiful in the region, along with deposits of True water and True earth along the banks of the Lesser Mothingale. The Heart was easily reached from any part of the forest, making it an ideal site for the Warders' purposes. They Named the city they built at its center *Tesrae k'Ailiu*: the Citadel of Magic.

From *Tesrae k'Ailiu*, the Warders oversaw the Forest's Heart for centuries. At first they allowed free access to elves from all over the Wood. These visitors came to gather True wood or simply bask in the dazzling beauty of the place. Some even chose to make the Forest's Heart their home. Over time, the Warders restricted access to other elves and encouraged residents other than Warders to leave. By the time Alachia ascended the Rose Throne, the Forest's Heart belonged exclusively to the Warders and their invited guests. Other elves were virtually nonexistent in the region until the early days of the Scourge, when Wyrms Wood's population relocated to the vast wooden kaer the Warders had grown with powerful elemental magic.

When Alachia realized the kaer would not withstand the Horrors through the entire Scourge, she ordered her Warders to find another solution. After following a few dead ends, Warder Kethos Escalanas and his compatriots discovered a method they believed might keep the Horrors at bay: the Ritual of Thorns. The method carried a steep price, so steep Alachia dismissed the Ritual when the Warders first presented it to her. Even though she could see the wooden kaer crumbling around her, Alachia feared inflicting permanent pain and disfigurement on the elven people. Such an act might well change the Court beyond recognition, making it unfit to remain the heart of elven culture and the Queen herself unfit to remain the guardian of elven ways. Even knowing the Ritual of Thorns might be their only hope, she ordered the Warders to find another way.

Madness in the Flames

While other Warders sought a way to save the elves, an Elementalist Named Lysarin Greenbranch strove to save the forest itself from the Horrors. What neither Lysarin nor his followers knew was he had been marked by a Horror. The Horror's touch altered his perceptions and tainted his work, leading to catastrophe.

Under the Horror's influence, Lysarin came to believe he could protect the trees of the Wood much as the Ritual of Thorns was intended to protect the people. By weaving True fire with a tree's elemental spirit, he could inflict inconceivable agony on the tree that would immunize it from a Horror's taint. Before he could complete his research, his fellow Warders learned of his plans and ordered him to stop. Unfortunately, the Horror mark continued to warp Lysarin's reality, convincing him to complete his work in secret.

His first experiments left trees twisted, blackened, and lifeless. Lysarin persevered until achieving what his Horror-tainted mind thought was a success: a single birch tree with a kernel of True fire burning in its heart. Though every bit as outwardly twisted and charred as his failures, this tree lived. Sadly, the unending pain of the burning drove the spirit of the birch insane. This was the first fire birch, a perversion which destroys every living plant near them.

Having succeeded once, Lysarin prepared a ritual to transform an entire birch grove. He slipped through the crumbling kaer's outer defenses and found a location suitable for his experiment. The other Warders caught wind



of his plans, but arrived too late to thwart him. Lysarin completed the ritual and burned down the area. Driven insane by agony, many of the afflicted trees' plant spirits fled beyond the grove, infecting other trees with the dreadful fire they carried. Thousands of trees burned to death before the Warders managed to contain the carnage. In the confusion, Lysarin vanished. No one knows whether he perished in the conflagration or if he still exists somewhere, performing his twisted experiments in some hidden corner of the Wood.

The fire birches are among the worst perils of Blood Wood. Lysarin's grove was permanently scarred by the fires, known today as the Blasted Heath. No creature lives within, nor does anything wholesome grow there. Only a few foolish elves venture to this place, seeking the rare kernels of True fire left behind by Lysarin's ritual. Occasionally fire birch saplings sprout from the ground, but are swiftly destroyed by Blood Warder patrols sworn to exterminate the destructive plants.

Willful Destruction

One attempt to save Wyrn Wood almost caused its loss to the Horrors. The experiment ultimately led to the corruption of the Forest's Heart and the Blood Wood, though none learned this until after the Scourge. To present day ears, what the Warders did sounds mad. The elves were so desperate for an alternative to the Ritual of Thorns that even the craziest risk seemed worth it. The plan involved a type of parasitic Horror that had slipped through Wyrn Wood's defenses. Among other things, the Warders knew a notable side effect of these Horrors: the parasite's presence caused all other Horrors to ignore its host.

Through experimentation, they found they could control the parasitic Horror's growth and advancement with relative ease. They could even kill it without doing permanent damage to the host. The Warders believed carefully controlled exposure to this minor Horror might make the entire population of Wyrn Wood invisible to other Horrors. The Warders began infecting plants and animals with the Horror, keeping a close eye on how it spread and how much control they could maintain. At first, they found it easy to restrict the Horror's growth, with no apparent adverse effects on the test subjects.

Just as they were about to present their discoveries to Queen Alachia, the parasite escaped their control. Most of the subjects died suddenly and the few survivors were warped beyond recognition. The Horror invaded everything within the surrounding land: animals, plants, even the soil itself. It was only a matter of time before the infection spread to the people. Unable to keep the parasite from spreading, the Warders had no alternative but to take drastic action.

Using powerful blood magic ritual spells, the Warders reshaped the True pattern of the Forest's Heart. The change cleansed the Horror, saving Wyrn Wood and its people from imminent destruction. The Warders reported their failure to Queen Alachia, and with time running out she had no choice but to implement the Ritual of Thorns.

The final Ritual, however, was different than the one Alachia had rejected. The fight to contain their botched experiment had expanded the Warder's perception of blood magic. Kethos Escalanas modified the Ritual to reName the entire Wurm Wood, which gave its True pattern a new shape. This act of powerful magic kept the forest and its denizens safe from the Horrors, but destroyed the essence of what it was intended to save.

Unavoidable Costs

For a time, the elves of Blood Wood believed they had won. The Horrors swept across Barsaive, but left much of the Wood intact. The magical wards created by the Ritual of Thorns kept most destructive Horrors at bay, even at the Scourge's height. Fed by the blood each Protected elf willingly gave to the forest, the wards remained intact until the Warders deemed it safe to emerge from their underground shelters.

At the end of the Scourge, Queen Alachia commanded the Blood Warders to regrow and repair the parts of the Wood the Horrors had harmed. The Warders worked tirelessly to accomplish this goal, and even the Forest's Heart was restored to the beautiful place it had once been. Only the Blasted Heath refused to return to life.

Unfortunately, signs of the Wood's true state began to show after a few months. The trees of the Forest's Heart grew more quickly than was natural and twisted horribly in on themselves. Huge thorns split the bark of many trees, creating jagged gashes through which vile-smelling sap dripped. The blood magic that had kept the elves and their homeland alive had irretrievably warped the forest's pattern. Worse still, the magic used to regrow the forest worsened the harm it was intended to heal. The tainted Wood was and is hungry for blood. Every drop that falls from the thorns of the blood elves feeds that corruption as the Heart expands outward.

The Northern Reaches

The Northern Reaches is the largest of Blood Wood's five regions and covers vast tracts of sparsely populated wilderness. Several minor tributaries of the Mothingale and Lesser Mothingale rivers run through it. None are large enough to accommodate heavy river traffic, but elves native to the region use rafts to travel the tributaries between nomadic camps and to trade with villages in the southern parts of the Wood.

The most noteworthy of these villages, Araouane, is home to the Talshara ranelle and Lord Erithander, the ranelle's leader and eldest member. Near Araouane is the Grove of Thorns, the Talshara war college where blood elves train to join the ranks of the wardens and exolashers. A few minor ranelles also make their homes in the Northern Reaches, living among the prosperous Talshara. Perhaps the most unusual feature of the region is the village of Goro'imri, where blood elves and other Namegiver races peacefully coexist. Those who were not outcasts from their homes before settling in this

unique village earned that status by choosing to join this small but growing community.

The Land

The Northern Reaches supports some of the forest's most dangerous plants and animals, leading many to consider it the most rugged wilderness in the Wood. Traveling in the Wood is difficult by any standard, but the vegetation growing in the Northern Reaches forms underbrush so thick it reduces normal travel rates by one fourth. The area contains rich deposits of elemental earth and a few small veins of orichalcum, and mining these elements accounts for most of the Talshara's riches. The ranelle must set aside a certain percentage for the Elven Court, but the remaining share gives the ranelle enough to sell and trade for other goods, making them relatively wealthy in the process.

The People

The Northern Reaches contain little arable land, forcing most of the area's blood elves to live by hunting game and gathering wild foods. They move their encampments each season to harvest roots, berries, herbs and other edible plants as they ripen. Six permanent villages survive by trading among themselves and with other permanent settlements in the Wood.

Going beyond the ranelle's established trading routes and venues, a few adventurous Talshara Weaponsmiths secretly trade with nomads and villagers from lands north of Blood Wood. These outsiders travel to remote sites along the Wood's border to barter raw ore for elven crafted weapons and armor. Because the Weaponsmiths' only goal in this illicit activity is to further strengthen the Wood's defenses, neither Erithander Talshara nor Queen Alachia have made any attempt to curtail these activities.

The Western Border

The Western Border is perhaps the most isolated region of Blood Wood. Nearly 400 miles of forest, some of it the darkest and most corrupt growth in Blood Wood, separates the Western Border from the elf queen's palace. About 200 miles to the southwest stand the Scol Mountains and some 300 miles to the west is the city of Iopos, set on the largely uninhabited plain that covers most of northwest Barsaive.

Life in the Western Border is dominated by the Escalanas ranelle. From the town of Letheran, the Western Border's largest settlement, the ranelle oversees harvesting of the region's rich supplies of True wood. Because of their isolation from the Elven Court, the region's inhabitants depend on the Escalanas for protection and mediation of minor disputes. The residents' respect for and gratitude to the ranelle is tempered by fear as well, for it has long been rumored some Escalanas magicians practice dark, unwholesome rites of blood magic.

The Land

Dense forest fills most of the region, with thick undergrowth covering nearly every path between settlements. This growth slows the average travelers' walking speed to about 20 miles per day. The dense foliage thins slightly at the Wood's outermost edge, within roughly ten miles of the border. Very few permanent trails are large enough to be called roads in this region, though well-traveled tracks connect the villages along the Mothingale River.

Like most other areas of Blood Wood, the Western Border holds ever-present dangers. Hunters must be especially alert for Death Daisies and Blood Wasps, which are particularly prolific in the region. Even elves who remain inside their villages must be vigilant against the occasional incursion of a Hulker (see Companion, pg. 283) or Witherfang (see Gamemaster's Guide, pg. 354). All manner of strange and dangerous creatures have emerged from the Forest's Heart in past years, plaguing nearby villages. Intruders from outside the Wood are rare here, though the region's rich deposits of True wood occasionally attract small, uninvited gathering expeditions. The wardens and wards present along the border stop all but the most intrepid adventurers long before they reach the sources of True wood.

The People

The blood elves of the Western Border count themselves among Queen Alachia's most loyal subjects. Despite their isolation from the Court, they have traditionally followed the lead of the Escalanas, who pride themselves on their devotion and service to the queen. The Jae'Helastri, long rivals of the Escalanas, whisper that the western elves' vaunted loyalty is mostly an attempt to compensate for the vast distance separating them from the Court. Regardless, Alachia knows she can count on the Western Border to follow her lead without question.

The Border elves are also distinguished by their self-reliance, forged by their isolation and the hardships of life in the region. The scarcity of game forces most of the population to live as nomads, regularly moving their settlements to avoid depleting the game in any one place. As a result, most residents of the Western Border enjoy little leisure time. A few permanent settlements are found along the forest's edge and the Mothingale river.

The Southern Fringe

Lying closest to northern Barsaive's major trade routes, the Southern Fringe is the part of Blood Wood most familiar to the outside world. This region is more densely populated than the rest and is overseen by the powerful Carithasca ranelle, wealthy since the reign of the late Queen Failla. Their home city of Trenevar is the Wood's primary center for trade, legitimate and otherwise.

A large portion of the region's northern territory has become unlivable since the Scourge, as corruption from the Forest's Heart creeps outward in a widening circle. Deserted farming and fishing villages dot the banks of the

Lesser Mothingale, abandoned when their residents fled to safer ground. Villagers closest to the affected area keep a wary eye on the river, watching for signs of taint in its waters. Despite assurances from Queen Alachia and Chief Blood Warder Preystia Tales, many fear the Heart will spread southward until it engulfs them. A few prominent citizens from the northernmost habitable villages have been petitioning Queen Alachia for stronger action, though she has yet to formally address their concerns.

The Land

The trees cluster less thickly here, and local elves have turned many of the abundant clearings into large vegetable gardens. The soil in these areas is dark and rich, producing food of impressive size and delicious taste. The bounty in these farms is prized throughout the rest of the Wood. Instead of the narrow, overgrown paths typical elsewhere, the Southern Fringe boasts roads clear and wide enough for carts to travel. In addition to the roads, the west branch of the Mothingale River frequently carries small trading vessels to Trenevar from the Northern Reaches and Western Border.

The People

Once every eight days, blood elves from the region's permanent settlements travel to the market town of Trenevar, the Fringe's largest community. Local farmers and fishmongers peddle the bountiful produce and fish cultivated from the land, while others trade in goods only available in other regions of the Wood. On occasion, smuggler ships bring contraband up the Mothingale from the Serpent River.

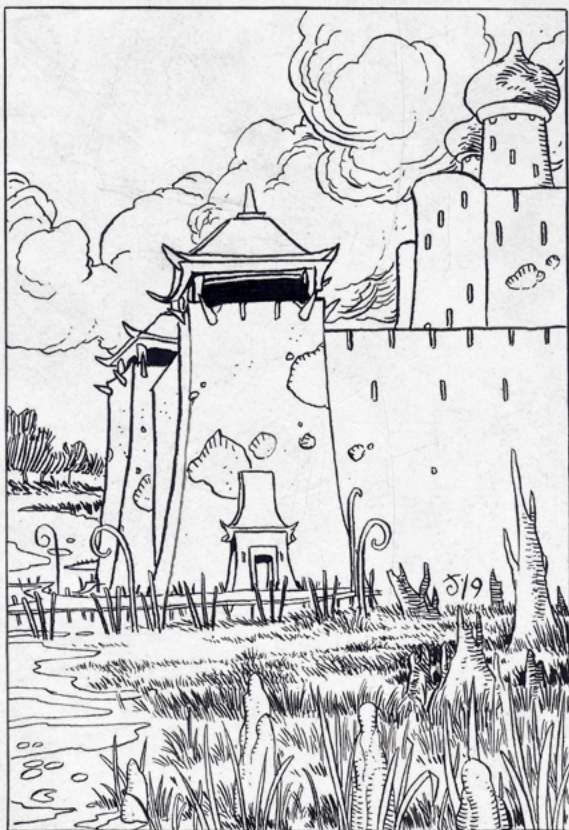
Kaer Eidolon

Kaer Eidolon represents the only settlement of blood elves outside Blood Wood recognized by the Elven Court. Built ten years ago at the behest of the Carithasca and Talshara ranelles, Kaer Eidolon occupies a site with a tragic history. The ancient kaer, four days south of the Wood's border, was partly excavated by elves during the Scourge in an attempt to escape corruption by the Horrors. Nearly three hundred years later, their labors would give birth to an unprecedented alliance between the Elven Court and the t'skrang of House Syrtis. Today, Eidolon serves as a vital military and economic outpost for both Namegiver races.

Kaer Eidolon received its baptism by fire when a combined force of elves and t'skrang beat back an Ishkarat incursion in the Battle of Sejanus. While t'skrang histories naturally emphasize the role of Syrtisian riverboats, the elven troops manning the fort proved equally decisive. The swift, overwhelming victory gave both sides immense respect for each other's fighting abilities, promoting further collaboration between them. The battle also enhanced the status of the Talshara ranelle, which supplies almost all the blood elf soldiers currently residing in the fortress.

History

The kaer's original inhabitants, a small band of Warders, fled to the area midway through the Scourge. Though their names have been struck from existing records, legend has it they left Wyrn Wood after their experimentation with a parasitic Horror went terribly awry. Believing their magics doomed to failure, the Warders journeyed four days from the Wood and began building a Thera-style underground shelter. Unfortunately, Horrors overran and devoured them before they could complete it. Elven explorers who stumbled onto the excavations after the Scourge named the place Eidolon, which means "phantom" in Sperethiel.



Soon after, an envoy from House Syrtis arrived seeking an audience with the Elven Court. The visit was highly unusual, given the historical enmity between the elves and t'skrang. The treaty ending their previous border dispute gave the elves sovereignty over the northern Mothingale, but cost them control of its southern stretches. Legends portray the treaty both as an elven victory and an unjustified concession to the t'skrang, said to have "deceived the Passions by misusing their gifts."

Even more unusual than the envoy's appearance was her reason for coming. She proposed that House Syrtis and Blood Wood form a defensive pact to keep House Ishkarat in check. As a symbol of this alliance, elves and t'skrang together would erect a fortress for their mutual benefit. The immediately defensible location of Kaer Eidolon made it a perfect site for such an installation.

Alachia took the matter under advisement and promised an answer at some future date. Since the idea came from the t'skrang, and a traditional enemy at that, the queen was inclined to distrust it. However, House Ishkarat's swift and brutal progress eastward along the Serpent River was bringing its forces closer to the Mothingale. If they managed to conquer Syrtis's territories, an unknown adversary would be on Blood Wood's doorstep. House Syrtis

was, at least, an enemy Alachia knew. The fact they had made such a startling proposal indicated they needed the elves as equal allies.

The choice of site inclined Alachia to favor the idea despite the risks, though not for reasons she would publicly admit. When the Warders fled the Wood, they took with them everything necessary to continue their magical research. No solid evidence of what magical tomes or relics they might have carried is found in the Wood's records. A fortress atop the ruins provided the perfect opportunity to explore the kaer and retrieve whatever elven secrets had been left there, ensuring such knowledge stayed in the right hands.

Queen Alachia laid the matter before her consortis. Haeleon Carithasca argued strongly in its favor, taking the opportunity to remind the Court of his longstanding request to open Blood Wood's borders. Tarin Daevenar opposed the alliance on the grounds that daily contact with the t'skrang would contaminate elven culture with foreign influence. The remaining six consortis split over the issue, leaving the advisors deadlocked.

Haeleon Carithasca badly wanted to build the fort as he saw great potential in the venture. Kaer Eidolon presented an opportunity for the Carithasca to establish regular shipments from Trenevar to an area outside the Wood, making it easier to skirt the royal ban on foreign goods. Over the course of a four day hunting party, Haeleon won over Erithander Talshara with his eloquent, if not persistent, argument for the fort's military value. Alachia had all but decided to back the project by this point, and took Erithander's endorsement as an approving omen. The Queen immediately sent word of her decision to House Syrtis. Within weeks, t'skrang construction crews arrived to begin laying the foundations only to find the elves already there, hard at work.

The Fortress

Eidolon is one of the most defensible cities in the area, protected on all sides by thirty-foot walls. Most of the surrounding lands are shallow marshes that make it difficult to approach the fortress on foot. Only one side of Eidolon is directly exposed to the Serpent River, which connects the dozen or so docks to the city. These docks service the many military and civilian ships that arrive and depart from the kaer each day.

The outer walls join together in a hexagonal pattern, with a guard tower and entrance to the city at each intersection. On the other side of this barrier are the wooden stands and carts used by local merchants to peddle wares brought in from around Barsaive. These semi-permanent shops are only removed should the city need to prepare for an attack. Across a laneway from these stalls are the brick-and-mortar shops that require more permanent facilities, like forges, taverns, and research libraries. The laneway circles the entire city, allowing residents easy access to the underground sections of Eidolon containing their homes.

The center of the city is elevated from the civilian districts and protected by a twenty-foot high wall. In this area are the t'skrang administrative offices and blood elf barracks, as well as the city treasury, armory, records center,

and other administrative buildings. House Syrtis, along with the Carithasca and Talshara ranelles, maintain modest estates in the central district to have a secure place to conduct their business.

The People

The elven forces at Eidolon are currently commanded by Rhisiart Talshara (see The Talshara Ranelle, pg. 136), the youngest son of Erithander Talshara. Rotation of blood elf troops takes place every three months, which coincides with the regularly scheduled arrival of supply ships from Trenevar. The Carithasca ranelle has placed its fleet of cargo boats at the Talshara ranelle's disposal, an act of apparent generosity. In fact, the Carithasca use these supply runs to smuggle foreign goods to Trenevar, which then travel by ship or caravan across Blood Wood, sometimes even to the Elven Court.

Blood Elves in Eidolon

The wardens assigned to Eidolon follow a separate rotational pattern to those in other regions of Blood Wood, which limits the spread of external contamination within its borders. A warden who arrives at Eidolon will patrol the fortress for their first three months, and then be assigned guard duties within the inner districts when a 'fresh' batch of blood elves rotates into the kaer. The warden is then rotated back to patrol the outposts within the Southern Fringe for three months before returning to repeat the cycle. This pattern minimizes the effects of Wood Longing (see Game Information, pg. 254), while ensuring that blood elves familiar with Eidolon's layout are always present to defend it. Political figures, such as Rhisiart Talshara, have a larger degree of freedom when it comes to the length of time they spend outside of the Wood and will typically make short trips back every two or three months.

In addition to the soldiers, about one hundred and fifty Unprotected elves have made their homes inside Eidolon's walls. Ever since news of the Wood's transformation reached the rest of Barsaive, elves born outside Blood Wood have struggled to deal with its implications. Many traveled to their ancestral homeland to judge it for themselves, and some chose to stay. While Alachia refuses to let them live in the Wood, their sworn allegiance makes them a useful tool. She allows these pilgrims to reside at Kaer Eidolon, bolstering the contingent of soldiers and craftsmen that keeps the fortress a thriving settlement.

While the elves handle most of the city's defenses, the t'skrang oversee Eidolon's day-to-day operations. Docking schedules, supply storage, tax collection, and everything else keeping the city running are overseen by Magistrate Ritizk Syrtis. Alachia originally fought against this arrangement, but the Talshara and Carithasca ranelles convinced her otherwise. Erithander was happy to focus solely on defense and Haeleon saw plausible deniability for illicit goods ending up on ships traveling to Trenevar. In addition to the

many t'skrang trading vessels that come and go as they please, a number of Syrtisian military vessels use Eidolon as a resupply stop as they patrol the Serpent river.

Like the Carithasca smuggling activities, the Seekers of the Heart have used Eidolon as a way to enter Alachia's domain undetected. The group has been using smaller supply runs to subvert the borders of Blood Wood for years, leading to one of few failures that tarnishes the Talshara's reputation. Only whispers of their activities are heard inside the Wood itself, making their movements difficult to follow by the wardens. Kaer Eidolon, however, is full of sympathizers to the Seekers' goals and is becoming a political powder keg with a pre-lit fuse. The group's covert members are becoming bolder by the day, forcing the blood elves to put more pressure on Magistrate Ritizk to help flush them out of hiding.

Adventure Idea

Tensions at Kaer Eidolon have steadily built up in recent years between the Magistrate Ritizk, Rhisiart Talshara, and the Seekers of the Heart. Gamemasters are encouraged to use this political triangle as a means to shift the nature of the kaer throughout the course of an adventure or campaign. The Talshara may hire a group to hunt down/capture members of the Seekers, the Seekers may require a distraction to smuggle members in/out, or the Magistrate may want to gain leverage over these elven factions to further his own goals. Interactions that affect the political stability of Eidolon will not go unnoticed by Queen Alachia or the Shivalahala Syrtis and should have consequences, positive or negative, that effect interactions with their respective kingdoms in the future.

Important Characters

Magistrate Ritizk Syrtis

As an elder member of House Syrtis, most elves believe Magistrate Ritizk earned his position through years of dedicated service to his family. The truth is he was sent to Eidolon as punishment for some unknown dishonor to his house's prestige during his attempt to secure the position of chamberlain. The position was granted to Ritizk's eldest niece, who banished her uncle to serve far from the arapagoi. Ritizk has spent the past decade turning Eidolon into a symphony of efficiency and continues to plot his return to prominence within House Syrtis.

Ritizk has daily contact with the Talshara stationed at Kaer Eidolon, as their patrols are integral to the city's safety. The Magistrate is often invited to troop briefings out of respect for his office. He rarely attends these, however, since his suggestions are frequently ignored by the wardens. Ritizk is also acquainted with most Carithasca ship captains, who frequently exchange supplies at Eidolon's port. His position makes him responsible for ensuring a

smooth operation of the docks, which the Magistrate has used as a means to collect a percentage from any contraband traveling up to Blood Wood.

Two Sides of the Same Coin

Both Ritizk Syrtis and Rhisiart Talshara have been given their respective positions of power in Kaer Eidolon after tarnishing their families' reputation. Each knows this about the other, forming a bond through their common goal of one day returning to political prominence. This respect does not blind them to their predicament, however, as either would sell out the other if there were any chance of ending their exile.

The Seekers of the Heart have yet to inconvenience the Magistrate in any meaningful way. Ritizk's official stance is to arrest any known member of the Seekers on sight, but many seem to escape custody before any criminal charges are filed. Whether it is someone in his administration or Ritizk himself, he seems more bark than bite when it comes to these outlaws.

Attributes

DEX: 7	STR: 6	TOU: 6
PER: 6	WIL: 5	CHA: 7

Exploring and Traveling

Because of Queen Alachia's isolationist policies, the Wood remains a source of wonder and awe to many adventurers in Barsaive. Those who journey to Blood Wood face difficulties unlike those anywhere else in Barsaive, and surviving a trek into the forest is a deed worthy of song. The defenses of Blood Wood, natural and elf-made, ensure very few uninvited travelers who venture beyond the outermost fringes of the Wood live to tell the tale.

While they know of these perils, the Wood still lures outsiders who seek to learn its secrets or harvest its riches. Hasty mining expeditions delve quietly into the forest in search of deposits of True earth and True wood. Others are drawn by tales of the beauty and magnificence of the Elven Court. Of those who seek the elves, most are turned away or are never heard from again.

Entering the Wood

The first challenge facing characters who wish to explore Blood Wood is finding a way into the Wood undetected. While the size of the Wood's borders makes it impossible to watch every part of the forest, the border guards take their duties seriously. To assist the Talshara wardens in their task, the Blood Warders set various traps along the Wood's perimeter. Characters entering Blood Wood must pass through the Southern Fringe, the Western Border or the Northern Reaches. Each region presents unique opportunities and obstacles to intruders.

Most travelers from Barsaive approach the forest along the Southern Fringe. Those traveling by land aim for the most isolated stretches, furthest

from the Mothingale and the village of Arralena. The Blood Warders anticipated this, however, and used particularly strong path magic (see p. 70) to protect this region of the Wood, adding +2 to its Mystic Defense. Travelers may be warned off by the remains of hapless Namegivers that litter the Southern Fringe. A more reliable method of entry is by boat along the Mothingale or Lesser Mothingale rivers. Though each river has plenty of guard stations, adventurers can often slip past them, either in the hold of a larger ship or under the cover of night. Some guards can even be persuaded to ignore the occasional traveler, usually in exchange for foreign delicacies banned by the queen.

The Western Border is the most difficult region through which to enter Blood Wood, at least when traveling overland. Its defenses feature wards and magical traps that summon the Wood's natural predators, including assassin vines, blood oaks, and root walkers. Most travelers seeking to enter the Western Border actually travel by boat along the Mothingale from the Southern Fringe. Once past Burdoin, the river poses a greater danger than the Wood's inhabitants. Only elven vessels are able to navigate up river to Letheran, home of the Escalanas ranelle.

Due to its distance from Barsaive and inhospitable surroundings, the Northern Reaches makes for an impractical choice for entering Blood Wood. Ironically, the region offers relatively easy access. While Talshara outposts are built closer together here than in other regions, the vast area of the Northern Reaches forces the wardens to patrol their territory reactively. A small group of adventurers might find it easier to slip into the Wood from this direction, but they must travel deep into the Wood before they can consider themselves safe from detection. Though it is possible to reach the Northern Reaches via the Mothingale and Lesser Mothingale rivers, piloting an uninvited boat along either of these rivers is an arduous task. Intruders using the Mothingale must face Talsharan sentries from the village of Eamonn. The Lesser Mothingale remains largely unprotected, but flows directly through the Forest's Heart, which poses formidable dangers of its own.

Traveling in the Wood

The biggest challenge to exploring Blood Wood is the nature of the forest itself. The blood magic the elves practiced during the Scourge warped the Wood's True pattern, twisting its beauty into a sickening mockery of nature. The unusually thick growth of plants and trees makes travel more difficult than normal. The density of undergrowth reduces travel times to roughly 20 miles per day walking and 30 miles per day riding.

Wary travelers may survive the predators that hunt the forest only to fall victim to an apparently harmless blood oak or assassin vine. The corruption of the Forest's Heart continues to creep deeper into the various regions of the Wood, fed by every drop of blood that falls from the residents' thorns. Blood permeates nearly every living thing in the Wood: plants, animals, even

the earth itself. In some areas of the forest, thick blood wells up in travelers' footprints.

Path magic (p. 70) is one of the most significant obstacles to travel, both along the ground and on waterways. This enchantment permeates the entire forest, directing the movements of intruders by obscuring the land and placing obstacles in their path. The waterways are protected by a slightly different magic, causing storms to rise on the river and works to turn back any unauthorized ship.

Defenses

The Blood Warders protect Blood Wood with many defenses, including outposts, patrols, wards, and special enchantments. Officially, the Blood Warders are responsible for defending Blood Wood, but tradition has seen them cooperate with the Talshara wardens. While the Warders maintain the forest's magical protections, the Talshara have taken responsibility for choosing, training and directing the foot soldiers who make up the bulk of the Wood's defensive forces.

Talshara Outposts

The primary defense of Blood Wood's borders are the outposts established along the forest's perimeter. Located about seventy miles apart, each outpost consists of a garrison of sixteen defenders, at least three of whom are adepts, and several guard animals. Each outpost also maintains a few messenger birds to alert nearby outposts of intruders, request reinforcements, and maintain contact with their leaders at Court. Most of these outposts lie less than a day's walk inside Blood Wood's edge.

The wardens stationed at each outpost patrol the area between the outposts in a rotating fashion. Eight wardens garrison the outpost while the other eight patrol the borders in two groups of four, one patrol traveling toward the next outpost in one direction, the other traveling toward the other. When the patrols arrive at their respective destinations, they form the next stationary watch along with the patrol arriving from the opposite direction. The garrison wardens garrisoning the outpost form two new patrols and move on to the next outposts. With this system, each warden



tours all the outposts over six months, spending roughly half of his time on watch and the other half on patrol.

The wardens are also responsible for tending a small number of spectral willows (see Game Information, pg. 258) strategically placed throughout the Wood. These dual-natured plants warn of intrusions and other threats from astral space. All wardens are trained to recognize the willows' distress signal, but only three Blood Warders can actually communicate with the plants: Takaris Talshara, Niriname Jae'Helastri, and Preystia Tales (see Notable Blood Warders, pg. 74).

Wards

The border is also protected by a net of wards placed about every hundred yards by the Blood Warders to hold intruders until they can be collected by a patrol. While most of these are designed to create thorn men when triggered, the magicians of the Escalanas have also created wards that summon other creatures to attack intruders, such as storm crows and elemental spirits. The Blood Warders also use more traditional magical and mundane traps.

Path Magic

One of Blood Wood's best defenses against unwanted intruders is path magic, an enchantment created by the Blood Warders that causes the forest's plants to obscure trails and lead travelers in circles until they become hopelessly lost. When a group enters Blood Wood uninvited, the gamemaster makes a Step 12 Path Magic test and compares the result to the Mystic Defense of the intruders. If the test is successful against even a single character, the path magic has been activated and will attempt to lead the group astray. As the characters travel through the forest, the trees will shift to form trails ahead of the characters and obscure the way they just came.

In order to notice the forest shifting to trap them, a character must pass a Perception test against the path magic's Mystic Defense of 10. Characters can use abilities like the Tracking talent or the Safe Path spell, but these methods require an extra success to succeed. At least one character must succeed at the Perception test every 30 minutes for the group to travel unaffected, otherwise they fall prey to the path magic and are diverted from their destination. Characters may attempt to notice their unintended detour at the next half-hour mark with another Perception test.

When path magic detects a group of travelers, it alerts the nearest border outpost. Teams of four to six wardens will venture out to locate the trespassers, sometimes including Blood Warders or exolashers. In general, path magic ignores groups including a blood elf, though if the blood elf has been away from the forest for more than a year and a day, the path magic may not recognize them. In this case, the group is targeted by path magic as described above, but gains a +2 bonus to their Perception tests.

Path magic can also affect abilities used to follow a target in Blood Wood (like Mystic Pursuit) or navigate its waterways. Instead of obscuring the

correct path, the magic diverts the user from their target or destination. When using relevant abilities in Blood Wood, the character must achieve at least one extra success against the path magic's Mystic Defense for the ability to function properly. Failure means the character believes their intended route lies in the opposite direction or turns their boat towards the nearest exit from blood elf territory.

ORGANIZATIONS AND SECRET SOCIETIES

Blood Warders

The Warders have guarded the Wood from Theran slavers, enemy armies, and anything else that has dared threaten its borders for centuries. Officially, these warrior magicians are responsible for every aspect of Blood Wood's defense and charged with keeping it safe for all who live within. They oversee the Talshara wardens and outpost commanders throughout the forest.

Over the years, the Blood Warders have become the leading magical experts of the Elven Court, especially blood magic. Many Blood Warders follow two or more magician Disciplines, some also choose to pursue other Disciplines. The most senior Blood Warders employ blood magic to extend their lifespans, a practice kept secret from all but Queen Alachia.

The Warders believe Protected elves are inherently superior to their Unprotected brethren, placing them as far above other Namegiver races as Namegivers are above insects. They see those who submitted to Theran rule as the price for safety from the Scourge as weaklings without honor. They believe blood elves are the only true survivors of the Scourge, because they adapted to meet the challenge rather than debasing themselves before the Therans and hiding away in abject terror.

Respected and feared throughout Blood Wood, the Blood Warders are one of Alachia's greatest strengths and her greatest weakness. Their magic has kept Blood Wood alive and helped Alachia maintain her power within it, but at a price possibly higher than she realizes. Recently, the Warders have begun to assume more autonomy, reporting their actions after the fact rather than seeking the Queen's prior approval. For now, Alachia finds their research valuable enough to overlook these minor transgressions. Most elves at Court believe the Warders must be performing some vital task or the Queen would surely punish them for disobeying her. A few minor voices have surmised Alachia doesn't care what the Blood Warders do, as long as they don't threaten her position.

History

The Queen's Warders were created early in Failla's reign to maintain the wilderness around the Queen's palace, keep the forest paths safe for travelers, and defend against intruders. The order of warrior magicians was proposed by Darelón Escalanas, then leader of the Escalanas ranelle. While some questioned his motives, even the most skeptical praised the Warders'

discretion and subtlety. The inhabitants of Wyrms Wood rarely saw them unless an intruder appeared. Any who dared trespass were swiftly dispatched by the Warders' martial and magical skills.

Magic gradually took precedence over combat as the Warders performed experiments aimed at expanding their ability to safeguard the Wood. Queen Failla gave them permission to explore anything that might better protect her people and their home. This freedom worked well, as the Warders' increasingly sophisticated magic helped them with every aspect of their duty.

Over time, the Warders expanded their research into Nethermancy and blood magic, some of which had little connection to their duties. Queen Failla was unexpectedly tolerant of their exploration of magical theory and even suggested new areas of research. At the same time, she granted Teharrillon Talshara permission to form a new ranelle, which soon earned a reputation for military prowess. The Talshara gradually took over the daily task of protecting the forest's borders, allowing the Warders to focus more attention on their magical pursuits.

Some years later, the Warders petitioned Failla for an isolated place to conduct their research. The queen's blessing allowed them to found Tesrae k'Ailiu, the Citadel of Magic. There, the order was able to delve deeper into the application of blood magic without exposing the rest of the Wood to their unnatural methods.

The Warders and the Scourge

When word of the coming Scourge reached Wyrms Wood, Queen Alachia ordered the Warders to discover a way to withstand the Horrors. She had learned through her own sources of the Tharan Rites of Protection and Passage and resolved never to accept the Therans' aid. It remained up to the Warders to devise other protections if the Wood was to survive.

The Warders pursued different avenues of research, from elemental warding to shifting the Wood to the astral plane. The latter produced a method similar to what was used by the city of Parlainth, though they ultimately rejected this as too troublesome. For Wyrms Wood, the Warders chose to create a vast wooden kaer where the entire population could live out the Scourge. Some Warders were uncertain about the shelter, since it might not withstand repeated Horror assaults. Alachia, however, was delighted with the solution and backed it over all other plans. As work progressed on the ritual spells needed to complete the kaer, the folk of Wyrms Wood migrated to the lands around the Citadel of Magic, which would sit at the kaer's center.

The wooden shelter remained intact around the Forest's Heart for nearly two hundred years. The kaer's wards didn't begin to fail until the Scourge's third century, at which time Horrors began to slip inside. Alachia commanded her Warders to strengthen the kaer or find other methods of protecting the elves from the Horrors' growing power.

One group, led by senior Warder Kethos Escalanas, discovered the rite that would become the Ritual of Thorns. Warder Lysarin Greenbranch, marked

by a Horror, created the fire birches that threaten the Blasted Heath to this day. Another experiment almost allowed a parasitic Horror to destroy Wyrn Wood, but the Warders undid their terrible handiwork through blood magic. This drastic act pointed towards the only solution that could save the elven people.

Kethos combined this blood magic ritual with his original Ritual of Thorns. Though most of his fellow Warders endorsed the plan, a few argued against it. When Alachia accepted his proposal, the outspoken Warders left the wooden kaer along with a hundred or so followers to build their own shelter. Succumbing to the Horrors before their work was completed, their half-built kaer lies under the foundations of the fortress now known as Kaer Eidolon.

The terrible alteration of the Wood and its people through the Ritual of Thorns preyed upon the minds of many Warders, leading some to commit suicide rather than live with what they had done. Others believed they had failed their people and feared Alachia would put them to death. To their surprise, Alachia praised them as saviors and called the horrific disfigurement of the Ritual a mark of noble sacrifice. Those elves who survived the agonizing pain came to agree with their Queen, learning to view their thorns as a badge of pride. Acknowledging the role their order played, the Queen's Warders were henceforth known as Blood Warders.

Life as a Blood Warder

The Blood Warders perform many tasks at least somewhat related to safeguarding Blood Wood. They advise the Queen and her consortis on matters pertaining to magic. They also reinforce the Talshara outposts by maintaining the magical wards that protect against unwanted intrusion, sometimes even joining the warden patrols. Blood Warders also make magical items for the exolashers, including thorn bows, thorn swords, and various blood charms.

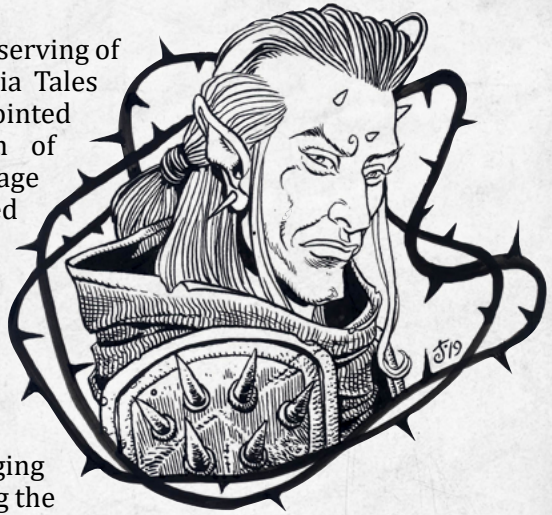
The Queen chooses new Blood Warders from candidates sponsored by existing Warders. Prospective recruits are brought before the Queen, where they undergo several tests and challenges before being accepted or rejected. Those who fail may petition for admittance one more time, but a second failure is final. Once chosen, a Warder holds their position for life, but some Warders have retired from active duty and pursue their own interests or take on other responsibilities.

Notable Blood Warders

Takaris Talshara, Niriame Jae'Helastri, and Aithne Oakforest are the senior Blood Warders in charge of the groups tasked with performing the order's day-to-day duties. Each reports directly to chief Blood Warder Preystia Tales, who keeps Alachia informed of the Warder's activities.

Preystia Tales

The most powerful and longest-serving of the current Blood Warders, Preystia Tales is the first non-Escalanas to be appointed chief Blood Warder. A magician of dazzling skill, his Daevenar heritage has also made him an accomplished artist and craftsman. His position gives the Daevenar ranelle considerable influence at Court, partly compensating the limited clout of their single consortis. Preystia has earned his status and honors through steadfast devotion to Alachia's rule, never once challenging the Queen's insistence on continuing the Ritual of Thorns.



Preystia has been concentrating on a way to purge the corruption of the Forest's Heart while leaving Blood Wood's True pattern intact. Along with this royal command, Alachia has given her permission to use as many of the Warders' resources as necessary. Loyal and conscientious, Preystia is making every effort to carry out the queen's wishes. Unfortunately, he is starting to believe the damage done by the Ritual of Thorns cannot be healed without dire consequences to the Wood.

Preystia has another, secret ambition. Like many Blood Warders, he uses blood magic rituals to extend his lifespan and maintain a youthful appearance. Most Warders are content with this, but Preystia seeks true immortality. He has studied the legends of so-called Great Elves who live far beyond the usual span of years and wishes to become one. He has yet to share this ambition with anyone else, but has considered seeking counsel from Alachia. Preystia believes Alachia is one of the Great Elves and so must know the secret of eternal life.

Few know the true extent of Preystia's powers. He has spent significant time studying the Elementalist, Illusionist and Nethermancer Disciplines, and is one of three Warders bonded to the spectral willows (see Game Information, pg. 258) that help defend Blood Wood.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 4 TOU: 5

PER: 8 WIL: 8 CHA: 8

Takaris Talshara

One of few blood elves who respects Namegivers from outside the Wood, Takaris is a potential ally for adventurers seeking a sympathetic ear among the Warders' ranks. He demonstrates his loyalty to Queen Alachia by protecting

the forest and its inhabitants in every way possible. His dedication to that task, combined with his Talshara heritage, made him the logical choice to oversee maintenance of the forest's defenses. His appointment to this prestigious position was a reward for returning the Everliving Flower to the Wood.

Takaris has learned through painful experience how to play the political games necessary at Court. His current favor with the Queen has enhanced his influence beyond his expectations. He remains sympathetic to the plight of outsiders in Blood Wood but will not urge Alachia too strongly to consider their needs for fear of falling from grace.

Takaris maintains a few important contacts outside Blood Wood, most notably with the wizard Hiermon of Haven. Takaris arranged several transactions with Hiermon, one of which led to the recovery of the Everliving Flower. He sends frequent messages and payments to Haven with Fafedriel, the Blood Warder who most often leads expeditions into Parlainth in search of lost treasures. Takaris accompanies Fafedriel on rare occasions but has not done so in several years.

Takaris set aside his pursuit of Elementalist magic to study the Warrior Discipline, following the traditions of his ranelle. He is one of the few Blood Warders to study at the Grove of Thorns and one of three Warders bonded with the spectral willows that guard the Wood's borders.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 6 WIL: 7 CHA: 7

Niriame Jae'Helastris

Few people expected Niriame to succeed when she announced her intention to join the Blood Warders upon coming of age. Few of her relatives had shown any significant aptitude for magic, let alone the talent necessary to become a Warder. The dominance of the Escalanas among the order's ranks made opportunities that much harder to come by for other ranelles. Niriame was determined, however, and used her formidable magical talents to win a place. She has since used it to gather compromising information on many people, including several of her fellow Warders. Only her beauty and charm have kept many from realizing she owes her rapid advancement in the ranks to secrets other than magical ones.

Niriame has become one of Alachia's advisors on magical matters. This responsibility has put her in close contact with Orlando Escalanas, the consortis charged with advising the queen and Court on such matters. Like her uncle Mithran (see *The Jae'Helastris Ranelle*, pg. 127), Niriame's greatest talents are political. Some say she is a candidate for consortis in the near future. Niriame is an accomplished Elementalist and Wizard. She is also one of three Blood Warders bonded with the spectral willows that guard the Wood's astral borders.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5

PER: 7 WIL: 8 CHA: 6

Aithne Oakforest

Originally from Sereatha, Aithne Oakforest traces his bloodline to a minor branch of the Escalanas ranelle. Like many of his kinsmen, he excels at the magical arts and is utterly loyal to Alachia. Even though the Ritual of Thorns claimed the lives of his wife and children, Aithne still believes it was the right choice for the elven people. He shares his queen's loathing of the Therans and would rather have died during the Scourge than accept their protection.

Few Blood Warders have taken a more prominent role in politics than Aithne. Unlike many of his fellow Warders, he is comfortable with the intrigues that come with life at the Elven Court. While skilled in several magical Disciplines, he does not thirst for knowledge as many of his order do. Instead, he seeks to bridge the gap between the Warders' abstract research and the Wood's needs. Aithne sees knowledge without a guiding purpose as meaningless at best, and likely to cause the seekers' downfall at worst.

Aithne has not tried to take advantage of his position for wealth or power. This display of personal integrity may explain the depth of trust the Queen has shown him. Aithne is known to follow the Elementalist, Nethermancer, and Wizard Disciplines.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 5 TOU: 6

PER: 8 WIL: 8 CHA: 8

Exolashers

The exolashers serve as personal guards for Queen Alachia and the consortis, and ensure security around the palace grounds. All members are highly trained adepts in the Warrior, Swordmaster, Archer, Beastmaster, or Cavalryman Disciplines. Few exolashers follow magician Disciplines, preferring to leave that to the Blood Warders.

The exolashers are fiercely loyal. They will readily die in the queen's defense or undertake any task she assigns them without question. Most come from the Talshara ranelle, though some are from other ranelles or even commoners. Any elf wishing to join their ranks undertakes a long period of martial training, including tactics and several different fighting styles. After completing training, the exolasher is given a thread weapon appropriate to their Discipline and magical armor crafted by the Blood Warders. These items bear an image of crossed swords in front of the Rose Throne, the symbol of the exolashers since their founding.

While they rarely display brute force, the exolashers serve to remind Alachia's subjects of the martial power at her disposal. More than a hundred strong, they will rally to Alachia's side should anything or anyone threaten her.

So strong is the exolashers' bond with their sovereign that they would likely crush any challenge to the queen's rule without her calling them to action. The only other force that comes close to matching the exolashers' fighting prowess is the Talshara wardens who protect the forest's borders.

Notable Exolashers

Exolashers notable for exceptional loyalty, unusual services, or unique circumstances include Elindrel Talshara, Wilsaron Goldivy, and Narrek Leeron.

Elindrel Talshara

Hailing from the village of Burdoin in the Southern Fringe, Elindrel became a warden after completing his training at the Grove of Thorns. An accomplished warrior, as many wardens tend to be, Elindrel's valor did not set him apart from his peers until his time at Kaer Eidolon. His skill with a blade, knack for leadership, and unquestioning loyalty made him the ideal candidate for liaison between the elf troops and Magistrate Ritizk Syrtis. Elindrel's ability to coordinate the disparate troops played an important role in the successful defeat of Ishkarat forces at the Battle of Sejanus. When Erithander Talshara judged Elindrel's service record sufficient to warrant promotion, he arranged an invitation to the Elven Court so Alachia could consider his candidacy for exolasher.

While all Alachia's subjects are devoted to her, Elindrel's devotion approaches the feeling usually reserved for the Passions. In fact, he sees the queen as the embodiment of Astendar. The stories describing her beauty and bewitching presence had not prepared him for the impact of meeting her in person. Elindrel fell immediately and hopelessly in love with Alachia, a crush as strong today as when he first saw her. Recognizing his absolute and incorruptible devotion to her, Alachia welcomed Elindrel into the exolashers' ranks.

Elindrel's fondest wish is to be appointed Alachia's personal champion. Her last champion was killed in battle half a century ago. While any among the exolashers would jump at the chance to serve their queen in such a capacity, she has refused to name a replacement. To his credit, Elindrel has served as Alachia's interim champion on the few occasions when it was necessary.

The dishonor brought to the Talshara ranelle by his kinsman Rhisiart pains Elindrel deeply. It is inconceivable to him that any subject of the queen cannot instinctively anticipate her slightest whim. Elindrel had recommended Rhisiart to take up his former position at Kaer Eidolon. Rumors say Elindrel's motivation was less about Rhisiart regaining his honor and more focused on keeping him out of the Queen's sight.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 6 TOU: 7

PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 6

Wilsaron Goldivy

Wilsaron has served Alachia well on many occasions, publicly and covertly. His skill as a bowyer, and fletcher, and archer is legendary. A genuine Goldivy warbow, recognizable by the stylized ivy-leaf inlaid with silver, will fetch a high price for any merchant lucky enough to obtain one. The only bow without the distinctive marks is one Wilsaron reserves for missions requiring secrecy.

A member of a minor ranelle, Wilsaron has little patience for Court intrigue. He is soft spoken, slow to anger, and honest to a fault. His unwillingness to play politics has kept him from advancing further in the exolashers' ranks, though many of his peers believe his insight and mild temperament would make him an excellent commander. The Queen trusts him and has occasionally sought his advice in military matters. In Goldivy's mind, this royal favor proves he is more than capable of leading the exolashers; only the power of the Talshara ranelle has pushed less deserving comrades above him.

Attributes

DEX: 9 STR: 7 TOU: 7

PER: 8 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

Narrek Leeron

While not a member of the Talshara ranelle, Narrek has powerful Talshara connections. He is a graduate of the Grove of Thorns, where he studied under Erithander Talshara. An enthusiastic follower of his mentor's personal vision for the Wood, Narrek follows both the Warrior and Swordmaster Disciplines. He is currently assigned to the Northern Reaches, leading patrols around his home village of Laggan. Though many of the Leeron ranelle have hopes of gaining prominence in the Court, Narrek has developed strong loyalty towards the Talshara. His close association with Erithander might see him remain loyal to the Talshara should he be forced to choose between them and his own family.

Attributes

DEX: 8 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 8 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

The Knights of the Thistle

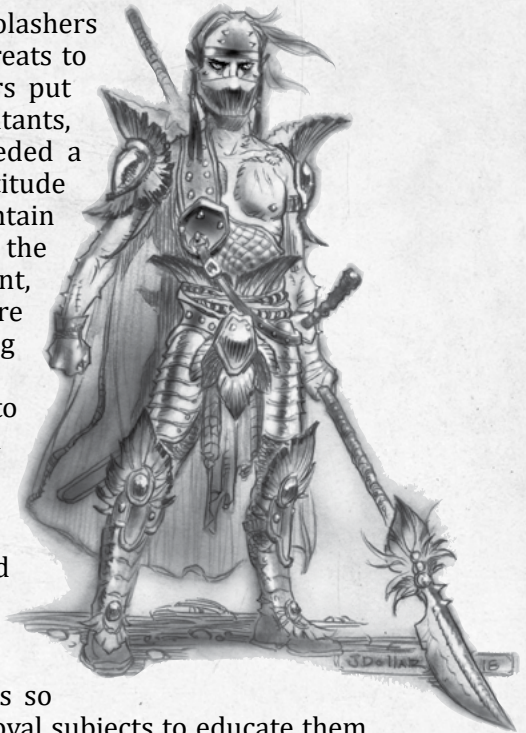
Originally created as a branch of exolashers to help keep order during the Scourge, the Knights of the Thistle have grown to serve the court's interest throughout the elven kingdoms. Feared as assassins and spies loyal to Queen Alachia, the Knights have cultivated a dangerous reputation shrouded in rumor and legend. Those outside Blood Wood have rarely laid eyes on the thistle-shaped silver pendant that marks a Knight. Those who do count themselves lucky to be alive and seldom recount the tale for fear their luck will run out.

History

Before the Ritual of Thorns, most exolashers focused their attention on external threats to keep the Court safe. However, Horrors put significant strain on the minds of inhabitants, both common and noble. Alachia needed a way to monitor lapses in mental fortitude and deal with them quietly to maintain order. This need drove the creation of the Knights of the Thistle. Discrete, efficient, and fiercely loyal, the Knights were critical to keeping the elves from tearing themselves apart in their kaer.

After it was safe to venture back into the world, the Knight's skills were seen as even more valuable to the Court. Some of the only blood elves sent out as envoys, their official purpose was to dispel rumors concerning the disfigured Elven Court. But those who know Alachia best doubt this was her true intention. They don't believe the Queen would regard the opinion of outsiders so highly that she would send her most loyal subjects to educate them on the Court's condition. Given the Knight's reputation, it is far more likely Alachia was spreading her eyes and ears across the land.

In recent years, most of the Knights have been deployed outside Blood Wood on extended assignments. Rumors about their activities spread among even the exolashers, with Shaylyn Talshara's private reports to the queen being the subject of frequent debate. Many believe the Knights are searching the realms for acorns from Oak Heart. Others believe Alachia is expanding her network of spies into Sereatha and Shosara. Only the Queen and her Knights know the real truth.



Adventure Idea

Even though the Knights activities remain hidden from the public eye, the nature of their activities outside of Blood Wood necessitates the use of non-blood elf adepts. Using Kaer Eidolon as a jumping off point, agents for the Knights have hired a number of independent groups to complete tasks vital to their current objectives. The gamemaster may choose one of the following options for how one such mission would play out.

Option 1

Shaylyn hires a group to transport a set of sealed orders to agents outside of Barsaive. These orders are sought after by other interested parties, who

would either try to negotiate a finder's fee or simply attempt to take them by force.

Option 2

The group is hired by Alavara to transport a shipment back to Blood Wood from Shosara. The shipment is stolen or removed from the group's possession through various means, necessitating its retrieval to receive the agreed upon payment.

Option 3

Folwin may use the group to carry out the assassination of a minor nobleman within the city of Sereatha. The group could either carry out the deed themselves or be framed for such an act carried out by Folwin himself.

Notable Knights of the Thistle

Few members of the Knights of the Thistle have been openly identified as such. Usually, only the stories of their deeds make it out of the palace halls. Shaylyn Talshara, Alavara Faleth, and Folwin Leeron have all been rumored to be among the Knights' ranks.

Shaylyn Talshara

Shaylyn was placed in charge of the Knights towards the tail end of the Scourge, making her one of few elves with full knowledge of their activities since that time. Her natural talent with a bow was clear from a young age and further refined during her training at the Grove of Thorns. Shaylyn graduated at the top of her class, so no one was surprised at her appointment to exolasher service or that she excelled among their ranks. After decades of service, her instincts as a warrior and unshakeable faith in the Queen's leadership was rewarded with a Goldivy Warbow commissioned by Alachia herself, and membership into the Knights.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 8 TOU: 6

PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Alavara Faleth

Born in a kaer in Glenwood Deep to a minor ranelle, Alavara was raised to follow elven traditions and dreamed to one day take her place as a protector of Wyrn Wood. Upon reaching Blood Wood, she was denied residence due to her Unprotected status. Alavara settled in Goro'imri while she considered undergoing the Ritual of Thorns. She admired the Talshara patrols who helped defend Goro'imri despite having no orders to do so and decided to claim her place among the blood elves, whatever the cost. Alavara's skill at espionage was recognized almost immediately and her appointment to the

exolashers is given as a shining example of what Unprotected elves should aspire to. Her current whereabouts are not widely known, but rumors place her on assignment in the kingdom of Shosara.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Folwin Leeron

Folwin's name is not known in lands outside the Wood, but his exploits as one of Alachia's most lethal agents are. The Queen's personal records credit him with over a dozen assassinations across Barsaive alone. None of these deaths have been traced back to Blood Wood, though a potent magical poison was used in all of them. Descriptions of Folwin vary greatly among consortis, leading to the theory that he is a master of disguise. Folwin is currently thought to be operating in Sereatha.

Attributes

DEX: 8 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 8

Kellimar's Brotherhood

While many believe the Brotherhood to be a bedtime story the Talshara tell their children, the reality is that they have defended the Elven Court since before the Ritual of Thorns. Working outside official channels, the Brotherhood's members do not concern themselves with politics. They focus instead on the charge they have taken upon themselves to carry out: protect the Wood at any cost.

History

After sacrificing his life in defense of Queen Alachia, Kellimar Talshara's bravery convinced a number of exolashers to ensure Wyrn Wood remained secure from further Horror attacks. They formed a small, tight-knit band within the exolashers and took it upon themselves to hunt down any Horrors that threatened the elven people. Jaheros Talshara took command of this group, naming it in his older brother's memory. When the danger of Horrors diminished after enacting the Ritual of Thorns, this group expanded their self-imposed purpose to include the elimination of any perceived threat to Blood Wood.

Operating outside the normal chain of command, the Brotherhood's activities are seldom known to any outside their order. The Queen does appear to keep tabs on this group, though generally seems content to allow their unauthorized actions to continue. Their defense of Blood Wood has, for the moment, served to further her own goals. Most rumors regarding the Brotherhood crop up around the village of Thigreach. Every so often, an

apprentice at the Greatearth Forge will claim to have seen Jaheros picking up a specially crafted item, but none of the forge's members have ever confirmed these sightings.

Of the rumors surrounding this group, one claims the Brotherhood whisked away Kellimar's body shortly after he fell in battle. Hidden somewhere in the forest, the crypt that serves as his final resting place is also from where the Brotherhood is thought to defend Blood Wood. Kellimar's Armor of Rose Petals (*Earthdawn Companion*, pg. 210) is said to sit at the center of this crypt, waiting for the next hero of the Wood to take up this legendary mantle.

The Needs of the Many...

Kellimar's Brotherhood has the singular goal of protecting Blood Wood at any cost, which a Gamemaster may use in whatever way best suits the needs of their campaign. This group does not receive their orders from the Elven Court nor are they restricted from taking actions considered disloyal by the general public. The Brotherhood will work with agents of other nations, trade supplies with smugglers, and even help outsiders navigate the Wood if they feel it will help protect the elven people. They are loyal to the Rose Throne and the symbol of protection it represents above all else, not necessarily the queen who sits upon it.

Notable Brotherhood Members

Jaheros Talshara

Trained by his brother from a young age, the two shared a bond of student and mentor in addition to that between siblings. Jaheros was at Kellimar's side when he was taken from this world and blames himself for not being able to save his brother's life. With the fate of the elven people left to a dangerous ritual, he dedicated his life to ensuring no elf met their end at the hand of a Horror again. In the years that followed, Jaheros's leadership of the Brotherhood was found to be a crucial element in their successful elimination of hidden threats to the elven people. He has felt compelled to continue the group's activities since the end Scourge and wonders if the elves of Blood Wood will ever truly be safe again.

Attributes

DEX: 8 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 6 WIL: 7 CHA: 7

Laerdya Willowby

Cousin to Ilisa Willowby, Laerdya leveraged her family's loyalty to the Court and personal combat prowess to an appointment to the exolashers shortly after the Scourge. Having grown up on tales of Kellimar's Brotherhood, Laerdya always believed rumors of their deeds were true. Her actions as an

exolasher showed her to be a loyal defender of the Wood, but her keen tactical senses often caused her to question if the elves were doing everything they could to keep themselves safe. Laerdya's fresh outlook on the defense of Blood Wood caught Jaheros's attention. He set up a test for her, sending her to secure a shipment of ore from the Southern Fringe, which he knew was being brought in by illegal means. Laerdya ignored Alachia's isolationist policies and secured the shipment, justifying her actions to Jaheros by arguing trading of this nature was vital to Blood Wood's survival. Impressed by her resolve, Jaheros asked her to join the Brotherhood then and there. Laerdya has been among their ranks ever since.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 8 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

Seekers of the Heart

Referred to as arrogant outsiders by Queen Alachia, the goals of the Seekers of the Heart are remarkably similar to the queen's. Both work to heal the Forest's Heart and restore Blood Wood to its former glory. Their methods, however, are vastly different, with the Seekers believing the only way to achieve this is to undo the Ritual of Thorns. As a result, the group has been banished from the Wood and pursues their ends in the shadows.

History

The Seekers of the Heart trace their origins back to the banishment of Monus Byre and Yoruial Tan from Blood Wood. Both of these Unprotected elves hailed from kaers that survived the Scourge and grew up idealizing the Wood in the face of the terrors each had experienced. They were the first from their kaers to journey back to the Elven Court of Wyrn Wood, only to be horrified at the sight of Blood Wood that took its place. The Wood's tainted nature convinced them both that something drastic needed to be done.

Starting their campaigns to rally the blood elves separately, Monus and Yoruial eventually joined forces within the small villages scattered throughout the Southern Fringe. Commoners in these settlements were intrigued by the tales of outside kaers surviving the Scourge without the Ritual of Thorns and began questioning Alachia's decision to continue the practice. These dissidents were eventually silenced, forcing Monus and Yoruial to retreat from Blood Wood to continue spreading their message. The mutual respect they felt for each other had blossomed into a deep connection, but neither ever lost sight of their common goal to restore the Wood. They decided to return to their respective kaers to seek the training and allies they would need in their coming struggle.

After returning to Kaer Oribella (see *The Wastes*, pg. 190), Monus shared the twisted truth that led to the creation of Blood Wood. After years of delving into the magical theory of blood magic, she became convinced the damage

to Oak Heart could only be undone if its original pattern was restored. To do such a thing, however, was beyond her current capability. As she describes it, visions started to overpower her dreams that focused her attention onto acorns of Oak Heart. Remembering that Yoruial's family received one as a gift prior to the Scourge, Monus knew the next steps in her journey led away from the safety of her home.

Monus's sister Renna, along with several other members of the kaer, felt a similar call to seek out a method to restore Wyrn Wood and dedicate their lives to her task as well. This small group of adventurers set out to secure the acorn they believed would bring answers. All they found were more questions. After analyzing the artifact, Monus realized its pattern was a mere sliver to that of Oak Heart. They would need to find more acorns to reconstruct a complete pattern, which were currently held within Blood Wood or scattered across the fractured nations of elves. Yoruial and his allies agreed to help Monus in her task, which gave birth to the group that would eventually be known as the Seekers of the Heart.

The early years were blissful, with the group traveling Barsaive in search of the gifts from the queen that they needed. Yoruial was a talented troubadour and often took center stage when conducting negotiations with elven settlements. While this caused many to label him as the group's leader, it allowed Monus to concentrate her efforts on unraveling the magical mysteries that were key to her success. This arrangement ended abruptly the morning Yoruial was found dead, gruesomely murdered with no trace of who was responsible. The group was shaken by the incident, but it strengthened their resolve. The group rallied around Monus, who decided it was finally time to bring the Seekers of the Heart into the public eye.

Having expanded their network of followers across most Unprotected elven settlements in Barsaive, the group gained the attention of Namegivers across the country. They began to hold protests against continuing the Ritual of Thorns and the resulting corruption it brought to the Wood. These actions did not go unnoticed by Queen Alachia, who responded by using propaganda to frame the Seekers' members as a dangerous cult. Tales of their deeds began to take on a life of their own, resulting in the group being regarded as unstable and disreputable. These setbacks deterred Monus' research, as she reached a point where a detailed analysis of Oak Heart's current pattern was necessary.

The Seekers could not make headway among the Protected elves until Kaer Eidolon was established. There, the group's purpose could be heard and spread to Blood Wood unedited. With Eidolon as a stable jumping off point, Monus was able to make several secret trips to the Forest's Heart to determine the true extent of its destruction. As the Seekers' message spread into Alachia's realm, the queen sent her Warders to purge the disruptive influence from the Wood's border. While many Seekers were forced from Eidolon, several still remain hidden in the settlement and continue to push their group's agenda.

More recently, the Seekers have expanded their reach to Sereatha and Shosara. Their sudden rise in the Western Kingdoms suggests they have spent

years building up their network in secret. While this makes sense given the connection between the Seekers and Kaer Oribella, it is unclear why they have so suddenly made their presence known. Seeker activities in Shosara are much less prevalent, with no major demonstrations held there yet. It is likely the Seekers in this area have focused their activities on building their membership from behind the scenes.

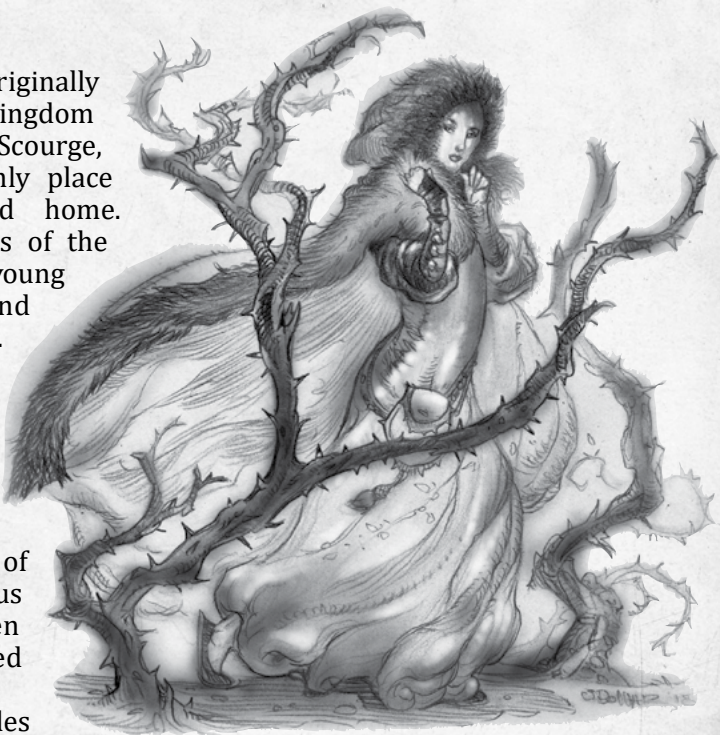
Notable Seekers of the Heart

Monus Byre

Though her family originally hails from a Western Kingdom city lost during the Scourge, Kaer Oribella is the only place Monus has considered home. Born in the latter years of the Scourge, she is too young to have any first-hand memories of the Horrors. She did, however, suffer a significant loss at the hands of a minor Horror that slipped past Oribella's enchantments. The attack claimed the life of her parents, leaving Monus and her sister to be taken in by relatives who raised the girls as their own.

Monus grew up on tales of Wyrn Wood, idealizing it as a safe haven for elven culture. After reaching adulthood and learning the fate of her birth parents, she felt the call of the Wood and focused her attention on convincing Kaer Oribella to rejoin the Elven Court. Monus was allowed to join the delegation Oribella sent to reestablish relations with Queen Alachia, though her excitement vanished upon discovering the truth of how the Court survived the Scourge. This shattered the elven paradise she had built up in her mind and forced Monus to reconcile a darker view of the world than she was accustomed to. Many say this changed her, but in truth it merely brought to the surface a sense that something was not right with the world. Monus concluded Blood Wood was no longer the beacon of elven culture it once was and dedicated the rest of her life to restoring it.

Realizing that Unprotected elves would never consent to Alachia's decree of loyalty, Monus decided to reform these policies through her people. She



slipped away from her delegation as they returned home and began rallying support in secret across the Southern Fringe. Yoruial Tan, an Unprotected elf with similar aspirations, had also found his way into these settlements and the two decided to combine their efforts. Their time with the blood elves was brief, as their agenda quickly drew attention from the Blood Warders. Monus and Yoruial were speaking out against the Ritual of Thorns and gathering support among those who would hear their arguments. This was in direct opposition the queen, so the Warders gave them a choice: recant their statements and undergo the ritual or be banished from the Wood. Knowing they wouldn't be able to redeem the Wood without support from the other elven kingdoms, Monus and Yoruial returned to their respective homes with heavy hearts.

Returning to Oribella, Monus did what she could to rally support for her cause. Her first step was to find a mentor. Monus had heard the stories of Darfin's valor during the Scourge and surmised there was no one better suited to teach her the ways of the world. The hermit did his best to remain isolated after the kaer had opened its doors, but Monus had a feeling his knowledge would be vital to her success. It took some convincing, but her natural aptitude for wizardry and elemental magic swayed his opinion in her favor. After progressing through Darfin's rigorous training and delving into the theory of blood magic rituals, Monus started receiving visions of Oak Heart's acorns.

Monus gathered her closest allies and set out across Barsaive in search of these artifacts, hoping they would hold the key to healing Blood Wood's corruption. She found numerous sympathetic settlements with dozens of Namegivers willing to help and, after many years of work, declared the group's intentions by unveiling the Seekers of the Heart. Tales of her purpose have since spread far and wide, though only a small fraction hold the truth of her intent. While sightings of Monus in and around Kaer Eidolon had been frequent, more recent rumors have her operating somewhere in Shosara.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 8

Renna Byre

Only a couple years younger than her sister, Renna and Monus are often mistaken for twins. The two grew up side by side within Kaer Oribella and had seldom gone more than a day without seeing each other. When Monus was one of the elves chosen for the kaer's delegation to Blood Wood, Renna was separated from her sister for the first time. She reflected on the tragedy that befell her birth parents during the Scourge. The gut-wrenching sadness these thoughts brought over Renna convinced her to ensure Monus would not be taken from her as well. Renna began to experiment with the magical arts and patiently awaited her sister's return.

The tales of Blood Wood Monus brought back sullied what should have been a joyous reunion. Learning of the torment caused by the Ritual of Thorns

and seeing Monus's dedication to restoring the Wood to its former glory, Renna vowed to assist her sister any way she could. Monus insisted they both seek out an apprenticeship with Darfin, the mysterious hermit who was rumored to have saved the kaer over the course of a single night. Renna's self-guided study was limited to Nethermancy, but her training under a proper mentor revealed her talent for illusion magic.

Monus's visions of Oak Heart's acorns frightened Renna, as she began to see her sister slip into a mild obsession. The signs were subtle at first, but Renna observed a noticeable shift in Monus's demeanor after obtaining the first acorn from Yoruial Tan. The rest of their traveling companions dismissed these concerns as the overprotective nature the Byre sisters were known to have for each other. This was different, however, and Renna knew her sister well enough to tell. Yoruial's sudden death complicated the matter further, burdening Monus with the full weight of their group's noble purpose. Renna pushed her concerns aside and resolved to focus her attention on keeping Monus safe above all else.

After years of rallying support across Barsaive, the Seekers of the Heart declared their intentions to the world. Monus took over Yoruial Tan's role in the public eye, whereas Renna preferred working from behind the scenes. Her abilities with illusion magic came in handy when the Seekers began setting down roots in Kaer Eidolon. The settlement let the group operate outside the Wood while still being close enough to build up their membership in the area. It took careful planning and subtle negotiation, but the Seekers were finally able to study the Forest's Heart. Unfortunately, Monus's infamy caught up with her and the Blood Warders forced her out into other elven kingdoms. Renna, despite misgivings about separating from her sister once again, honored Monus's wishes and replaced her as leader of the Seekers in Eidolon.

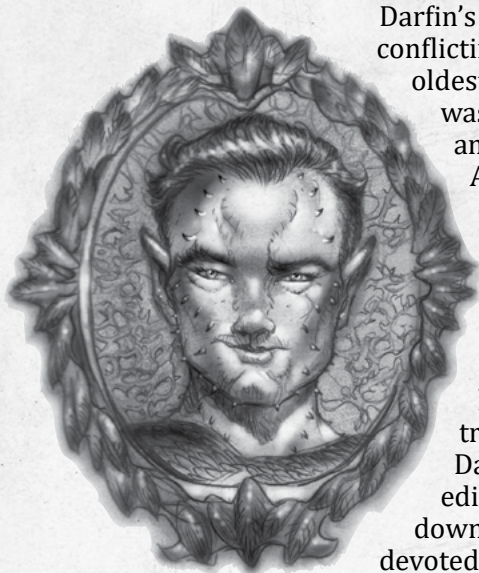
The uneasy situation at Kaer Eidolon between the t'skrang and elves is Renna's primary concern. A growing number of her subordinates are losing hope in peaceful protest and have started wondering if the blood elves will respond to anything other than violence. Faelar, Renna's second in command, has given her particular trouble lately by pushing to carry out more forceful activities. Between keeping the blood elves off their scent, appeasing the t'skrang magistrate, and running the largest cell of the organization, Renna is stretched thin.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 8 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

Darfin Escalanas



Darfin's story is a mix of half-true rumors, conflicting fiction, and enigmatic legends. The oldest tales trace back to Sereatha, where he was born into a position of prominence among one of the city's three major ranelles. At that time, Darfin was rumored to be one of the strongest supporters of rejecting the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage.

His faith in Alachia's ability to find another method for surviving the Scourge was shattered by the loss of his wife and daughters. The taint of a Horror had penetrated Sereatha's defenses, a tragedy that might have been avoided if Darfin hadn't blindly supported the queen's edict. Ashamed of his actions, Darfin stepped down from his position in the ranelle and devoted his efforts to preparing the Sereathan kaer. Most believe this his final action before his death.

More tales of Darfin appear a hundred years later, though it is unclear if it is the same man. Stories from Kaer Oribella tell of an elf that appeared during a time of great peril. Partway through the Scourge, the kaer's enchanted seals began to fail and the elders were struggling to maintain the protection. One of the refugees taken in before sealing the kaer came forward and single-handedly repaired the enchantments, saving the kaer from doom. The stranger, known as Darfin, was clearly skilled in the magical arts and drew the attention of other Namegivers in the kaer. Many begged to become his apprentice, but Darfin insisted on living a solitary existence in an isolated section of the kaer. Only two are known to have succeeded in gaining his tutelage since the end of the Scourge: Monus and Renna Byre, the orphan girls who reminded Darfin of the children he had lost long ago.

Only a few whispers of Darfin around Kaer Oribella can be heard today. If asked, the kaer's ruling council claims he left some time after the kaer reopened. Having survived unspeakable terrors during the Scourge, the council says Darfin wished to return to the beauty of his homeland. Given his strong ties with the Byre sisters, some believe he has gone underground as a member of the Seekers of the Heart. A few even believe he leads their agents in the Western Kingdoms.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 6 TOU: 7

PER: 8 WIL: 9 CHA: 7

Faelar Eilhorn

Faelar was born just after the start of the First Theran War in a small village outside the many kaers built in the Twilight Peaks. When Theran forces began their assault on Barsaive, Faelar's home was one of the first settlements to be used as an example of what happens to those who dared oppose Theran rule. At the age of six, he was one of a handful of elven survivors who escaped east to Throal.

Unlike Monus and Renna, Faelar did not have the support of a loving family to soften his temperament. He was raised in a group home filled with the orphans of dwarven soldiers and bullied as one of the few elves sheltered there. They would often make fun of his scrawny body and torment him with stories of the "twisted blood elf" he would grow up to become. Faelar did not believe the tales of Blood Wood he heard from the other children and began to resent the other Namegiver races due to their cruelty. He dreamed of one day joining his people in their ancestral home of Wyrn Wood.

The bullying Faelar experienced as a child instilled in him an unbalanced sense of right and wrong, leading him to dedicate his life to fighting against perceived injustice against the elven people. After traveling to Blood Wood and seeing the torment caused by the Ritual of Thorns for himself, Faelar struggled to reconcile the shattered state of the Elven Court. The queen had committed a great atrocity against his people, and yet the injustice had been allowed to continue unchallenged. Faelar heard the Seekers of the Heart were calling elves to action and decided to seek them out. His dedication to justice made him the ally the sisters were looking for, and their quest to restore the Wood aligned with Faelar's goals. As the Seekers' ranks at Kaer Eidolon grew, Faelar's capacity for leadership became an important part of the group's success.

Working alongside Renna in Eidolon, Faelar does not agree with the approach she has been taking. The organization has been working for multiple decades and, despite growing their membership significantly, Faelar has yet to see any real progress toward restoring the Forest's Heart. Renna has assured him Monus's research is progressing with every acorn they obtain, but his youthful exuberance has exhausted his patience.

Faelar has started taking liberties within his assignments, believing the passive tactics used so far are inadequate. Instead of negotiating for assistance, he has started to threaten. Instead of protesting a business that denies the Seekers service, he steals supplies. Encouraged by the results, Faelar considers his actions justified in service of the group's overall goal. With Monus driven from Eidolon, it is only a matter of time before his actions escalate further.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 6

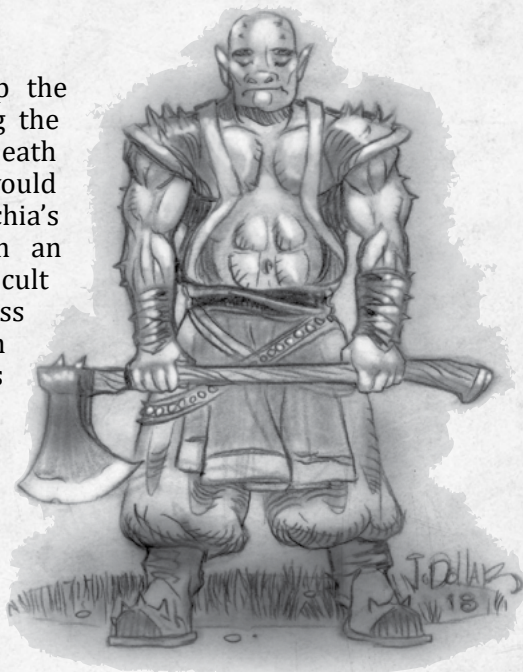
PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Seekers of the Blaze

Rumors of elves who worship the fire birches have circulated among the Blood Warders since the Blasted Heath was created. While the Warders would never mention these heretics in Alachia's presence, they have grown from an infrequent oddity to a dangerous cult who seek to spread the birches across Blood Wood. Someone has begun organizing them and, if nothing is done, the Wood may be reduced to nothing more than charred remains.

History

Lysarin Greenbranch's method of weaving True fire to a tree's elemental spirit resulted from the taint of a Horror mark. The Horror found pleasure in the torment of elemental spirits and used Lysarin's desperation to save the forest against him. However, Lysarin has not been the only Namegiver tool used for this twisted purpose. While the Ritual of Thorns protects the blood elves from Horrors looking to inflict pain onto Namegivers, it does not make them immune to ones with other intentions.



Adventure Idea

Unhappy with the capture of a close friend, Faelar devises a plan to break him out of Talshara custody. Renna will not allow the mission to proceed, believing it to be a trap meant to expose the Seekers. Faelar hires an outside group to carry out the rescue. His plan is a direct "smash and grab" strategy suitable for a group equipped for heavy combat. Faelar has likely overlooked a subtler way to accomplish his goal, which more careful groups may choose to pursue instead.

During the Scourge, Blood Warders patrolling the Blasted Heath would sometimes come across one or two elves ablaze. Investigating these sites, they discovered little more than a few smoldering piles of ash. Initially thought to be unfortunate souls attacked by a fire birch while attempting to harvest kernels of True fire, the increasing frequency of their appearance in recent years has hinted at something more sinister. It was not until the Warders discovered magical runes instead of ash in these areas that the mystery began to take shape. These elves were using a ritual similar to the one developed by Lysarin, continuing his work towards some dark purpose. The Blood Warders

view these elves as dangerous to the Wood as the fire birches, hunting them down whenever they reveal their presence.

Rumors of mad elves within the Blasted Heath are rare outside Blood Warder circles. The Warders believe these elves, driven mad by the Ritual of Thorns, are researching a way of weaving True fire into their own patterns. The process would intensify the blood elf's constant pain by adding an eternal flame to their thorns. The Warders have brought this matter to Queen Alachia on several occasions, insisting these elves be eliminated by any means. The queen has been unwilling to acknowledge the existence of such a threat and refused to allow the proposed hunt to be carried out. This group could only result from a flaw in the Ritual of Thorns which, of course, could not be true.

Notable Seekers of the Blaze

Zaleria Dornelis

Born after the Scourge, Zaleria took the path of hard work and perseverance to eventually become a valued member of the Blood Warders. Her youth granted her an open mind when it came to magical research, which made her an ideal candidate to investigate a means of stopping the spread of fire birches. Unfortunately, none of the Warders knew the depths of corruption that had befallen Lysarin Greenbranch when he created them. The information he left behind pushed Zaleria down a dark path, leading to her becoming influenced by the same Horror and obsessed with continuing his work. With access to Lysarin's original research, the freedom to enter the Blasted Heath, and knowledge of the Blood Warder patrol patterns, Zaleria has transformed this handful of corrupted blood elves into an organized cult.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 6

PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

Adventure Idea

Zaleria is willing to use any viable method of furthering her group's goals, up to and including manipulating outsiders to carry out her agenda. One possibility would be for her to smuggle a group past Blood Wood's defenses and have them remove a fire birch sapling from the Blasted Heath. The attempt should be thwarted by a Blood Warder patrol but can be used as a way to introduce the Seekers of the Blaze into your campaign. Zaleria will operate through intermediaries, both inside and out of the Wood, and her followers are pawns that can be used to appease the Warder patrol and secure the player's safe exit from the Wood. Zaleria's involvement will only be revealed after extensive work and investigation of the cult.

The Songbirds

Over the past three decades, Alachia has enlisted numerous Unprotected elves, along with individuals from other races, to act as her spies in Barsaive and beyond. This spy network, called the Songbirds and led by the exiled Blood Warder Vistrosh, keeps Alachia informed on events outside the Wood's borders, adding greatly to her power.

Elven Songbirds serve Alachia out of loyalty, though she often rewards their devotion with magical items or payment in silver. Members of other races serve her for reasons of their own—some out of greed, others out of admiration after meeting the queen face to face. Upon joining the organization, each swears a blood oath to never reveal the group's existence or connection to Alachia. Violating this oath means almost instant death.

The Songbirds operate across Barsaive, in some provinces of the Theran Empire, and the other elven nations. Rumor has it the group has blood elf members who act as servants to minor courtiers in order to keep watch within the Elven Court. The Songbirds report to Alachia through carrier pigeons, messenger services, and trade caravans that pass along the Southern Fringe.

Agents receive their assignments through an elaborate network of contacts, none of which leads back to Vistrosh. The former Warder delivers orders through Brocher's Brood, his gang in Kratas. Should anyone uncover a connection between the Brood and the Songbirds, they are likely to assume Vistrosh is spying on Alachia's spies.

Notable Songbirds

Vistrosh

Vistrosh carries the distinction of being the only Blood Warder ever exiled from the Wood. He leads Brocher's Brood, the second most powerful criminal gang in Kratas. He has renounced all ties to the Carithasca ranelle since his exile and refused any attempted contact by his kinfolk.

One popular explanation for Vistrosh's exile paints him as a former lover who offended the queen. Another accuses him of an attempt on Alachia's life. Neither tale is true. Vistrosh's banishment is an elaborate blind for a scheme known only to him and the queen. He was sent by Alachia's order to serve as leader of the Songbirds. Vistrosh's true position is one of the queen's most closely guarded secrets and not known even among the Songbirds.

As part of his cover, Vistrosh sends Alachia letters in which he begs to be allowed to return to Blood Wood. These frequently contain coded reports on recent activities in Barsaive and lands beyond. Vistrosh has proven invaluable in keeping Alachia informed of events in Barsaive, including the arrival of the Theran behemoth at Lake Ban and the assassination of Varulus III.

The Songbirds are kept busy by various events since the Second Theran War, keeping a close eye on the Iopan Holders of Trust. Vistrosh is an

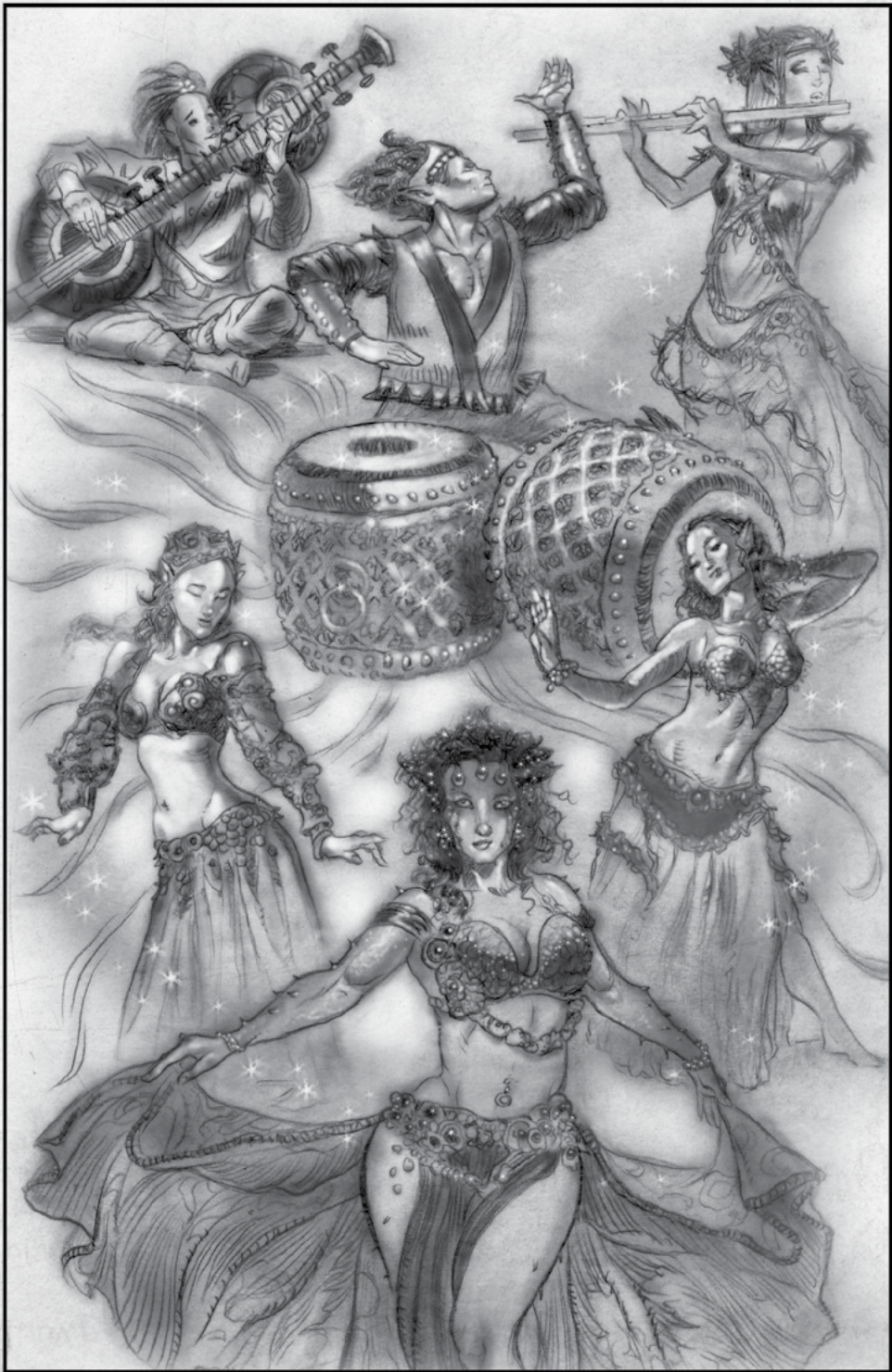
accomplished magician, following both the Illusionist and Wizard Disciplines. His position in Kratas has also led to him pursuing the Thief Discipline.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 4 TOU: 6

PER: 8 WIL: 8 CHA: 8







THE GREAT RANELLES

Of Blood Wood's ranelles, five hold the most power in the Court. From these so-called great ranelles, the consortis are most frequently chosen. Each dominates an aspect of elven life, such as trade, craftsmanship, or military might, exerting significant influence in that specialty. The five great ranelles are Carithasca, Daevenar, Escalanas, Jae'Helastri, and Talshara.

The Carithasca ranelle is found mainly in the Southern Fringe, though outposts are becoming more numerous along the Western Border. The Carithasca focus on trade within the Wood, though they also conduct black market trade through Trenevar and Kaer Eidolon. The Carithasca have been among the most prominent voices at Court pressuring Alachia to open the borders to outside trade. The queen continues to reject their petitions, occasionally granting the ranelle some small favor as a way to redirect their attention.

Members of the Daevenar ranelle are renowned for their craftsmanship and artistry, often gracing the Elven Court as the queen's personal entertainers. Alachia's tastes change as quickly as her moods, so the Daevenar learned long ago not to concern themselves with her approval. Instead, they devote themselves to their art and enjoy royal favor while it lasts. Some Daevenar consider politics an art form and pursue appointments to the consortis with the devotion their kin apply to painting or singing. The Daevenar make their home on the far western edge of the Courtyard surrounding Alachia's palace.

The Escalanas ranelle boasts unparalleled achievement in the magical arts. Members of this ranelle form the core of the Blood Warders and continue to collect the most appointments to that position. While best known for their magical activities, the Escalanas are the most diverse of the five great ranelles. Members live across Blood Wood and pursue a variety of occupations. The Escalanas are respected and feared by the Wood's residents, a reputation they have found both useful and inconvenient.

Members of the Jae'Helastri live in all parts of Blood Wood, though their ancestral home is located only two hours' walk from Alachia's palace. The Jae'Helastri have received more appointments to consortis than any other ranelle since the position was established and are said to be unrivaled in their chosen art of political manipulation.

The Talshara ranelle is prominent in the Northern Reaches. Many of Blood Wood's Scout and Warrior adepts come from this family, as do many of the Queen's exolashers. They rarely involve themselves in the Court's political maneuverings and, until recently, have not had a consortis since before the

Scourge. The Talshara's expertise in warfare and unquestioning loyalty to Alachia, however, ensures their voice is heard when necessary.

THE CARITHASCA RANELLE

Before the Scourge, this powerful ranelle made its fortune in trade. Granted exclusive Royal Patents to trade in several goods and resources produced in Wyrn Wood, the Carithasca used their political favor to build an impressive network of affiliates among minor ranelles. These smaller families did most of the work, running caravans across Barsaive, while the Carithasca collected the lion's share of the profits.

The Scourge stopped trade outside Wyrn Wood, but the Carithasca remained prosperous by maintaining their exclusive trade rights within the Wood's borders. Though many minor ranelles have grumbled about Carithasca's continued domination of trade, most acknowledge they owe whatever prosperity they have to their connections with the prominent family. For their part, the Carithasca take every opportunity to reward their subordinates. Sons and daughters of affiliated ranelles can count on Carithasca sponsorship for Court positions and the Carithasca have even bestowed partial rights to their Royal Patents on particularly loyal minor ranelles.

While they are a force to be reckoned with inside Blood Wood, the Carithasca dream of reestablishing trading ties with the outside world. Since the end of the Scourge, they have used every means at their disposal to persuade Queen Alachia to open the Wood's borders. Achieving this would restore the wealth and power they had before the Scourge, but this is only one reason. They also want Blood Wood to resume its prominence in the world. They believe elves are innately suited to leadership and wish to take what they regard as their race's rightful place at the top.

Significant opposition to the Carithasca comes from the Daevenar ranelle. They tend to regard the Carithasca as a band of upstart, money-grubbing merchants, uncultured fools who know the price of everything but the value of nothing. The Daevenar were a great ranelle before the Laryskova ranelle's downfall catapulted the Carithasca to prominence, and many of the older generation still regard the Carithasca as jumped up commoners lacking manners and taste. The Daevenar staunchly support Alachia's decision to keep the Wood isolated from foreign influences and see the constant push for open borders as one more sign of Carithasca ignorance.

History

Even before they were a great ranelle, the Carithasca family was known for their ability to obtain anything a client wanted. It might take time and silver, but Carithasca traders knew how to get their hands on what their clients sought. From rare spices to unusual magical items, nothing seemed out of their reach. According to family legend, a youth by the Name of Eamyn Carithasca was among the ten warriors who accompanied Queen Dallia on her ill-fated pilgrimage to Shosara. As the story goes, Eamyn persuaded Alamaise

to spare the lives of the surviving escort by promising him a ruby from the King of Scavia's crown. Since the Names of Queen Dallia's escort did not survive to the present day, no support for this tale exists.

In the years before the separation of Shosara, the Carithasca ranelle became a significant force among the minor ranelles of the Southern Fringe. The heir to the ranelle, Ethenia Carithasca, had begun gathering favor for her family by supporting Queen Failla's accession to the throne. However, the ranelle's rise to prominence did not begin until late in Failla's reign. The queen's displeasure with the Laryskova ranelle caused several key trade disputes to be resolved in the Carithasca's favor, giving them the resources needed to gain prominence at Court.

Persistent royal favor allowed the ranelle to extend its trade rights across the entire Southern Fringe, frequently at Laryskova's expense. Among other things, the Carithasca received a Royal Patent giving it exclusive rights to supply the Elven Court with saenor, a species of river grass much prized for its delicate flavor. Along with the patent, they received a grant entitling them to lands along the northern bank of the Mothingale River, a source of dispute between the rival ranelles. Queen Failla's ruling in the Carithasca's favor was a major blow to Laryskova power.

Soon afterward, Failla appointed Ethenia as one of her consortis. The position allowed Ethenia to wed her eldest son Seosamh to Milina Escalanas, granddaughter of the queen's chief Warder. This alliance enhanced Carithasca prestige even further. After the failed Laryskova whisper campaign brought Queen Liara to the throne, the Iron Queen banished the rebellious ranelle and gave its extensive holdings to the Carithasca. This gift was coupled with several Royal Patents, a consideration that completed the Carithasca's journey from lesser nobility to the forefront of political power.

Throughout Queen Liara's reign, the Carithasca used their ownership of trading patents to forge a network of alliances among the minor noble families. By the time Alachia ascended the Rose Throne, the Carithasca had established themselves as the undisputed merchant consortium of Wyrn Wood.

The Scourge cost the Carithasca ranelle a considerable portion of its revenues but had little other effect on the family fortunes. They wholeheartedly backed Alachia's rejection of Theran protections and for a time remained a vital conduit for magical resources from the outside world. Rumor has it Ethenia opposed the casting of the Ritual of Thorns, but her objections, if any, cost her none of her sovereign's goodwill. Some attribute Queen Alachia's unusual tolerance for this dissent to blackmail, though no one can say over what. Others say it proves the rumors of opposition false. Regardless, the Carithasca remain high in the queen's favor. Though unlikely to grant their plea to open the Wood to outsiders, Alachia did grant another request dear to Carithasca hearts: the formation of Kaer Eidolon, a joint defensive outpost outside the Wood's borders.

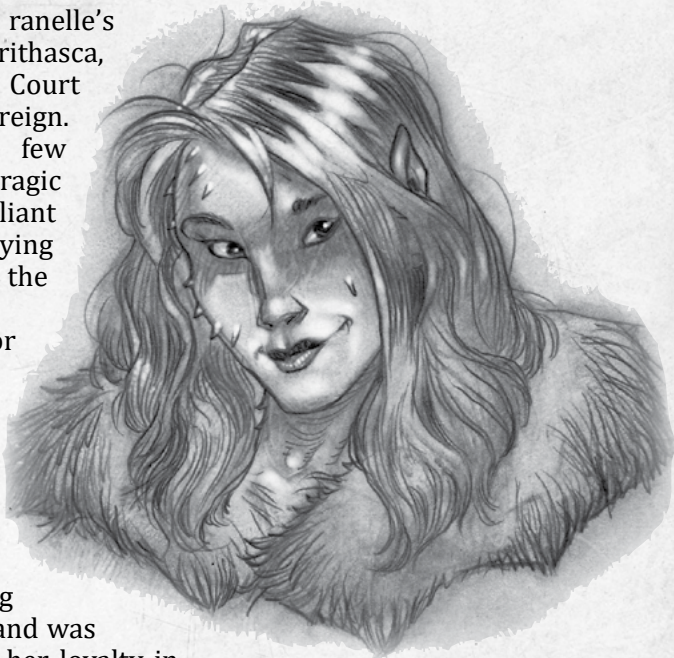
Important Characters

Since Queen Failla's reign, the Carithasca ranelle has been the major power in the Southern Fringe. With a formidable and unusually long-lived matriarch, two out of eight consortis at Court, and strong affiliations with numerous minor ranelles, the Carithasca are a force to be reckoned with.

Ethenia Carithasca

The Carithasca ranelle's matriarch, Ethenia Carithasca, began her long career at Court during Queen Dallia's reign. Despite serving just a few months before Dallia's tragic death, Ethenia's brilliant dancing and flute playing had propelled her among the Queen's favorites.

Ethenia had the honor of accompanying the senior courtiers when Lady Failla presented herself as a candidate for the Rose Throne. Ethenia was the first to acclaim the miracle of the falling leaf proving Failla the rightful queen and was generously rewarded for her loyalty in the following years. The clearest mark of favor came when Queen Failla made Ethenia a consortis, despite the Carithasca ranelle's minor status.



Ethenia served as consortis until after the Scourge, offering advice to Queens Liara and Alachia. She is credited with tempering some of Liara's cruelest reactions and was said to be the only one capable of soothing her blackest moods. Rivals who mistook her soft-spoken manner for weakness, however, quickly found themselves outmatched by Ethenia's formidable will and political clout. Her friendship with Queen Alachia is especially close, managing to even weather a sharp difference of opinion about the Ritual of Thorns.

Ethenia supported Alachia's rejection of the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage and backed the creation of the vast wooden kaer. Always one to hedge her bets however, she persuaded Alachia to allow excavation of underground shelters as well. Because excavating the tunnels did not require Theran magic, and because the Carithasca paid for the work, Alachia allowed Ethenia to have her way.

The underground shelters were largely finished when the wooden kaer began to give way under the Horrors' onslaught. Ethenia believed the Queen's Warders were investigating a properly elven method of warding the shelters, along with other ways of protecting the forest. When Alachia endorsed the Ritual of Thorns, however, Ethenia was horrified and openly objected to the plan. The cataclysmic rite was just as likely to destroy the Wood as save it. Ethenia maintained that some other, safer choice would be wiser. She implored Alachia to invest resources into researching elemental earth magic to seal the underground kaers against the Horrors. The Wood itself might not survive, but the elven people would live on to regrow their homeland. Alachia insisted the time for safer choices had run out and told her Warders to proceed with the Ritual.

The Ritual of Thorns led to the one real tragedy of Ethenia's long life. Her eldest daughter, Rhenyia, did not survive the Personal Ritual. Even this loss, however, was not enough to shake Ethenia's faith in her queen. She still believes the Ritual was a mistake but has convinced herself Alachia made the best possible choice in a terrible situation. Since the end of the Scourge, Ethenia has never brought up the subject of the Ritual in the queen's presence.

Soon after the Scourge, Ethenia begged Alachia to send expeditions to determine the fate of the other elven nations. She also suggested sending emissaries to Barsaive's kingdoms to find out who had survived and notify them the Elven Court still existed. Ethenia hoped to put Blood Wood in the position later held by the Kingdom of Throal, but her efforts would end before bearing results. Alachia chose isolation and remained committed to that policy. Ethenia opposes it, but her long experience with Court politics and her personal relationship with Alachia have taught her the value of subtlety. She is content to slowly work to change Alachia's mind and has confidence in her ability to eventually succeed.

Ethenia retired as consortis shortly after the end of the Scourge, passing the position to her nephew Haeleon with the queen's blessing. Though she proclaimed her desire for "a quiet life, surrounded by the kin I hold most dear," few believe it. A few critics credit her decision to boredom or eccentricity, but most of her fellow courtiers doubt she would act on such trivial motives. Allies and enemies alike, most earned over her long service at Court, are well aware of her diplomacy and enjoyment of the political game. Many believe her "retirement" a ploy to broaden her ranelle's power by giving its younger generation a chance to prove themselves.

Intelligent and ambitious, Ethenia dreams of the day Blood Wood's borders will open and Alachia's Court resumes its rightful place on the world stage. While she wants the increased trade such a move would bring her ranelle, her deepest desire is to see Alachia acknowledged and honored across the world as befits her high birth and great power. Naturally, Ethenia has her own role to play in this fantasy: the power behind the throne, the one true confidante of the mighty Elven Queen.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5
 PER: 7 WIL: 9 CHA: 8

Haeleon Carithasca

A slightly overweight middle-aged elf, Haeleon Carithasca is the senior of his ranelle's two consortis. The eldest son of Ethenia's favorite brother, Haeleon became her foster son after Ethenia's daughter and his own parents died during the Ritual of Thorns. He remains very close to his aunt and credits her with teaching him everything he knows about politics. He has been an apt pupil, nearly matching Ethenia's skill at the game of Court. He also shares her conviction that the only way to achieve their ranelle's objectives is to move slowly. As he is fond of remarking, "You'll catch more blood monkeys with trailfruit than bramble vines."

Haeleon's easy going approach irritates some members of the ranelle, who regard it as diplomatic foot-dragging. Those unwise enough to accuse him of neglecting the ranelle's interests, however, often find themselves copying old account ledgers for months on end. Though Haeleon has Ethenia's full confidence, he regularly consults with her at her home in Da'seaishta. He also makes trips to Trenevar to keep an eye on Carithasca doings in general.

Clever, patient, and observant, there is little that escapes Haeleon's gaze. He enjoys a good joke or a good wine, deliberately playing up this aspect so others will underestimate him. He is patronizing toward his fellow Carithasca consortis, whom he regards as a little girl with a lot to learn. He holds Alachia in high regard but thinks that she has a blind spot when it comes to outside influences. Haeleon wholeheartedly believes the Court should freely invite outsiders in, so those unfortunates might learn something from exposure to elven ways.

Haeleon feels no particular animosity toward Therans, mainly because he doesn't consider them worth despising. Their founder was foolish enough to defy the queen and leave the Court. How much can the doings of his equally misguided descendants matter? Trade in Theran luxury goods, which Haeleon turned from a haphazard undertaking to a smoothly disciplined operation, is an expression of his attitude toward the Empire: take what you want, make a profit, then forget about them.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 5
 PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 6

Gealleon Sea'lish

Gealleon is the eldest daughter of the Sea'lish family, a prominent branch of the ranelle. Young and inexperienced in the ways of the Elven Court, she was given her position as compensation for the rejection of the Carithasca's most recent petition to open Blood Wood's borders.

Unlike Haeleon, Gealleon is dedicated to advancing Carithasca interests, even at the expense of Blood Wood's overall agenda. She has publicly disagreed with him on several occasions, hoping to embarrass him into action. While bright enough to grasp the surface of Court manners, the underlying intricacies escape her. She sees her own opinions as the only ones that make sense, finding it hard to believe others don't view the world the same way. She has a touch of the family charm, however, and is gradually learning how to use it.

Some believe Ethenia has hopes for Gealleon and so has not attempted to have her replaced with a subtler family member. Others believe she finds Gealleon's youthful arrogance useful. By drawing attention to herself, Gealleon makes Haeleon look more reasonable. Gealleon deeply resents Haeleon's patronizing behavior toward her and would love to show him up in some way. Some believe their common heritage is the only thing keeping Gealleon from actively conspiring against him.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Captain Trellius

Captain Trellius and his ship, the *Soaring Eagle*, are a common sight on the lower Mothingale River as they make supply runs between Trenevar and Kaer Eidolon. He also carries trade goods to his home village of Sirthechan, just a few miles west of Trenevar. He belongs to the Gadulka ranelle, a minor but prosperous house famed for its shipbuilding expertise until the destruction of the shipyards at Dren Hathal. Much of the shipbuilding craft was lost, but Trellius used knowledge passed down through his family's oral traditions to build the *Eagle*. He sees the preservation of that knowledge as a sacred obligation to his ancestors, who sacrificed the craft they loved at the queen's command.

Born after the Scourge, Trellius underwent the Ritual of Thorns at age fifteen. The trauma of the Personal Ritual still haunts him, as it does many who underwent the transformation in their youth. He views the



Ritual as unnecessary now that the Horrors are gone and the cruelty of continuing it has turned him against the status quo. He regards himself as Alachia's loyal subject, but believes she is wrong about continuing the Ritual. He is willing to consider just about anything to help stop the practice, short of openly attacking the queen and Court.

In addition to his legitimate river trips, Trellius is a smuggler, mostly of ordinary goods bartered from Serpent River towns near Kaer Eidolon. He also occasionally smuggles people into the Wood for a hefty price. He is a willing ally to the Seekers of the Heart and hopes the Ritual of Thorns will end if they succeed in healing the Wood. Illicit cargo is stored in hidden compartments below the *Eagle's* main hold, avoiding the prying eyes of the border wardens.

A number of Talsharan enforcers turn a blind eye to Trellius's cargo in exchange for contraband items. They have another reason for treating him with kid gloves, though Trellius does not realize it. His travels outside Blood Wood make him one of the queen's most useful links to the Songbirds. The spy network keeps careful track of his movements and often use him as an unwitting messenger. They often hire him to deliver a personal letter or pass on information disguised as gossip that they know he will share.

In his twenty years of sailing the Mothingale, Trellius has learned many of the river's secrets. Few blood elves know the waters better. His skills have even earned him a reputation among t'skrang sailors. Several of them go out of their way to meet him so they can trade stories over a meal. Their common love for river life enables them to overlook Trellius's thorns, so much so that anyone ungracious enough to stare at Trellius in public may find themselves knocked across the room by a boatman's tail.

The *Soaring Eagle* is a modified trading galley with a single sail. Only its captain and builder know the sail is woven with elemental air in the manner of the ancient elven ships, of which the *Mallornica* is the only surviving example. The *Eagle* has seen many repairs. Its hull looks patched together in more places than any sane sailor would allow. The patchwork, however, is actually armor that has let the *Eagle* hold its own against pirates on more than one occasion. The armor is stronger than the standard armor used on trading galleys.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 6 WIL: 7 CHA: 8

Permanent Settlements

The Carithasca lands are mainly in Blood Wood's Southern Fringe and host more permanent settlements than any other ranelle in Blood Wood. The majority of these are simple farming and fishing villages settled by refugees fleeing the corruption expanding from the Forest's Heart. The Carithasca also maintains Da'seaishta, which allows the ranelle's courtiers to live close to the Elven Court.

Trenevar

This port is the seat of Carithasca wealth in Blood Wood and the largest town in the Southern Fringe. Of all elven settlements, Trenevar most resembles a typical Barsaivian market town. It has several permanent buildings, some even made of stone, and an extensive span of docks to accommodate the boats that travel from other parts of the Wood. Larger cargo ships regularly sail from Trenevar to Kaer Eidolon, carrying legitimate supplies and troops along with contraband. The town's location near the confluence of the Mothingale rivers and proximity to the Wood's southern border make it a vital trade center for the entire Wood.

Trenevar lies on the main southern road to the Elven Court. Noble-born courtiers regularly send servants on errands to pick up the forbidden luxuries Trenevar merchants are more than happy to provide. Other courtiers arrive for the weekly market day, hoping to remain inconspicuous amid the multitude of villagers who come to buy and sell. Farmers with cartloads of vegetables, fishmongers from riverside villages, and countless others flock to the town's market to peddle their wares or hunt for bargains.

Compared to famous markets like Throal's Grand Bazaar, market day in Trenevar is a subdued affair. The square is small, barely more than forty paces across, with little of the color and bustle of a typical open-air market. There is no loud hawking of goods or attention-getting banter, as blood elves view such behavior as unseemly. If a customer wishes to buy something, they will. The seller waits quietly and courteously serves those who approach. The variety of goods available, a cornucopia when compared with the rest of the Wood, is severely limited in contrast to the rest of Barsaive.

The Carithasca manor stands at the eastern edge of Trenevar, amid the spreading branches of a vast oak. According to family legend, the oak grew from an acorn of Oak Heart itself. It is difficult to tell where the manor walls end, and the tree branches begin, though buds and blossoms during the warmer months make it easier. In a mark of the ranelle's wealth, the roof is made of blue slate found only in the Tylon Mountains. Ethenia Carithasca commissioned the quarrying and transport of the stone to Wyrms Wood during Liara's reign.

The manor grounds extend for nearly three miles in every direction save the west. On them grow the orchards that are the pride of the Sea'lish family. Carithasca apple brandy is famed throughout Blood Wood and before the Scourge was considered a delicacy in most of Barsaive. The property also includes vegetable farms and tree groves, the bounty from which offers valuable medicinal properties.

The markets at Trenevar gather the finest elven goods available within Blood Wood into a single area. Such goods are a tempting affair for smugglers, who often use the village's ports to trade foreign contraband for the delicacies only available within the Wood's borders. Deals of this nature are often made below the decks of legitimate trading vessels so as to garner

as little suspicion as possible. This lucrative endeavor is not without its risks, however, as trafficking in illegal wares levies severe consequences if caught. In spite of this, smugglers have been known to attempt bulk transactions every so often and hire groups of adepts as additional insurance against Ishkarat pirates during such missions.

Dren Hathal

Before the Scourge, the shipyards of Dren Hathal were among the finest in Barsaive. Sturdy docks stretched for hundreds of yards along the Mothingale. Towers with massive pulley systems, designed to swing finished keels out over the water, rose into the sky. As with everything of elven make, the construction halls of Dren Hathal were beautiful as well as useful. Elven artisans from the various shipbuilding ranelles built the structures of different-colored wood. The most sought after of these boats were decorated with carvings of birds, fish, water lilies, and other motifs.

Bridges woven from thick river reeds connected the pulley towers and upper windows of the largest construction halls, where the keels for the great sailing ships were assembled. Vast storehouses of True wood lined the riverbank and giant drums of True air floated near the towers like dancing wheels. Every day the yards bustled with activity, from carpentry, to sail-weaving, to the final assembly of each wondrous vessel.

All that changed with news of the Scourge. When Queen Alachia refused the Theran Rites of Protection, she spoke for elven nations everywhere, assuming that even the most far-flung elven communities would follow her lead. The other nations, however, did not share her hatred of the Empire—or were perhaps more pragmatic. As signs of the Scourge became more prevalent, more elven communities broke faith with the queen and paid the Therans for survival. Even in Wyrn Wood, Queen Alachia met opposition. In what came to be known as the Schism, whole ranelles abandoned the Wood, fleeing to places protected by Theran rites.

The shipbuilding ranelles had strong ties to the Laryskova ranelle, banished during the Queen Failla's reign, and styled themselves as free thinkers. While they never openly opposed the Queen's authority, their leaders considered themselves too important to the Court to suffer more than a token censure for their non-traditional views. Alachia decided if these ranelles could be made to demonstrate their loyalty, the remaining ranelles would also fall in line. The queen demanded proof of the shipbuilders' devotion: the destruction of Dren Hathal. The dramatic gesture of destroying the Wood's most reliable and fastest method of contact with the outside world would serve as a statement to its people. From then on, they would depend only on themselves for survival.

Alachia's order shocked the shipbuilding ranelles. Some refused and abandoned their homes rather than, as one chronicler of the time put it, "destroy our very souls." Others begged the queen to reconsider, but to no avail. For the good of the elven people, the ranelles were forced to choose between Alachia's command and their own desires. The shipbuilders

submitted and put Dren Hathal to the torch. The conflagration lit the sky for miles. More than a few elves, overcome by anguish as they watched their jewel burn, threw themselves into the flames. The entire elven fleet, save the renegade Mallornica, burned as well. Accounts by survivors speak of the ships themselves screaming as the flames consumed them.

Partial remains of some of the docks and warehouses remain to this day, though they are badly charred and rotting. A few of the shipbuilders' houses closest to the treeline remain mostly intact. These were spared by Alachia's exolashers who made sure to prevent the flames from threatening other parts of the Wood. All that remains of the towers are blackened stubs. None of the reed bridges survived. Unknown magical devices lie burned and broken throughout the shipyards. The saddest sights are the corpses of great ships, reduced to charred half-hulls and the occasional broken mast. The stench of sorrow hanging over the ruin is so intense the local folk claim to hear the "ghosts of the yards" sobbing every time a strong west wind blows.

The ghost stories are more than just rumor. Dren Hathal is haunted by numerous spirits and other ghostly beings, from spectral dancers to the spirits of shipwrights who once loved the place. Local fireside tales speak of the elves who burned haunting their death sites as demiwraiths, possessed by hatred for those who made them destroy their home. Other tales tell of spirits trapped in endless reenactment of their own deaths, or the acts of destruction they committed. Most of the spirits haunting the yards are insane, prone to attacking trespassers without provocation.

One account speaks of a spectral dancer that hovers around the easternmost dock. The dancer killed three of the journal-writer's companions before the writer managed to communicate with her. He learned the dancer's Name in life had been Mereniyā Gadulka and she had stayed to mourn the shipyards after their destruction. Driven to near-catatonic depression by her role in the tragedy, Mereniyā was easy prey for the Horrors. They made her into a spectral dancer and tied her pattern to Dren Hathal.

Another account tells of an entire crew of Namegiver spirits, the shades of shipwrights who committed suicide when the yards were destroyed. These ghosts can be seen on moonlit nights, building a spectral ship they will never finish.

The only living being who regularly visits the ruins is Captain Trellius, who uses one of the half-collapsed construction halls and its adjoining warehouse as a hiding place for contraband. The various spirits around the ruins regard Trellius as family, rarely interfering with his activities.

Most t'skrang ship captains know to stay away from Dren Hathal. Every so often, however, a riverboat from House Syrtis will go missing in the area. Family of the lost crew members do their best to convince Kaer Eidolon's magistrate to investigate these disappearances, but often find their request goes unanswered. Adventuring groups have been known to accept contracts to conduct independent investigations at the behest of both these parties,

though their findings are rarely pleasant. Gamemasters may center an adventure on gaining access to the area via Captain Trellius or around an active investigation of the area.

Da'seaishta

Located along the far south edge of the Elven Court, Da'seaishta is the second home of the Carithasca ranelle and the center for much of the trade passing through the settlements around the Court. All supplies for the Court flow into Da'seaishta, where the Carithasca oversees its distribution by Alachia's command. Under the guidance of the ranelle's two consortis, Da'seaishta is a thriving hub of commerce. Caravans enter and leave almost daily, bound for all corners of the forest. The village markets offer an assortment of goods from across Blood Wood and even a few from places beyond its border.

Haeleon and Gealleon both have homes in the village. Unlike their fellow consortis, they tend to spend more time in these homes than in those nearer the palace. Ethenia also lives in Da'seaishta rather than the family home in Trenevar. Her close friendship with Alachia and continued role in Court politics make the region preferable, in her mind, to the Southern Fringe.

Current Activities

Small villages across Carithasca lands are taking in more and more refugees as corruption from the Forest's Heart drives them from their homes. The ranelle's leaders have publicly stated any elf in the region may find a home on Carithasca lands. Privately, however, Ethenia has devoted most of her influence to convincing the Court to do something about this problem before overcrowding becomes a significant problem.

Rumors of the Carithasca trafficking the acorns of Oak Heart are persistently denied by members at all levels of the ranelle. In truth, Haeleon has been secretly working with several interested parties to track down and acquire any acorns in Barsaive. While the Carithasca talent for establishing supply of a product far before the demand exists is well known, this is one market where the Carithasca have been behind their competitors. Haeleon's pursuit of the acorns has been so quiet he has not yet used any merchants outside of the core Carithasca bloodline. The identity of his client in this endeavor is a detail not known by anyone besides himself.

The Long Game

Haeleon's main reason for seeking acorns is to return those located outside Blood Wood to Queen Alachia. He believes this gesture of loyalty will convince her to open their borders to the world. Ethenia knows the Queen has been privately obsessing over the artifacts in recent years and suggested this as the best way to put her mind at ease. Always looking to diversify his portfolio, Haeleon has let a few acorns slip into the hands of the Seekers of the Heart. In this way he opens up multiple paths to achieving the

ranelle's goals. If the Seekers succeed in healing the Forest's Heart, Haeleon believes he can eliminate the overcrowding of Carithasca territory and loosen the restrictions on outside trade with minimal risk to his current political standing.

Because most of the Carithasca's Royal Patents pertain to trading, Gealleon devotes most of her efforts to reestablishing trade with other nations in Barsaive. Though the ranelle respects Alachia's wisdom deciding the best course for the Wood and its people, they are also aware of the profit to be made trading outside the Wood. Until Alachia chooses a new course for the Wood, the Carithasca must be content with conducting this trade on a very small scale.

Gealleon has used a number of freelance adventuring groups to establish secret trade deals with other nations. Such deals take on many forms: some are small transactions made with independent merchants, while others are multi-year deals with the heads of other governments. Unable to negotiate these deals in person, Gealleon must use the enticement of a fair percentage to secure trustworthy agents on her behalf. Adventures focused on striking an agreement on Gealleon's behalf can send a group to almost any corner of Barsaive or beyond and used as a means to introduce the Carithaskan agenda of opening Blood Wood's borders to external trade.

THE DAEVENAR RANELLE

Renowned as the finest artisans and craftsmen in Blood Wood, the Daevenar are one of the oldest and most influential ranelles. Their love of the arts has made them favorites of elven queens since the reign of Queen Failla, with Alachia holding them in especially high esteem. Their ability to celebrate Blood Wood, its people, and the queen in various art forms has earned them respect, securing their place near the heart of the Elven Court. Alachia's goodwill has led her to appoint between one and three Daevenar consortis at all times. The current consortis is the ranelle's leader, Tarin Daevenar.

Should the Daevenar seek to exploit their advantages, they might come close to taking political control over the Court. Fortunately for the other ranelles, the Daevenar are content with exercising more subtle influence. The Daevenar rarely express their views in open council, preferring to convey their feelings through their art. This strategy has the added benefit of selective ambiguity. It is easier to attack a political rival's speech, rather than to go after them for what they *may* be saying through a painting or satirical poem.

The Daevenar value artistic ability more than any other trait. As a result, the ranelle has produced famous artists and craftsmen throughout elven history. Daevenar artisans make elegant versions of everyday items, from sought-after swords and bows to finely crafted cutlery, furniture, and other goods. Some

members focus purely on artistic creations, deeply intricate works that might take months to create. Daevenar artists include painters, musicians, writers, wood carvers, and sculptors. The last are the least common, since stone is not abundant in Blood Wood. Daevenar sculptors have spent significant sums to acquire marble and other types of stone from beyond the forest's borders, after seeking royal dispensation for such otherwise forbidden trade.

Support of Alachia's refusal to accept the Theran Rites of Protection has its roots in the Daevenar's conviction each individual must be master of their own destiny. To command or control another, especially by enslavement, is the greatest evil. The average Daevenar sees the Therans in much the same way other Namegivers see blood elves: as the personification of corruption. The Daevenar insist the Empire's thirst for power, subjugation of lands, and practice of slavery have corrupted it beyond redemption.

This reverence for individual rights seems to run counter to the ranelle's other foundational principle: unquestioning loyalty to the Rose Throne. The effort to rationalize support for a queen who controls her people's lives as tightly as Alachia has led to disputes within the family. These discussions have become more frequent as the sentiment against continuing the Ritual of Thorns grows in the Wood.

Ultimately, most prominent Daevenar believe Alachia has done the best possible job of protecting her people in an impossible situation. She has not ordered them to wage war, nor enslaved them like the Therans. Each individual remains free to pursue their own path. Alachia prevents her subjects from leaving Blood Wood for the good of her people as a whole. As the Daevenar see it, the Elven Queen must preserve the elves' traditions and way of life. Theirs is the oldest and most advanced civilization in the world and must survive. If that means the queen must demand sacrifices from the elven people, so be it.

History

The Daevenar have been prominent at the Elven Court since the earliest days of Queen Failla's reign. According to legend, the ranelle first came to power when Failla commissioned one of its founders, the woodcarver Tilyria Daevenar, to craft the Rose Throne. Since that time, the Daevenar Name has been associated with fine craftsmanship and unswerving loyalty to the queen. The ranelle's influence has waxed and waned over the centuries, but they have never been without some political influence.

Though often dismissed as a collection of poets and dreamers, the Daevenar ranelle has had more influence over affairs at the Court than most people realize. They count several heroes in their history, from Weaponsmith and Swordmaster Merwyn Daevenar of Queen Liara's reign to Baltana Daevenar, who distinguished herself with a bow during the Battle of Sejanus. Their most important contribution, however, came in the aftermath of the Ritual of Thorns. During that dark time, their artwork helped maintain the morale of a people undergoing a frightening and painful transition.



The Ritual's trauma led many elves to question their loyalty for the first time. Many saw themselves forever changed and terribly altered from what elves had been for centuries. The sculptures, portraits, and ballads created by Daevenar artists in the following years helped the blood elves see themselves as a people made strong by pain. The thorns enhanced their poise and grace. The Ritual had not marred them but transformed them into something better. Unlike other Namegivers, they did not live every moment in fear of the Horrors, wondering when their shelters would fail. They alone were safe, and their existence was to continue through their own magical merits.

This inspiring portrait kept the folk of Blood Wood from succumbing to despair during those first years, giving them the hope they needed to survive. Now, many blood elves consider the Daevenar the Wood's artistic voice. This influence, combined with the queen's favoritism, ensure the ranelle a place at the Elven Court for years to come.

Important Characters

Despite the Daevenar ranelle's strong artistic nature, several members have flourished in other fields. The present leader of the Blood Warders, Preystia Tales, is of Daevenar descent. The ranelle also has members among the consortis, the wardens, and exolashers.

Tarin Daevenar

The best-known Daevenar at Court is Tarin, consortis and leader of the ranelle. Many courtiers saw his appointment three decades ago as a simple whim by Alachia, but he has entrenched himself as a trusted advisor. People are inclined to dismiss him as a political lightweight, judging him by the intricate

embroidery on his coat rather than his actions. However much of a fashion-setter Tarin may be, his influence runs deeper than most know. His colleagues are sometimes prone to assume his artistic background predisposes him to fits of emotion, a misjudgment he uses to his advantage.

Tarin is among the most conservative of Alachia's consortis and the strongest supporter of her isolationist policies. He sees most other Namegiver races as negative influences, and only grudgingly admits the blood elves might learn something of value from the dwarfs of Throal. The only exceptions to the Wood's isolation Tarin approves of are visits by elves from Shosara and Sereatha, whom Tarin wishes to return to the guidance of the Elven Court. His willingness to deal with Unprotected elves may stem from a meeting with the Sereathan emissary Caimbueul, who impressed Tarin on a recent visit to Court.

In what many see as a bit of perverse humor, Alachia has made Tarin responsible for advising the Court on relations with outside nations. This oversight focuses on Shosara, Sereatha, Barsaive, and the Tharan Empire. This strange assignment shows careful thought. Tarin's strong objections to outside contact ensure only the most determined foreign nations will convince him to recommend the Queen establish formal relations.

Tarin's conservatism does not extend to spiritual beliefs. He is Dae'mistisha, a Free Follower, currently on the Path of Sages. In his youth he was considered one of the finest Troubadours in Blood Wood. Though he no longer diligently pursues the Discipline, he remains one of its most gifted practitioners in the Daevenar ranelle.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 8

Baltana Daevenar

One of the few Daevenar to excel at martial skills, Baltana spent most of her military service with the Talshara garrison at Kaer Eidolon. As is customary for graduates of the Grove of Thorns, she served as a warden before her assignment to the fortress, where her expertise in the Scout and Archer Disciplines served her well at the Battle of Sejanus. Shortly before the battle, she infiltrated the Ishkarat fortress at Lake Vors with two t'skrang soldiers and returned in time to report the Ishkarat attack plans. This act of courage brought Baltana to the attention of Erithander Talshara and the queen. At Erithander's request, Baltana was made an exolasher, a position she still holds.

Her time as a warden exposed Baltana to the views held by the Seekers of the Heart. Unlike her Talsharan brethren, Baltana did not dismiss the Seekers' propaganda without looking into their arguments for herself. She sympathized with many points the Seekers made and even thought the group should be allowed to present their growing evidence at Court. Baltana, of course, did not

voice her opinions. Much like any Daevenar, her loyalty to Queen Alachia was absolute and sympathizing with the Seekers was forbidden.

During her assignment to Kaer Eidolon, Baltana's core values were truly challenged. Seeing the thriving community of blood elves, Unprotected elves, and t'skrang working together made her question Alachia's leadership for the first time in her life. Over the course of several years, Baltana talked with sympathizers to the Seekers' cause and learned what they stood for. She eventually met Monus Byre, who described their ongoing operation in detail, leaving the organization's fate in Baltana's hands. Instead of arresting her, Baltana pledged her loyalty to Monus in hopes that the Wood would one day be restored to its former beauty.

Perhaps one of the most unlikely spies operating in Blood Wood, Baltana puts her life in daily peril as an agent for the Seekers of the Heart. Her position in the exolashers gives Baltana unparalleled access to secure areas and Court briefings. She often acts as the personal bodyguard of important courtiers, though she has also been assigned to guard consortis at their request.

Attributes

DEX: 9 STR: 6 TOU: 6
PER: 8 WIL: 6 CHA: 5

Permanent Settlements

Most of the Daevenar live in Se'vianna, the ranelle's ancestral home, located about two hours' walk from the palace. Some Daevenar elves live in the Northern Reaches, as well as the Southern Fringe.

Se'vianna

Se'vianna lies on the eastern edge of the Elven Court directly across from the village of Estandia. Almost all of its over two thousand residents are artists and craftsmen. Most are related to the Daevenar ranelle, but about a quarter of the population are artists and craftsmen from other ranelles. These elves came to Se'vianna to live among the expert practitioners of their craft. Artists and artisans from across Blood Wood come here to live, work, and study. Se'vianna hosts several schools specializing in various art forms, including smithing, woodcarving, and leatherworking.

To those knowing what to look for, Se'vianna is one of the loveliest settlements in the Elven Court. The works of resident artists decorate its buildings and streets. Recent artistic fashion, however, call for works that blend seamlessly into their surroundings. A traveler might walk through a section of the village without noticing the delicate beauty they are passing by.

The Daevenar manor, home of the ranelle's leader, is the largest building in the village. To most elves, the manor seems oddly unimpressive. Its exterior is so subdued the house, at first glance, appears plain. Those skilled in the arts and crafts, however, see the building for the wonder it is. Close examination is required for visitors to notice the manor's beauty lies in its intricate surface

detail and superior craftsmanship. This suits the Daevenar perfectly, as they prefer to impress those who can appreciate their skills.

Of the prominent Daevenar members at Court, only Tarin lives in Se'vianna. Preystia Tales has a home near the palace, while Baltana lives along with her fellow exolashers in the village of Tallamnia.

Along with several craft guilds, Se'vianna holds one of the few Weaponsmith forges in Blood Wood not controlled by the Talshara ranelle or Blood Warders. Weaponsmiths from both these groups often send apprentices to study at the forge, where they learn the art of weapon crafting from the finest smiths in the forest. Some of the thread weapons created by the Blood Warders are made here before being enchanted.

Se'vianna hosts an annual art festival, judged by senior members of the ranelle, the queen, and a panel of courtiers selected by Tarin Daevenar. This festival often sets trends among artists throughout the Wood. Recently, Alachia has allowed select artists from outside Blood Wood to enter the festival, most from Shosara and Sereatha. Outsiders chosen to participate rightly consider this a great honor.

Adventure Idea

A famous artist from outside of the Wood has been allowed to attend the art festival but does not feel comfortable leaving their safety entirely up to the blood elves. With Alachia's permission, the artist hires the group to serve as their personal bodyguards. The group could be confronted by blood elf extremists that protest the presence of outsiders inside the Wood, growing more violent as they move closer to Se'vianna. The artist's work might be stolen as they make the trip through the Wood and the group must recover the lost items. Gamemasters may use this situation as a way of introducing their group to the politics of the Elven Court or as a way to allow legitimate exploration of the forest.

Current Activities

Tarin has made it his personal mission to teach the Carithasca ranelle a lesson. He has known about the ranelle's smuggling for some time, but when he laid his suspicions and fragmentary proof before the queen, she dismissed the allegations as misinterpretations stemming from their political rivalry. Since then, Tarin has been searching for solid proof of Carithasca involvement, something so damning even Alachia cannot brush it aside. He has had little luck so far, for the Carithasca are clever operators and cover their tracks well. Still, Tarin continues to pursue what he perceives to be one of the greatest betrayals in the modern Court.

Adventure Idea

Evidence of the Carithasca smuggling activities is difficult to come by in Blood Wood, but their outside partners are seldom as guarded with records of these transactions. Tarin believes he can acquire the evidence he seeks from these merchants and has used a number of intermediaries to hire adventuring groups to do so. The gamemaster may choose one of the following options as the main objective for their adventure.

Option 1

The information is easy to retrieve but transporting it back to Blood Wood's border is met with complication at every step. The Carithasca have caught wind of Tarin's plan and are actively working to prevent the group from completing their task. Such an adventure should end with the Carithasca purchasing the evidence themselves, possibly by impersonating Tarin's agent, and having the group driven from the Wood by force.

Option 2

The merchant has done years of lucrative business with the Carithasca and is unwilling to hand over what the group is looking for. They must either steal the evidence or secure a replacement contract for the commerce the trader will lose if the Carithasca are exposed. If the evidence is stolen, it should end up being fabricated or otherwise unconnected to Carithasca activity. Securing a replacement contract may gain a finder's fee for the group, but the Carithasca should intervene to ensure the merchant's continued loyalty.

Serving as Tarin's personal bodyguard while at Court, Baltana has access to much information vital to the Seekers' operation. Tarin's oversight of foreign delegations give Baltana a way to pass information out of the Wood, and she often passes coded messages through minor members of these entourages. Tarin also takes regular trips to Kaer Eidolon to host less trustworthy delegations, which Baltana uses to transport intelligence too sensitive to send by other means. She has also found Tarin's interest in the Carithasca ranelle useful. The Seekers use the black-market trade as a way of moving items and spies into Blood Wood. Several shipments have been reported to the wardens by Tarin as possibly containing contraband. Baltana is able to send word before the cargo could be intercepted, protecting the Seekers' limited supplies and valuable personnel.

THE ESCALANAS RANELLE

The Escalanas ranelle has traditionally supplied the most Warders and other magicians to the queen's service. The ranelle is best known for the accomplishments of its leader, Kethos Escalanas, revered throughout Blood Wood as the creator of the Ritual of Thorns. Their ancestral home lies in

the Western Border of the Wood, though members of the ranelle belong to communities across the forest and pursue a wide variety of professions.

Because the Escalanas maintain an ancient tradition of following the magical Disciplines, it is widely (but incorrectly) believed all Escalanas dabble in the magical arts. While they are respected throughout the Wood for their role in creating the Ritual of Thorns, their fame often becomes infamy for those same reasons.

History

One of the oldest ranelles in Blood Wood, the Escalanas have their beginnings in a noble family that traveled from the Western Kingdoms during the reign of Queen Melyora. While the origins of their magical power and knowledge are unknown, tales from Sereatha speak to the magical prowess granted by the Escalanas bloodline. Hailing from somewhere west of the City of Spires, the ranelle wields considerable influence in a number of elven cities. The oldest tales of the elven people speak of a single noble family serving as advisors to the rulers of many elven and other Namegiver cities. Some believe those legends describe the Escalanas.

When certain ranelles began gaining influence in Wyrn Wood and the Elven Court, the Escalanas quickly made their mark. Having continued their magical pursuits after moving to the Wood, the Escalanas were well placed to offer the Court unique spells, magical items, and minor rituals that won the queen's favor. Though the family's leaders pledged their loyalty to the Queen, the opportunity to prove their devotion beyond a doubt still lay in the future.

The ranelle's first step in establishing its prominence came early in the reign of Queen Failla. Seeking a new direction for their magical research, the ranelle began exploring the potential of blood magic. The ranelle's leader at the time, Darelton, suggested to the queen that she form an order of warrior magicians to patrol Wyrn Wood's borders and safeguard its travelers. Other ranelles suggested the Escalanas had selfish reasons for promoting this agenda, but Failla agreed and established the Queen's Warders.

Composed primarily of Escalanas elves, the Queen's Warders have proved worthy many times, quickly and quietly dispatching threats to the Wood and its people. Over time, the Warders devoted time to finding new uses for the magic they used to perform their tasks, always with the goal of better serving their queen. By experimenting across Disciplines, the Warders found ways to keep the paths clear of undergrowth, discovered a way to communicate long distances through sympathetic magic with the trees, and pioneered other innovations. Failla and subsequent queens encouraged this research, trusting the ranelle would do nothing to harm Wyrn Wood or its people.

Many years later, the Warders petitioned Queen Failla for a place to conduct their research. In the Elven Court, the pursuits of every man and woman were open secrets, and the Escalanas desired privacy when conducting unpredictable magical research. Such pursuits might be too dangerous to be conducted among the homes and shops of their fellow elves. The queen granted

this request, allowing the Warders to establish their own community in the Forest's Heart. Surrounded by a plentiful supply of True wood, the Warders built their citadel and began researching alternate uses of blood magic.

During the Schism, every member of the Escalanas, and by association the Warders, supported Alachia's decision to refuse the Rites of Protection and Passage. The ranelle's unwavering devotion won the queen's favor, raising the Escalanas' influence so dramatically many members feared a backlash from other ranelles. Family head Pelios recognized the potential disaster and, though Escalanas courtiers and Warders protested, withdrew them from most Court activities, maintaining the ranelle's relationship with the Court personally and through the two Escalanas consortis.

The Jae'Helastris whispered its disapproval, hinting the Escalanas held too much power with two consortis. The leader of the Jae'Helastris also implied the Escalanas intended a slight against the Queen by withdrawing their members from Court. Despite the uneasy rumblings of the other ranelles, however, the Escalanas navigated the stormy waters unscathed.

It wasn't until the Warders' struggle to find an alternative to the Theran Rites that the Escalanas reached their greatest prominence. The research and work of Kethos Escalanas created the main body of the Ritual of Thorns, for which he was hailed as savior of the elven people. Pelios Escalanas did not survive the Ritual, leading the Escalanas to select Kethos as their new leader. Using his unprecedented popularity, his considerable skills as a magician, and a certain amount of political savvy, Kethos led his ranelle to unchallenged prominence at Court. He successfully maintained the ranelle's position during the Scourge and continues to do so.

About five years ago, Alachia banished Kethos from the Elven Court for a year and a day. None but Kethos and the queen know the reason, though most courtiers assume it has something to do with magic. The Jae'Helastris have hinted Kethos was banished for dabbling in forbidden rites, though they are unable to say what those rites might involve. The punishment was less severe than it seems, however, as Kethos had already limited his presence at Court to the most vital ceremonial occasions. Even though this apparent exile has ended, he appears content to rely on the ranelle's consortis and courtiers to maintain his family's influence and keep him informed of important developments. The reason for this lack of interest regarding Court politics, however, remains a mystery to all but Kethos himself.

The Fruit of Forbidden Knowledge

For the past twenty years, Escalanas Blood Warders have been defying Alachia's edicts against contact with the outside world by secretly meeting with members of the Denairastas clan. In exchange for True elements, the Denairastas share their knowledge of ritual, blood, and elemental magic. The Warders consider this trade an acceptable violation of the queen's directives, reasoning the knowledge they gain helps them better defend Blood Wood.

Alachia has taken no steps to stop these meetings, though she has known about them for as long as they have been taking place. Only her most trusted advisors know whether Alachia's failure to punish the Escalanas reflects her trust in Kethos and his ranelle, tacit approval of the Warders' reasoning, or some other factor. Kethos assumes Alachia approves of his efforts to heal the Wood's warped pattern, though he never expects her to admit it. She trusts him to conduct business with the Denairastas discreetly and with the security of the Wood in mind.

After news of Denairastas involvement in the assassination of King Varulus III reached Blood Wood, Kethos stopped his secret meetings with them. Fearing the Elven Court might become caught in a conflict between Iopos and Throal, he did not want to create any trace of Escalanas contact outside the wood for his rivals to uncover. As time passed, however, Kethos has resumed the meetings on condition their emissaries travel to Blood Wood. It is a risky move given the clan's record of duplicity, but Kethos believes conducting the meetings on his home turf gives him a measure of extra control. He also wants the Denairastas representatives to examine some of his research more closely than is possible outside the Wood.

Jerleth Denairastas

Jerleth is the current Denairastas emissary to the Escalanas ranelle. One of Uhl's many nephews, Jerleth is also cousin to Jada Denairastas, the magician who assassinated Varulus III. Like most of his family, Jerleth is a superlative magician, well versed in the Elementalist and Nethermancer Disciplines.

Cold and arrogant, Jerleth regularly reminds Kethos that the Denairastas hold the upper hand in their relationship. Awareness of these secret meetings would do irreparable harm to the ranelle's reputation and force Alachia to punish the Escalanas. Jerleth's endless supply of snide remarks about the fate of Blood Wood and the Blood Warders' method of protecting themselves from the Horrors enrages Kethos almost beyond bearing. The Escalanas leader would have killed Jerleth by now were it not for his need of the Iopan's formidable abilities.

Jerleth dislikes dealing with the blood elves but finds their current line of research fascinating. Of all his family, he is the closest to a scholar, more interested in the theoretical applications of magic than using it to gain power. While he cannot shed his arrogant nature, his desire to solve Kethos's puzzle is genuine and lets him to relate to the Escalanas leader in a way almost unique in the Denairastas clan: more often than not, he tells the truth.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

Important Characters

The Escalanas mainly influence life in Blood Wood through the Blood Warders, most of whom are from the ranelle. Kethos's banishment from Court

had little effect because he had already delegated most of his power to the Escalanas consortis. These trusted courtiers have regular contact with Queen Alachia and use that access to pursue their ranelle's goals.

Kethos Escalanas

Though he achieved leadership of the ranelle based solely on the creation of the Ritual of Thorns, Kethos has proven an able administrator. His wisdom led him to surround himself with useful advisors who manage the ranelle's presence at Court and maintain Escalanas influence in other areas of elven life.

Kethos Escalanas was born several decades before the Scourge. He displayed an impressive talent for magic even before adolescence and used his arcane ability to become one of the Queen's Warders. During the Schism, the Queen rewarded Kethos's unwavering support with a prominent place at Court. This proximity brought out a surprising, wry sense of humor in Kethos Alachia found appealing. They have been lovers several times, with each affair ending on the same, bittersweet note. Each interlude began with Alachia rediscovering Kethos's gift for briefly making her forget her responsibilities and ended with her sending him away for making light of her obligations. Their ongoing relationship offers both elves a comfortable pattern to fall back on, allowing them to remain close even after Kethos's banishment.

The Queen's faith in his abilities was vindicated during the early years of the Scourge, when Alachia ordered the Warders to devise a way to protect Wyrn Wood and its elves from the Horrors. His previous research led Kethos to believe the elves might be able to inoculate themselves against the Horrors by fusing elemental thorn-plant spirits into their True patterns. With this theory as his base assumption, Kethos set in motion the research that led to the Ritual of Thorns, with much of the subsequent research conducted under his direct oversight. When Alachia agreed to the Ritual, Kethos was determined to take responsibility if his premise was faulty and was the first elf to undergo the transformation. When he survived, the Ritual was considered a success, and the Warders set about administering the Ritual to the forest's entire population.

Despite the horror of the Ritual and the devastating number of elves who died undergoing the rites, Kethos won acclaim for his part in preserving the elven people and the Elven Court. His capable leadership of the Escalanas further proved that his wisdom extended beyond his magical knowledge.

Over the past twenty years, Kethos has withdrawn from Court politics and isolated himself in his home at Letheran. His involvement in local activities has been limited to only the most important matters. His apparent lack of interest has prompted several of his advisors to ask if he intends to step down to make way for new blood. Kethos dismisses such suggestions with a smile and polite refusal to discuss the matter. Those most anxious to advance their own fortunes at Court attribute Kethos's attitude to the stubbornness of age. They also remark he is beginning to show his advanced age, from which they

conclude he no longer wants to bother with the effort of extending his life with blood magic.

The truth is Kethos's most recent attempt to magically extend his life failed. Upon learning his life would end sooner than expected, he began devoting all his energy to achieving his self-appointed final mission: to undo his greatest accomplishment and make the Ritual of Thorns no longer necessary. The primary problem he faces is the nature of the Ritual itself. Though Kethos petitioned Queen Alachia to stop performing the Ritual on newborns, he knew that change alone was not the answer. Kethos believes, rather than reNaming the Wood again, the key to ending the Ritual of Thorns might be to simply shift the Wood's True pattern.

If Blood Wood could be changed to survive without the constant supply of blood provided by the elves' thorns, the twisted nature of the forest might diminish. If the other Warders knew of Kethos's line of research, they might suspect the Escalanas leader was losing his mental faculties. Kethos, of all the Warders, should remember the unexpected and uncontrollable results of casting blood magic upon blood magic. Blood Wood is testament to the folly of trying to alter one blood magic ritual with additional blood magic. That Kethos would suggest another such attempt would horrify his fellow magicians.

Kethos was banished from Court for questioning Alachia's judgment in continuing the Ritual. He used this opportunity as an excuse to further isolate himself from any political obligations and delve deeper into his research of ritual blood magic. He hopes to devise a solution acceptable to Alachia before his time runs out but has thus far made little progress. Kethos is an accomplished magician and has studied the Elementalist, Nethermancer, and Wizard Disciplines.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 7

Orlando Escalanas

Orlando Escalanas serves as consortis at the Elven Court. Orlando and Kethos have known one another since they were children, and Orlando is Kethos's closest confidant and most trusted counselor. Like Kethos, Orlando displayed magical talent at a young age and served with the Queen's Warders. When Kethos assumed leadership of the Escalanas ranelle, he persuaded the Queen to appoint Orlando as a consortis.

Orlando's official duties are representing the ranelle's interests at Court and providing counsel to his leader's political agenda. Orlando also assumed the role of unofficial spymaster for the ranelle, in charge of keeping tabs on Court activities. He has been effective at uncovering the plots of other ranelles against the Escalanas and redirecting these activities toward other targets.

Few suspect how closely Kethos and Orlando work together, even among the Escalanas. Many years ago, Kethos and Orlando staged a very public

argument at Court, making a big show of falling out. In the following months, Orlando began dropping hints Kethos was losing his mental faculties and that he should be running the ranelle. Kethos, in turn, began telling his other advisors he felt Orlando was beginning to put his own interests before the ranelle's. If it were up to Kethos, he would replace Orlando immediately, but that decision belonged to the queen. Within hours, the Court was rife with rumors of the feud. A few enterprising souls were even betting on the outcome.

The two remain publicly cool and distant. Not even their closest associates suspect the long-running quarrel is a calculated fiction. Over the years, Kethos's rivals at Court and within the ranelle have voiced complaints about Kethos to Orlando. They've even plotted against Kethos in Orlando's presence, never realizing Orlando would report everything they said to his friend. This arrangement proved especially valuable during Kethos's banishment from Court. His continued withdrawal from ranelle politics has emboldened his enemies, including the Jae'Helastri, to urge Orlando to challenge Kethos for control of the Escalanas. As a result, Orlando has been able to monitor, manipulate, and counter opposition to Kethos and the ranelle. With the political game well sorted, Kethos can devote his full attention to finding a cure for the Wood's True pattern.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 8 WIL: 8 CHA: 7

Eletheria Escalanas

Of all the strange creatures lurking in the Western Border, none strike fear into the hearts of the blood elves as the legendary Eletheria Escalanas. Some younger elves claim she is a mythical figure, a monster born of the blood elves' primal fears. Her story has been told and retold so many times the elves no longer know how much is true. Even the most skeptical speak her Name in whispers lest they attract her attention, reluctant to venture into the western woods on nights when the moon is full.

All the tales agree on certain points. A female elf Named Eletheria—a striking beauty with long black hair, a pale complexion, and distinctive green eyes—belonged to the Escalanas ranelle before the Scourge. She was well known for her wit, beauty, and magical skill. Numerous suitors courted her, including a young Kethos Escalanas, and many assumed she would one day lead her ranelle. Along with the other Warders, she tried to find a way to protect Wyrms Wood and its elves in the days leading up to the Scourge.

Something went wrong. Some tales claim Eletheria simply broke from the strain of her work. Others claim she was experimenting with magic so vile the other Warders exiled her from their midst. Still others claim she used herself as the subject of her experiments and unwittingly became corrupted beyond redemption. The most scandalous explanation, however, is that Alachia became jealous of the growing bond between Kethos and Eletheria,



and the queen pressured certain Warders to fabricate a pretext for banishing the young elf. As the story goes, Kethos did not intervene on Eletheria's behalf because he feared doing so might jeopardize his work to protect the citizens of Wyrms Wood.

Whatever the reason, Eletheria left the Forest's Heart during the early years of the Scourge, traveling alone toward Letheran under the full moon. No evidence suggests she ever arrived, nor does any tale speak of her taking shelter anywhere. The elves of the Western Border assumed she perished in the wilds or assumed a new identity elsewhere in the Wood.

The mystery of her disappearance became unimportant as the elves struggled against the Horrors' onslaught and prepared to enact the Ritual of Thorns. The Escalanas even forgot about Eletheria until after the Scourge had ended. Once the elves had resettled the Wood, reports of strange and disturbing events emerged along the Western Border. Some unknown force ambushed Blood Warden patrols outside Escalanas villages.

At first, the elves assumed the deaths were the result of encounters with corrupted animals that had wandered out of the Forest's Heart or the lingering influence of Horrors. After a few months, however, a pattern began to emerge. All the victims had been killed in the same manner: their hearts ripped from their chest and their bodies drained of blood. The attacks took place on nights of the full moon and seemed to coincide with sightings of a pale, Unprotected elf maiden with long black hair and green eyes.

These reports launched rumors Eletheria had somehow survived, returning to the woods of the Western Border to carry out her revenge against Kethos and Alachia. Some claim the elf keeps herself alive with blood magic and drains her victims of blood to fuel her existence. Others say Eletheria became the bride of some Horror intent on destroying the Elven Court. A few tales claim the forest's corrupted beasts are the spawn of this unholy union. Alachia, Kethos, and the Blood Warders dismiss these rumors as tales to scare children, unwilling to discuss the issue further.

While the mystery surrounding these events and the Eletheria's fate may never be solved, one thing remains certain. Someone—or something—stalks the woods of the Western Border on nights the moon is full, and the Blood Warders seem powerless to stop it.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 8
PER: 8 WIL: 8 CHA: 8

Adventure Idea

Desperate to solve this mystery, the Blood Warders have brought groups of outside adventurers into the Wood to investigate the rumors of Eletheria Escalanas. Such groups could discover her lost spirit, a creature using her likeness to lure in its victims, or simply a series of unexplainable events they are unable to link together. The truth of Eletheria's fate is left open

such that gamemasters may develop the narrative according to the needs of their campaign. Outside groups may even be able to gather additional background by talking with Kethos, who would be more willing to discuss this subject with non-blood elf characters.

Permanent Settlements

The Escalanas maintain few villages of significant size. Their home of Letheran is the largest. Calabria serves as their main trading outpost near the southern edge of the Western Border. Smaller Escalanas settlements consist of True wood harvesters and traders who make their homes along the banks of the Mothingale. Many blood elves fear Estandia, the Escalanas village at Court, due to the high number of Blood Warders who reside there.

Letheran

More than two thousand elves live in Letheran. Most are from the Escalanas ranelle, but other elves choose to make their homes in this village. Many True wood harvesting expeditions start in Letheran, the northernmost trade stop for vessels traveling up the Mothingale River. These vessels are generally operated by blood elves, though Unprotected elves and Syrtisian t'skrang from Kaer Eidolon are occasionally, if rarely, seen on Letheran's docks.

Letheran is the most prosperous village on the Mothingale River. Its thriving True wood harvesting operation fuels trade with villages in the Western Border and Southern Fringe. Despite this prosperity, Letheran bears little resemblance to the larger villages farther south.

Letheran boasts a few modest piers stretching into the river and the village fleet is only a few small vessels. Meager wooden buildings line the riverbank, but most of Letheran's residents live in dwellings in the tall oaks. Some of these homes hang out over the river, providing magnificent views of the waterway and town. Farther back from the river's edge grow ancient oaks that stretch hundreds of feet into the air. These contain the largest of Letheran's tree-homes and provide views of the canopy for miles around. From these dwellings observers can see the western edge of Blood Wood.

In the center of the village stands the Escalanas manor. The largest and most elaborately decorated dwelling in the village, it is built in the trunk of a massive, ancient oak. It is home to many members of Kethos's immediate family, as well as other prominent ranelle members. Kethos maintains an intricate network of caves beneath the manor that houses his magical laboratory. Though rumors of the workspace circulate among the village's elves, most residents don't believe the complex exists.

Another notable landmark is the spectral willow that grows along the riverbank near the town's north edge. The villagers treasure this tree and pay a group of carefully chosen gardeners to care for it. The gardeners watch the willow to ensure no harm comes to it and monitor it for warnings of uninvited astral visitors.

While the Escalanas ranelle represents a significant presence in Letheran, the ranelle leaves governance to a mayor elected by the town. The election is held every ten years and the Escalanas have never had difficulty persuading eligible voters to elect the ranelle's preferred candidate. The current mayor, a commoner Named Larin, has held the position for nearly fifty years.

Calabria

Calabria, a trading outpost located between the Western Border and Southern Fringe, is the most independent-minded settlement in the Western Border. Agents of wealthy Carithasca merchants, renegade elven river traders, True wood smugglers, black marketeers, political radicals, and fugitives from the ranelles live here in uneasy harmony. United by their disdain for authority and distrust of outsiders, most arrive seeking haven from the Blood Warders, angry ranelles, or some other authority. Others come to sell or sample the forbidden wares available in the bazaar. Elves from across the Western Border come to try Theran wine or purchase the services of an "entertainer" from one of the sophisticated villages of the Southern Fringe.

Situated near a sharp bend of the Mothingale, Calabria is surrounded by miles of thick forest that make it nearly inaccessible by land. The settlement consists of numerous ramshackle dwellings and caves set amid large rocky outcroppings that form the riverbank. At the water's edge, the outcroppings create small, hidden lagoons that can conceal vessels from passing river traffic.

Despite the obstacles posed by the terrain, outside parties have located Calabria in the past. Expeditions sent by the queen, the Carithasca, and the Escalanas have managed to find the village at various times, but none have managed to permanently destroy the settlement. Raiding parties can flatten ramshackle dwellings and torch unattended vessels but capturing Calabria's residents is more difficult. They flee into the surrounding woods at the first sign of attack and return when the danger has passed. With the apparent futility of trying to destroy Calabria, the Escalanas and Carithasca ranelles have decided the village does not present any real danger to their power. Now, the occasional river patrol that happens upon the village accepts a small "tax" from the residents to move on.



Calabria has no formal laws or government. The typical resident has little regard for authority, and the settlement's population constantly changes as old residents leave and new ones arrive. Traditionally, the residents take a live-and-let-live approach and will not interfere in each other's business—unless that business attracts attention and threatens the security of its residents. By custom, anyone who fails to observe this simple edict is killed or banished.

Estandia

Estandia, the Escalanas ranelle's second home, lies at the westernmost point of the Elven Court region. Given the distance between the Court and the Escalanas lands, Estandia's proximity to the palace is vital to maintaining Escalanas influence at Court. Orlando Escalanas keeps a residence here, though he spends most of his time in a smaller private home closer to the palace.

Estandia boasts the largest population of Blood Warders in any forest settlement. Almost all the Warders who serve at Court live here, with the exceptions of Takaris Talshara and Nirame Jae'Helastri. Chief Blood Warden Preystia Tales lives in Estandia when at Court, rather than Se'vianna. Living here gives Preystia a close connection to his fellow Warders at Court, which he finds helpful in maintaining order.

Not surprisingly, Estandia has become the Court's center of magical research. Many Warders conduct small scale experiments here, with Queen Alachia visiting often to observe them. She also comes to Estandia when she wishes to speak with Preystia or other Warders in a less formal setting than the palace. Many Warden-crafted magical items are made in Estandia, and its markets boast the finest selections of magical goods in Barsaive.

Adventure Idea

The market at Estandia is well known to collectors of elven artifacts, both within and outside Blood Wood. Many individuals covet the thread items produced here and are willing to pay a high price to circumvent Alachia's isolationist policies to gain access to them. Adventures with this purpose should focus heavily on traveling within the Wood and encounters with its various defenses. The gamemaster may choose one of the following options as the group's overall objective.

Option 1

A collector wishes to acquire an item crafted in Estandia for a member of the exolashers. Through their network of contacts, they have found out when and how the item will be transported to their recipient. The group will be hired to sneak into Blood Wood and steal the equipment from the caravan.

Option 2

The group is contacted by a foreign noble who has acquired a thread item of Estandian origin. The individual wishes to acquire key knowledge for the item and has hired the group to discover it for them, requiring a visit to the Blood Wood.

Current Activities

Faced with his mortality, Kethos knows the status quo in Blood Wood will eventually lead to its destruction. Being one of few elves aware of the extent of the Wood's unnatural existence places Kethos in the unique position of possibly being able to heal it. He has considered no avenue of research taboo in his quest and frequently reaches out to the Denairastas for their knowledge of ritual blood magic.

Most of Kethos's research has grown from a vague vision of the birth of Oak Heart, though he has neglected to share with anyone that this was the spark that ignited his current undertaking. It took him nearly a decade to puzzle out the ritual he witnessed, but Kethos is confident he can use Oak Heart's acorns to create a new Forest's Heart. This action would be devastating to the blood elves, however, as the Personal Ritual has intertwined their True patterns with that of Blood Wood. Kethos is working to adjust the birthing ritual to one that will repair the damaged pattern of the forest. He has found the Seekers of the Heart a willing ally in this quest, who deliver any of Oak Heart's acorns he requires to progress his research.

Transportation of Oak Heart's acorns inside Blood Wood is a tricky endeavor even for the most experienced adventurer. However, the Seekers of the Heart consider assisting Kethos's research to be among their highest priorities at the moment. Persecution of their group has sometimes necessitated the use of independent adventurers for this task, as the occasional incursion of non-elves into the Wood draws far less attention than the presence of known Seeker agents. A smuggling run from Kaer Eidolon to Letheran could be used to introduce the acorns of Oak Heart and the secret behind Kethos's secluded research into a group's campaign.

Orlando has his hands full managing the ranelle's daily business at Court. He must remain vigilant, as rumors of Kethos's continued disobedience encourage his enemies. So far, Orlando has discreetly redirected every challenge to Kethos's authority without exposing the loyalty he still holds for his leader. Privately, Orlando spends several hours each week in somber reflection over the pending loss of his lifelong friend.

While he has made peace with the knowledge Kethos will soon pass, Orlando is deeply depressed that his friend's final months will be spent locked in his laboratory rather than among family. Worse still, he must keep this lament bottled deep in his own mind, for their current deception depends

on it. Orlando would do anything to help Kethos complete his dying wish, but the strain of doing so has nearly pushed Orlando to his breaking point. He is unsure whether he will be able to continue carrying the burden of Court politics once leadership of his ranelle is inevitably thrust upon him.

THE JAE HELASTRI RANELLE

Few ranelles know the political dance of the Court as well as the Jae'Helastris. Most courtiers must learn the art of politics, but it seems to come naturally to these elves. In a short time, the Jae'Helastris have established themselves as an influential ranelle at Court. Two of the current consortis hail from the ranelle, with numerous other advisors tracing their lineage back to the Jae'Helastris by blood or carefully planned marriages.

Unlike the other ranelles, the Jae'Helastris do not live off the land's bounty. Instead, they consider themselves traders of a single, vital commodity: information. They gather, exploit, and trade it with unmatched skill. While some might see their lack of material wealth as a weakness, the Jae'Helastris consider it an advantage. Unencumbered by ancestral lands, local tenants, the maintenance of caravan routes, or provincial politics, they can devote their full attention to Court matters and gain an edge over their peers.

The Jae'Helastris make it their business to know everything about everyone. If anyone calls this practice blackmail, the ranelle takes great offense. They don't actively use their knowledge to force anyone's hand. Their cache of secrets simply makes their enemies think twice before moving against them.

The Jae'Helastris have a knack for learning their rivals' secrets, a talent attributed to magic, a mammoth network of spies, or bribes. They use all these approaches, though their reputation overstates their power. Anyone with a guilty conscience assumes the Jae'Helastris know the truth. Whether they do or not, a clear conscience is a rare possession among those in politics.

History

The Jae'Helastris cannot claim the illustrious history of other ranelles, but they have swiftly become an influential player in Blood Wood politics. They came to prominence just before the Scourge with their unwavering support of Queen Alachia, helping to maintain the Court's stability during that difficult period. Unlike ranelles who trace their roots back generations to influential families, the Jae'Helastris come from humble stock. They started out as a small family of mediocre artisans in a village close to the palace.

Many of the ranelle's current influential members became Jae'Helastris through marriage. A standing joke says the surest way for a commoner to gain a place at Court is to seduce a Jae'Helastris daughter. Jest aside, marriage to the Jae'Helastris has brought several ambitious and politically astute newcomers to the front of elven politics.

The founder of the family was Cyrenal Jae'Helastris, a mediocre Blood Warder in comparison to his peers. While he never lacked enthusiasm for magical knowledge, he never mastered the more complex arts needed to

advance through the ranks. Destined to never achieve power among the Warders, Cyrenal looked elsewhere.

As Blood Wood rebuilt itself after the Scourge, Cyrenal noticed the widening gap between the Blood Warders and the Queen's advisors at Court. Neither group understood or trusted the other, as each wished to preserve its power in the face of the other's influence. Cyrenal decided to serve as a link between the two, ostensibly to smooth the operation of the Elven Court. His actions as unofficial liaison put him in a position to learn more about the Warders and consortis than either side could discover on their own.

Working between the two sides taught Cyrenal two lessons, which he used in guiding the Jae'Helastri to their current position. First, he learned the value of information, especially sensitive information. Second, he mastered the art of playing opposing factions against each other. Recognizing the power he could cultivate through these methods, Cyrenal became an unrivaled information broker to the highest levels at Court. The Warders came to see him as the best source of information on the consortis, while the consortis saw him as the best source of information on the Warders.

Using the secrets of each side to gain favor with the other, Cyrenal rose to a position of significant influence. His family took their cue from his success. They learned all they could, encouraging gossip and learning secrets wherever they could. Before long, few dared openly oppose the Jae'Helastri in fear they would reveal what they knew.

After Cyrenal's death, his nephew Mithran took over leadership of the ranelle. Like his uncle, Mithran is sly, cunning, and altogether untrustworthy. He heads a council of eight older ranelle members who maintain the family's trove of secrets. This group, called *Respitish od Telenetish* ("Those Who Listen and Learn"), includes consortis Tiriamae Jae'Helastri, her Blood Warder sister Niriamae, and Mithran's sister Joella.

Jae'Helastri operatives never write down the information they gather, lest the records be discovered. The ranelle's spymasters maintain an oral tradition, sharing their knowledge with others as needed. Each of the eight council members is responsible for digging up the secrets of a specific group, such as another ranelle, the Blood Warders, the exolashers, or consortis.

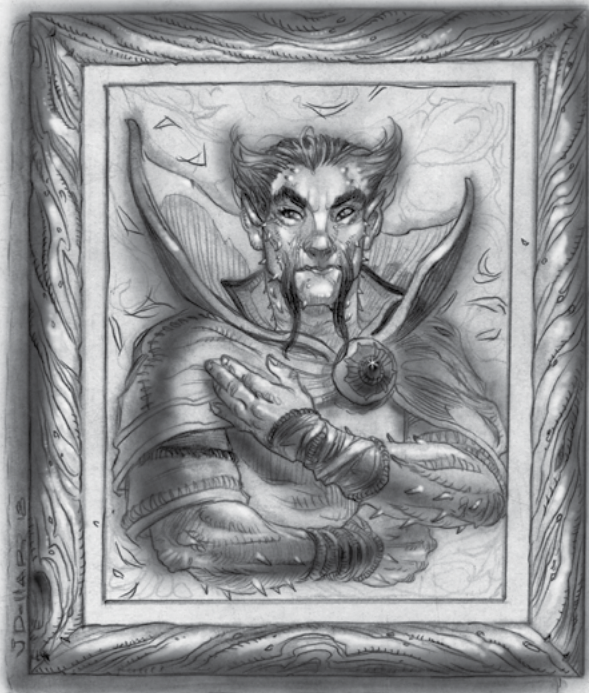
Important Characters

Jae'Helastri influence stretches nearly everywhere in Blood Wood. Ranelle members include Blood Warders, consortis, and other prominent figures at Court.

Mithran Jae'Helastri

Aging but still formidable, Mithran is the current leader of the Jae'Helastri. He served as consortis for almost forty years but stepped down in favor of his son Larrin. Since then, he has overseen the ranelle's activities from his home in Triammelle.

Mithran's hair is showing streaks of silver, but his green eyes remain sharp and bright. While somewhat of a glutton, he has remained in good shape through an active social life. His demeanor is easygoing, more interested in enjoying life's finer things than increasing his personal prestige. This image veils his true nature, but on the whole Mithran is a gentleman toward those who do not cross him. Those who end up on his bad side, however, find out the charming courtier can also be ruthless.



Lately, Mithran has appeared in Alachia's company more often, especially since the death of his wife. Some of his relatives see a connection, but for now Mithran and Alachia are just occasional dinner companions. Whispers that Alachia wants to have a child have been spreading like wildfire, and rumors suggest Mithran may be the chosen father. If true, this could increase the Jae'Helastris's already significant influence.

Mithran is aware of the political shortcomings displayed by younger members of his ranelle. They are a little too eager to break rules and could jeopardize all that his generation has worked for. Like Cyrenal before him, Mithran knows the virtue of moderation and discretion, especially when dealing with influential courtiers. Knowing when and where to set limits is a difficult art to learn and many of the younger Jae'Helastris have yet to master it.

Mithran fears headstrong youngsters may find their efforts backfiring unless they temper their actions with consideration of possible consequences. For example, many younger Jae'Helastris want to open the Wood's borders to spread their political influence beyond the forest. Mithran sympathizes with their desires but knows voicing it too strongly could provoke a backlash from the consortis or even the Queen. If it suited her, Alachia could use the outcry to discredit the entire ranelle. Mithran wants to avoid this and is trying to convince his younger relatives to be patient.

Mithran has received training in the Troubadour Discipline.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5
 PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 8

Larrin Jae'Helastr

Larrin, Mithran's eldest son, replaced him as consortis about a decade ago. The other ranelles predictably complained about a second Jae'Helastr consortis, but Alachia accepted Mithran's recommendation and appointed Larrin anyway. He has been given the job of keeping communications open between the Court and settlements in Blood Wood, a task well suited to the Jae'Helastr's aptitudes and goals.

Larrin is his father's son and puts Jae'Helastr interests first and foremost. The queen's interests and those of the Court rank second. Larrin is not an adept, making his skill at influencing others that much more impressive.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 3 TOU: 5
 PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Tiriame Jae'Helastr

When she was appointed consortis twenty-five years ago, Tiriame was the youngest elf ever to hold the position. Intelligent and observant, she quickly learned the ins and outs of Court politics. Since her cousin Larrin's appointment, Tiriame has taken to teaching him the skills she has learned so well.

Tiriame is responsible for bringing the concerns of the ranelles to the attention of the Court, a duty that grants her access to the kind of information the Jae'Helastr find useful. She cultivates a sympathetic, almost motherly manner that, despite her family's reputation as schemers, leads people to tell her just about anything. More than one naive courtier has been heard to call Tiriame "the only honest Jae'Helastr ever born."

Before entering politics, Tiriame considered joining the wardens. She studied the Swordmaster Discipline before abandoning it to take up training as a Troubadour.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 5 TOU: 6
 PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 7

Permanent Settlements

The Jae'Helastr live in different regions of Blood Wood, looking after their interests away from the Elven Court as most ranelles do. Many members live within a half-day's journey of the Court in the village of Triammelle. From there, Mithran spins his web of political intrigue.

Triammelle

The Jae'Helastri home village is Triammelle, a large settlement in the northeast corner of the Elven Court region. All two thousand of its residents are allied to the Jae'Helastri, making it one of the few woodland settlements occupied solely by members of one ranelle. Nearly all prominent Jae'Helastri have homes there, including Mithran, Niriame, Larrin and Tiriame. The latter three have residences near the palace as well, where they spend most of their time.

The Jae'Helastri manor is the largest and most lavish building in the village. It stands between two giant oaks, suspended above the ground by their interlinking branches. A large stairway grown from branches and vines leads up to the main building. In and around the trunks at ground level are the kitchens, pantry, and storage sheds, along with several small shacks where the manor staff live.

Twice a year, Mithran hosts formal parties, inviting the Queen, consortis, Blood Warders, and the leaders of the other great ranelles. Most of the consortis and many courtiers attend these functions, along with elders of families loyal to the Jae'Helastri. Neither Alachia nor her Warders feel their presence is necessary, attending on rare occasions. These parties give the Jae'Helastri a chance to mingle with other ranelles and the bulk of the Elven Court. Presented as a less than formal setting where guests can relax, the Jae'Helastri host these gatherings hoping to learn gossip and other valuable information.

While gossip can be valuable, the Jae'Helastri methods sometimes require more concrete evidence in service of their goals. Mithran has used these parties as a means to draw his political rivals to Triammelle and make it easier for Jae'Helastri spies to infiltrate their respective homes. Mithran has, on rare occasions, brought in outside groups as another layer of deniability when searching out particularly sensitive information. Groups can be sent to retrieve almost any type of evidence from another key location within the Wood during this time. Gamemasters may use this as a means to reveal the inner working of elven politics or the current activities of other major ranelles.

Triammelle also hosts schools and colleges renowned throughout the Wood. While most settlements have small schools, many elves, especially wealthier ones, send their children to Triammelle. The curriculum is focused on reading and writing Sperethiel, along with elven history and culture, magic theory, and artistic expression.

Current Activities

Mithran does not believe Alachia would banish Kethos Escalanas from the Court over a simple disagreement, as he has been one of her closest confidants for over a century. The Jae'Helastris knack for knowing there is a secret to uncover has led Mithran to investigate. He started by using the ranelle's contacts among the Warders, which resulted in a dead end. No one knows anything beyond the official story presented by Preystia Tales.

Mithran has since readjusted his spies in the Court, as he feels the truth lies somewhere in its halls. This also gives him the chance to keep a close eye on Larrin and Tirame, who have each taken it upon themselves to spend Jae'Helastris resources on their own endeavors. Proud that they have showed some aptitude at subtlety, Mithran waits to see what fruits their labors will bear.

Desperate to prove himself, Larrin has tried to solve Mithran's latest obsession with Kethos Escalanas. Larrin has spent significant resources extending his ranelle's network of spies into Letheran. He has been able to put several operatives in place, some among the city's dock workers and others in the True wood businesses within the area. Larrin was even able to gain the loyalty of one of the spectral willow's gardeners, an accomplishment he is particularly pleased with.

Despite this success, Larrin hasn't been able to discover what unnatural magical knowledge Kethos is spending his final years to master. He believes the reason Kethos was banished hides in this research, locked beneath the Escalanas' home. Unfortunately, his attempts to secure an agent in the manor have, up to this point, failed.

Tirame has stumbled onto a conspiracy somewhere in the Elven Court's highest levels. The mystery began with a number of secure shipments leaving the village of Trenevar, which seemed to disappear just before reaching the Court region. Digging further, she found only a third of these shipments actually made it into the Courtyard. The rest vanished deeper into the Wood by one of many pathways. It took several months before she was able to learn the cargo: each contained an acorn of Oak Heart.

How such a treasure ended up being trafficked in the Wood was a mystery Tirame struggled to understand. Even more concerning was who would be bold enough to do so. She did not believe Queen Alachia would go to the trouble of acquiring such artifacts without celebrating their return. Dealing in Oak Heart's acorns is leagues beyond the contraband normally associated with the Carithasca. Combined with the lack of evidence to support their involvement, Tirame has eliminated them as potential culprits.

Adventure Idea

Tirame has spent a small fortune tracing the origin of these shipments. Through means of bribery and extortion, she has found someone willing to discuss their transaction in one of Barsaive's Unprotected elf settlements.

Wishing to keep a low profile, Tiriamé has hired a group to transport her from Blood Wood to this village. The gamemaster may choose one of the following options for how such a mission would unfold.

Option 1

The group arrives to find Tiriamé's contact murdered. Investigation could uncover any number of culprits, but the trail should eventually lead back to blood elf involvement. Whoever is responsible, the justification for this death will be that the merchant was trafficking acorns of Oak Heart. Desecration of such artifacts is punishable by death. While the trail should end here, Tiriamé will be pleased to have confirmation that a conspiracy truly exists.

Option 2

The initial meeting at Blood Wood's border could be interrupted by a mysteriously convenient warden patrol and result in the group being arrested. Tiriamé will offer to provide payment if the group can escape the Wood without exposing her involvement. Other blood elf characters may be interested to learn the group's reason for entering the Wood and offer similar compensation to acquire knowledge of this meeting as leverage over Tiriamé.

The only other suspects left with the means and motive are the Blood Warders. Even with the Jae'Helastri's network of spies at her disposal, finding evidence of Warden involvement within the forest has proved nearly impossible. Tiriamé has turned her attention to tracking down the external source of these shipments, believing she can extort the proof she needs to expose the conspiracy from the culprits' partners.

THE TALSHARA RANELLE

The Talshara ranelle has trained many generations of warriors to serve the queen and Blood Wood. A tradition of excellence in nearly every combat Discipline has fostered belief in the Talshara ranelle's prowess. In addition to training most of the Wood's militia, the Talshara ranelle also produces the greatest percentage of wardens and exolashers. Though many wardens loyal to the Talshara actually belong to minor ranelles, the Queen's favor ensures most exolashers belong to Talshara-connected families.

The Talshara have proved unfailingly loyal to Queen Alachia. She has repaid that loyalty by giving Erithander Talshara, the ranelle's leader, special consideration at Court. She takes his advice seriously and allows him to speak bluntly instead of the flowery verbal ornamentation commonly used at Court.

History

In the days of Queen Failla a young elven warrior Named Teharrillon Talshara served faithfully, repeatedly performing acts of valor. As reward, Failla granted the young elf permission to found the Talshara ranelle.

The ranelle quickly gained favor by performing deeds on behalf of Wyrn Wood and its queen. As their reputation grew, more young, adventurous elves pledged their loyalty to the Talshara so they might add their Names to the growing legend. Soon, the Talshara stood as one of six ranelles in the Northern Reaches known for devoting their strength to defending the Wood against invaders.

During the Orichalcum Wars, the Talshara legend grew as their warriors repelled multiple attacks by troll, human and dwarf enemies. Toward the end of the wars, the dwarfs of Scythia proposed a treaty between their kingdom and the Elven Court. Though Queen Liara's consortis advised against it, the queen believed the offer represented a genuine opportunity to end the bloodshed. In the spirit of peace, Liara agreed to meet with Scythan emissaries in the town of Gudamis. This human settlement stood between the southeastern border of Wyrn Wood and the westernmost foothills of the Scythia Mountains.

While Liara believed peace was possible, she allowed her protectors to take precautions. Two Talshara exolashers, sent ahead as scouts, discovered a large number of dwarf warriors concealed in a storehouse on the edge of Gudamis. Their plan was clearly to ambush Liara and throw Wyrn Wood into chaos.

Having discovered the plot in advance, the scouts hatched a plan to expose the dwarfs' treachery. Setting fire to the storehouse, they forced the dwarf troops into the open as the queen's party approached the town. Though grossly outnumbered, the queen's forces took advantage of the enemy's momentary confusion to attack, fighting to keep Liara safe. After spoiling the ambush, the scouts raced to the queen's side. Both distinguished themselves in the ensuing battle, one of them sacrificing his life by taking an arrow meant for Liara.

After returning to Wyrn Wood, Queen Liara honored the fallen warrior by attending his Ritual of Everlife and commissioning a statue in his image—an item that remains in Alachia's chambers to this day. Liara showed additional favor by choosing more Talshara as personal bodyguards and approving more candidates for exolasher from the ranelle than from any other. Over time, the Talshara's position at Court attracted more minor ranelles to pledge them loyalty. This influx of talent and resources allowed the Talshara to eclipse the other ranelles sharing responsibility for the Wood's defense, cementing the Talshara's place among the five great ranelles.

The Scourge

As the Scourge approached, Queen Alachia charged the Talshara with repelling the Horrors while the Blood Warders prepared the wooden kaer. To this end, Sariellesrae Talshara founded the Grove of Blades, a combat school dedicated to training adept and non-adept alike. All who sought to

defend Wyrn Wood came to train with the Talshara, and the school produced hundreds who sacrificed their lives to keep the Horrors at bay as long as possible.

Even after the kaer was in place, the Talshara continued to teach, determined to remain vigilant in defense of the kaer's integrity. The Horrors eventually overwhelmed the kaer, but the defenders' valiant efforts allowed the elves time to enact the Ritual of Thorns. To this day, the blood elves honor the sacrifices of the Talshara ranelle and the warriors they trained.

After the Scourge, the Talshara resumed their duties as protectors of Blood Wood. In those first years, the Talshara repelled attacks from ork scorcher and troll raiders who assumed the Wood would be ripe for plunder. At the same time, other Talshara sacrificed their lives patrolling the ravaged remains of the Wood to destroy any remaining Horrors and their constructs, securing it so the Blood Warders could restore the forest.

Important Characters

While the Talshara have influence at Court because of their responsibilities, their position has been diminished of late. Never adept at politics, Talsharan soldiers rarely occupy more than one consortis position. Their current consortis is a commoner with strong Talshara ties. Erithander Talshara remains a trusted advisor to the queen, but the lapses of etiquette committed by his son Rhisiart prompted Alachia to appoint Rhisiart's scribe as consortis in his place. Most prominent ranelle members are not inclined to complain. Instead, they consider themselves lucky to have escaped with a commoner consortis and a mild case of royal disapproval.

Erithander Talshara

As leader of the Talshara, Erithander commands the respect and adoration of elves across Blood Wood. His three hundred years have added nothing more than streaks of silver to his raven-black hair. Like many other followers of martial Disciplines, Erithander believes in economy and efficiency. He does not speak often, but when he does he states his opinions clearly and concisely. His above-average height gives the impression of swooping down on those he interacts with. Combined with his observant gaze, this has earned him the nickname "Sir Griffin."

Born during the Scourge before the Ritual of Thorns, Erithander embraced his family's traditional Disciplines. Perhaps because he was taught



from the start to lead the ranelle and possessed the will to do so, Erithander emerged from the Ritual almost unchanged: still brutally honest, unflinchingly loyal, and with unimpeachable integrity.

While his body suffers constant agony, years of discipline have allowed Erithander to find a kind of unity with the plant spirit fused to his pattern. Few blood elves have found such peace in their transformation. Those who recognize Erithander's unique outlook believe his personal vision of Sa'mistishsa may have led him to this peace. It is likely his efforts to connect his heart and mind allowed him to reach a singular understanding, presenting an opportunity to incorporate the spirit's presence into his Path.

Early in life, Erithander followed the Warrior Discipline while serving as an exolasher. His family's dedication to martial Disciplines and his personal devotion to the queen led him to study the Archer, Beastmaster, and Swordmaster Disciplines in later stages of the Paths. The combined talents of these Disciplines make Erithander well suited to leading the ranelle charged with Blood Wood's defense.

While Erithander devotes much of his time and effort to the ranelle's welfare, he is also pursuing an ambitious private agenda. Always aware of the other ranelles' machinations to enhance their own prestige at Court, Erithander received a reminder the Talshara position is not unassailable. After the Jae'Helastris mounted a spurious attack against the Talshara with nothing but innuendo and rumors, the Queen asked Erithander to publicly refute the other ranelle's slander. This declaration, meant to chastise the Jae'Helastris rather than shame the Talshara, forced Erithander to face the possibility another ranelle might seek to become vanguard of the Wood's defense.

To ensure his beloved queen would never be forced to depend on inferior warriors—anyone not trained by the Talshara, in his opinion—Erithander has been consolidating power at Court by earning the loyalty of every minor ranelle in the Northern Reaches. His ultimate goal is to strengthen the ranelle's position such that responsibility for training and controlling the wardens would forever remain in Talshara hands. Other ranelle leaders and consortis may speculate about the purpose behind Erithander's recent activities, but even his most vocal opponents are hard pressed to prove the Talshara leader has ever been guilty of a vindictive or treacherous thought.

To further his strategy, Erithander is sponsoring youth from minor ranelles for training at the Grove of Thorns, the modern version of the Grove of Blades. Not only does this increase the number of wardens available to patrol the Wood's borders, but Erithander's generosity also earns the loyalty of the ranelles to which these young adepts belong.

The fact the Talshara, rather than the Blood Warders, direct the wardens' activities gives the ranelle another level of influence. Because the majority of exolashers belong to the Talshara, Erithander may offer assignment to that elite group as enticement for young blood elves to join his ranelle. Even though the queen actually chooses the exolashers, Alachia does listen to Erithander's recommendations for postings to her personal guard.

Attributes

DEX: 9 STR: 6 TOU: 6
PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Rhisiart Talshara

Following family tradition, Rhisiart spent years patrolling the Wood's northern borders. A handsome, likable young elf, Rhisiart passed the long months by reading a vast number of books and honing his conversational skills on his fellow wardens. When Queen Alachia began sending small parties out from Blood Wood to retrieve elven artifacts, she chose Rhisiart for one of these missions. Because he was Talshara, Alachia had no doubt he would remain loyal and knew his inquisitive nature would serve him well. She gave Rhisiart permission to travel with a scribe, suggesting the modest and intelligent Ilisa Willowby. Pleased with reports of their progress, Alachia sent the pair on increasingly sensitive missions.

As Rhisiart gained favor with the queen, Erithander considered sending his son to Court permanently. After his return from a mission to Throal, Alachia summoned Rhisiart to the palace. She found him a refreshing change from the normally practical, often dour Talshara. His ignorance of Court etiquette was a particular treat, as Alachia watched his exuberance outrage the languid courtiers and dignified consortis. As reward for his service, she seriously considered replacing the retiring consortis Kylanthra Landryss with Rhisiart.

The queen invited Rhisiart to a small dinner party in his honor. While she found his lack of sophistication amusing when it affected others, the extent of the young man's naivete became apparent as he made increasingly serious social blunders throughout the evening. His disgrace was complete when he mistook Alachia's comments on the Theran incursion at Lake Ban as an invitation to a friendly argument with the queen. As punishment for his failure to learn even the most basic Court etiquette, Alachia dismissed him from the dinner and banished him from Court until further notice. As a final humiliation, the queen chose Ilisa Willowby as consortis in his place.

Rhisiart is desperate to undo the damage to his reputation. He sent Alachia an apology in poetry every other day for a year after the fateful incident but received no indication she even read his pleas for forgiveness. The only bright spot is that his former scribe still considers him a friend and keeps him up to date on events in the Court.

Erithander was gravely disappointed with his son and is concerned Rhisiart's mistakes reflect badly on the ranelle. In hopes he might regain some favor, Rhisiart was put in charge of the garrison at Kaer Eidolon. There he can do little further damage to the Talsharan reputation and, if he can handle the threat presented by the Seekers of the Heart, may once more be able to curry favor with Queen Alachia.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5

PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 6

Ilisa Willowby

Born during the Scourge to two of Alachia's palace staff, Ilisa spent her formative years being groomed to assume a share of her father's responsibilities in the Royal Archives. While she showed great aptitude for organizing, caring for, and analyzing manuscripts, she longed to use her talents for more contemporary work. While she would never be allowed to petition the queen for a different position, Ilisa's parents nevertheless sympathized with her and set about arranging a new life for their daughter.

When Alachia suggested Ilisa should travel across Barsaive as scribe to Rhisiart Talshara, Ilisa briefly worried about the propriety of traveling alone with an unmarried man, but realized the opportunity she was being given and accepted the offer. Alachia expected Ilisa would temper Rhisiart's enthusiasm, while recording every pertinent detail of their travels. She also hoped some of the Court-bred scribe's manners would polish Rhisiart's rough edges.

When Rhisiart and Ilisa returned to Court after their mission to Throal, the queen instructed the pair to review their notes and construct a complete account of their adventure. In recognition of Ilisa's contribution, Alachia invited her to the dinner hosted in Rhisiart's honor. When the queen dismissed the young Talshara, Ilisa also stood to leave, assuming his transgression would be considered her failing as well. But Alachia made it clear the scribe was not responsible for her master's mistakes and elevated Ilisa to the consortis position meant for Rhisiart.

Ilisa harbors no illusions about her position. She knows Alachia named her as the Talshara consortis to shame Rhisiart for his lack of manners, as a warning to other ranelles, and a demonstration of Alachia's power. However, none of these have lessened Ilisa's desire to demonstrate her qualifications for the position, short lived as it may be. She draws on her education, talents, and travel experience to offer insightful advice on many issues.

Her performance has been a pleasant surprise to both Erithander and the other consortis, with her directness and insight even being complimented by Alachia on rare occasions. Ilisa does not frame her words with layers of subterfuge as is commonplace at Court. Instead, she uses a respectful candor the Queen seems to appreciate.

Ilisa owes loyalty to Rhisiart as she would to any member of the Talshara, but she also considers him her best friend and is determined to prepare him for the duties of consortis. She knows Alachia will eventually decide the point she made promoting Ilisa has been understood by her Court, which Ilisa believes will open up a second chance for Rhisiart. In the meantime, Ilisa serves to the best of her ability in hopes her life as a lowly scribe will remain behind her.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 4 TOU: 5
 PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

Permanent Settlements

Of the Talsharan settlements in the Northern Reaches, most outsiders only know of Araouane, the ranelle's home town. Members who reside near the Elven Court maintain homes in the village of Tallamnia. Their remaining population lives scattered in self-sufficient settlements across the northern territories.

Araouane

Araouane stands at the center of the Northern Reaches, about ten days northwest of the queen's palace and one day from the Wood's northern border. Named in memory of Erithander's first wife, who did not survive the Ritual of Thorns, Araouane is built around a small lake fed by quiet streams running down the gentle hills to the west. A thick wall of cultivated thorny bramble encircles the village.

The town's three thousand residents live on hills and wooded land surrounding the lake. Most dwell in simple, well-designed huts on the ground. Merchants and wealthier inhabitants live in homes formed from the interwoven branches of living trees.

In addition to making each tree-home unique, artisans have guided the growth of larger boughs to form a system of raised pathways. These bridges across the streams allow the elves to travel from building to building without setting foot on the ground. Flowering vines and hanging gardens bloom everywhere, creating a profusion of color and heady scent.

The Talshara manor is on the crown of the largest hill. Woven from the branches of three huge trees, the manor is a sprawling jumble of chambers, hallways, stairs and balconies. Many areas overlook a small amphitheater at the center of the tree. Plays, musical performances, and stage combat are performed here for the ranelle's lord, his family, and invited guests. Though at first glance the manor appears hastily thrown together, the house's layout allows for easy passage from any part of the manor to another.

The manor is the work of Telia Vestany, an Elementalist known for her skill with wood. During the Scourge, Vestany watched the Talshara train adept and non-adept elves from any ranelle. That training strengthened the other ranelles by widening their experience, convincing Vestany her own ranelle could benefit from such cross-training. She offered to design a new home for the Talshara after the Scourge if, in return, Erithander agreed to establish an artists' community in Araouane in cooperation with the Daevenar ranelle.

This small community, Named Beálte Astendar, rotates accomplished artists-in-residence every seven years who teach interested students from any ranelle. The students pay nothing for these classes but leave their best works with the village when they move on. Some students have remained

for decades, studying with each new instructor as they arrive. Nearly every instructor leaves the school with a promising apprentice. Vestany was first to teach at Beálte Astendar, a class of twenty students. Upon her death, these students honored her memory by carrying the knowledge of her unique and intricate style of wood weaving to every corner of Blood Wood, and some of her teachings have spread to other parts of Barsaive.

True earth and orichalcum mining, along with the industries necessary to distribute them, serves as the main occupation for nearly half of Araouane's population. The works produced by the students at Beálte Astendar also fetch a good price elsewhere in the Wood and occasionally in lands to the north and south. Araouane is considered wealthy, but the village is less prosperous than most Carithasca villages in the Southern Fringe.

The Grove of Thorns

Approximately two hours' walk south of Araouane lies the Grove of Thorns. This complex of winding paths, small bungalows, and narrow clearings serves as home to Blood Wood's war college, run and staffed by members of the Talshara ranelle.

The Grove of Thorns maintains nearly all the traditions established centuries ago by the Grove of Blades, training adepts in the Swordmaster, Warrior, Archer, and Scout Disciplines. It also provides combat training for non-adepts. The main difference between the two schools is the Grove of Blades accepted far more non-elf students. The Ritual of Thorns prompted the elves to rename their war college and limit the admission of outsiders to align with Queen Alachia's edicts. Despite their rarity, Unprotected students receive the same treatment as their blood elf fellows, with none of the traditional disdain for other Namegivers.

Erithander maintains an active role by choosing staff and students for the Grove of Thorns. He prefers a five-to-one ratio of students to teachers and limits the Grove to only ten to fifteen instructors. The Talshara leader also gently encourages the students to follow his Sa'mistishsa view of the Paths and strive for Ninth Circle in each Discipline they follow. The full course of training at the Grove of Thorns takes ten years to complete, another reason few non-blood elves apply.

The Grove of Thorns focuses on Discipline training, but some instructors also teach large- and small-scale tactics. Survival, scouting, handling of messenger birds, and other practical skills are offered to round out each student's education. These skills are especially useful to any who will live out their lives in Blood Wood. Every blood elf adept who graduates from the Grove of Thorns must serve as a warden for twenty years. Students with higher ambitions may pursue specialized training with one or more instructors.

Adventure Idea

Erithander maintains a high degree of pride in the curriculum taught at the Grove of Thorns. He believes his students receive the best training in Barsaive and is willing to do anything to prove it. With special approval from the queen, Erithander has invited groups of adepts to participate in war games against the Grove's most promising students. These games can take multiple forms to fulfill a gamemaster's needs.

Option 1

The competition is carried out in several rounds, with the group competing against the blood elves to complete various tasks: hunting, navigation, combat, and infiltration. The teams generate points based on how successful they are in each round and the team with the highest total deciding the winner.

Option 2

The group is put in direct opposition to the blood elf team, with the 'last man standing' being declared the winner. The group must assault a Talsharan defense outpost while the blood elf students defend it.

Tallamnia

This village is located at the northernmost point of the Elven Court region and serves as the local home of the Talshara ranelle. Most of Tallamnia's residents are exolashers and wardens. The Talshara consortis and Blood Warders also live there. Tallamnia features a large training camp where the exolashers and wardens practice their combat skills. Outside of Araouane and the Grove of Thorns, this camp is the largest center of combat training in the Wood, and many exolashers train younger adepts here.

Goro'imri

Though not controlled by the Talshara, the residents of Goro'imri rely on the ranelle's generosity to defend their village, since Queen Alachia does not extend her protection or attention to the settlement. Despite the Queen's attitude, off-duty wardens from the nearby outpost have established an unofficial schedule for patrolling the borders beyond Goro'imri. As further evidence of their peaceful intent, the wardens accept a limited amount of trade in return for providing basic training to the village's young adepts. Lord Erithander does not encourage this exchange but is pleased to know his wardens are keeping a close eye on a potential threat.

Goro'imri's Name is a Sperethiel word meaning, "Are we not outsiders?" This was not chosen deliberately but established through repetition. The village grew from the camp of an elf Troubadour who refused to believe the Ritual of Thorns had destroyed everything good in the residents of Blood Wood. Rommanarel Oakfast accepted the blood elves unconditionally, and they eventually accepted her friendship in return.

To date, only a few blood elves have disobeyed their queen's edict against contact with outsiders and chosen to share their lives with Rommanarel. Tales of this unique place have slowly spread outside the Wood, attracting those who were no longer welcome in other places. A ceremony has since developed to welcome travelers, during which the phrase "are we not outsiders" is spoken in the visitors' native tongue.

Those who reside in Goro'imri are proof that tolerance and understanding make it possible for all Namegiver races to live in harmony. The intricate dwarf stonecraft, utilitarian troll homes, ork tents, elven wood-weaving, and simple human structures are individually diverse yet create a pleasing picture when viewed together. In the same way, the variety of Namegivers creates an amicable whole. Each child born in the village plays and learns with children of other Namegiver races, strengthening the character of Goro'imri's approximately one hundred inhabitants.

Like other settlements of Blood Wood, the people of Goro'imri survive through carefully managed hunting, gathering, and gardening. In the evenings, the villagers often gather to share tales and legends of their different cultures. This offers a chance for the residents to learn about their neighbors' traditions and beliefs, fostering understanding of similarities and differences. Tempers still flare into arguments, but most are quickly forgotten. The stupidity of grudges would not serve this delicately balanced community.

Rommanarel Oakfast

An Unprotected elf Troubadour, Rommanarel came to Blood Wood about sixty years ago. She does not consider herself Goro'imri's leader, but the inhabitants rely on her wisdom and experience anyway. Rommanarel believes in the power of acceptance to change the world's attitude toward the blood elves and feels her little village proves such change is possible beyond its borders. She has made overtures to the Elven Court to gain an audience with Queen Alachia. Many believe Rommanarel seeks to receive an official sanction for Goro'imri, while others think she only wishes to guarantee peace for her village.

Though Alachia refuses to see her, Oakfast recently observed a new phenomenon she believes is compelling enough to catch the queen's attention. Children born to blood elves who do not undergo the Ritual of Thorns suffer an acute restlessness in their mid-twenties. This discomfort manifests as a compulsion to leave Blood Wood, a desire stronger and more deeply felt than even the most serious case of wanderlust.

Those who have given in to this compulsion and traveled away from the Wood report an overwhelming sense of relief within three days' travel from the forest borders. Those who refuse to leave their loved ones grow more irritable, eventually appearing to be driven almost insane by a presence they cannot see or explain. Rommanarel fears the Ritual of Thorns has exacted a heavier price than anyone suspected.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5
 PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

The Hidden Truth of Goro'imri

Alachia is aware of the affliction Rommanarel has discovered. Concern over the revulsion of living in the Wood was raised by Kethos Escalanas several years ago. He noticed the Unprotected children of blood elves experienced a wanderlust that makes them desperate to leave the Wood. Looking into the matter further, Kethos discovered the True patterns of all newborn blood elves have a natural aversion to Blood Wood's pattern. He traced the cause to a modification made to the Personal Ritual; a suggestion put forward by Preystia Tales during the Scourge that Kethos had explicitly rejected.

Wood Longing, as it has come to be known, is the feeling all blood elves are burdened with after leaving Blood Wood for extended periods of time (see Game Information, pg. 254). It was designed by Preystia to ensure the population remains within the Wood's borders and continues to fuel its magical wards. Kethos opposed the use of this curse, but Alachia instructed the Warders to integrate this longing into the Personal Ritual without his knowledge. Upon learning Alachia had secretly overruled him, Kethos became furiously opposed to continuing the practice.

Kethos begged Alachia to see that trapping the elven people through the Personal Ritual would be unnecessary if the dangers of exodus could be eliminated. His research into healing the Wood's corruption would undoubtedly produce a solution and he advised her to immediately end further use of the Personal Ritual on Unprotected elves. The younger generation may be driven from Blood Wood for a time but would certainly return to their loyal service once the corruption was purged from the forest.

The queen dismissed Kethos for his unwillingness to protect her power, banishing him from Court, and promoted Preystia Tales to Chief Warden in his place. Only the most senior Warders know of this terrible truth, a secret Alachia would do anything to keep hidden.

Current Activities

Erithander has focused most of his recent attention on securing the family legacy. While he still believes Rhisiart has a role to play, the talent and loyalty shown by Ilisa Willowby has given Erithander hope for the ranelle's future. The core of Talsharan influence has always centered around its exolasher appointees, who are the personal bodyguards of the Queen and her advisors. Combined with their high representation among the wardens, the Talshara maintains the largest network of blood elves across Blood Wood. If a commoner like Ilisa can be trusted as the Talshara voice at Court, it stands to reason such loyalty could be used elsewhere.

To this end, Erithander has accepted an unprecedented number of non-Talshara candidates to the Grove of Thorns. He intends to personally groom these blood elves into the next generation of military leaders who will owe any power they attain to the Talshara ranelle.

Distraught by his continued banishment, Rhisiart spends most of his time lamenting the mistakes of his last visit to the Elven Court some years ago. He is desperate to repair his reputation with Queen Alachia and is concerned her mood will never turn back in his favor without his intervention.

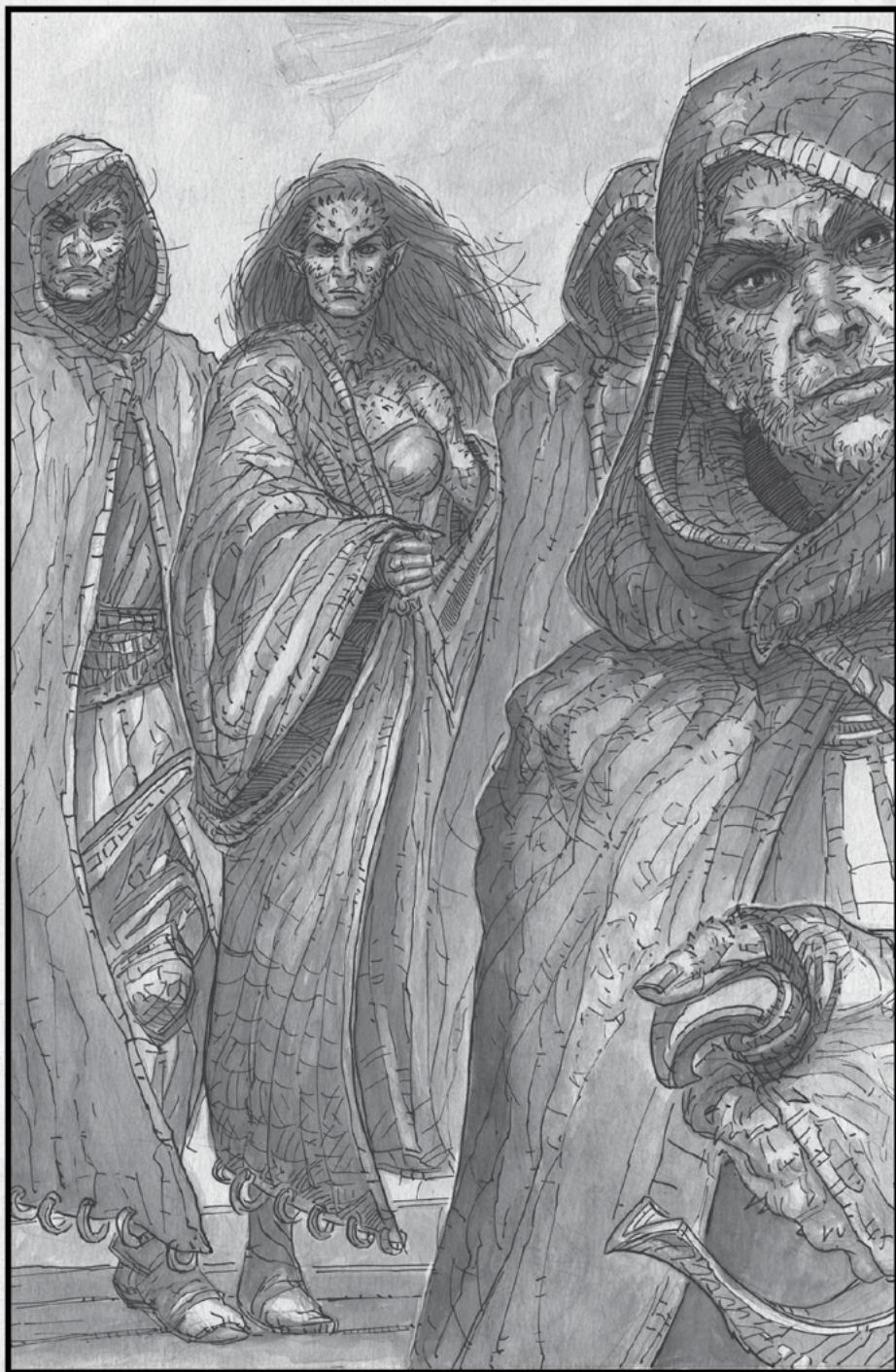
The quickest path Rhisiart believes will serve this goal is to drive the Seekers of the Heart from Kaer Eidolon. Removing this threat to Alachia's power from the fortress would go a long way to proving he is worthy to represent his ranelle as consortis. Thus far, Rhisiart has found the Seekers an elusive foe. Magistrate Ritizk has been less than helpful in his pursuit of the Seekers, prompting Rhisiart to believe the t'skrang may be working against him. However, Rhisiart's study of Court etiquette has taught him not to accuse a "superior" of such things without proof.

Rhisiart's friendship with Ilisa has allowed him to keep a close eye on what magical artifacts Alachia is currently searching for. Hoping that he may find something of significance to help turn her opinion in his favor, Rhisiart continues to make use of outside contacts he made while traveling the lands of Barsaive. He has even used his personal wealth to hire adventures to track down rumors of these artifacts.

Gamemasters may use Rhisiart's desperation to lead the group into a Horror tainted kaer, a trap by other interested parties, or to carry out a simple fetch quest. These artifacts are often of little significance to Alachia or have already been plundered by other adventures.

Ilisa knows her years as consortis are numbered. It is only a matter of time before Alachia promotes Rhisiart to his rightful place. In preparation, she has begun using her influence to create a situation where both Rhisiart and she can serve as consortis at the same time. Ilisa believes if the Carithasca are successful in convincing the Queen to open Blood Wood's borders, they would no longer need two consortis. Such a drastic change in policy would also require increased border patrols, making the Talshara ranelle a likely recipient of the vacant consortis seat.

Ilisa has demonstrated she is a capable voice at Court and believes Erithander would reward her loyalty by allowing her to serve alongside Rhisiart. To make this dream a reality, Ilisa uses her position to subtly support the Carithasca agenda. She has, however, made sure the more forceful methods of Gealleon Carithasca draw the attention of other Court members whenever this issue is discussed.





FIRST CONTACT

*From the Diary of Gerindal Mikul, First Throalic Ambassador to Sereatha,
Purchased in the Markets of Caelshara*

Captain Fikenzie called me to the deck. I had been below for most of the morning, my stomach uneasy after passing through the dust storm. I grudgingly left my quarters to see why I was being summoned. My queasiness left me, replaced with the cold chill gained prior to a battle. There were elves on our deck.

There were six of them, four men and two women. All save one wore blood red cloaks that marked them as Knights of the Crimson Spire. The sixth wore fine regalia that marked her a cut above the rest. She may have been one of their elders, one of the five consortis I had heard lead their people. All six were armed with elegant steel and curved bows. I cursed the captain for not calling me sooner.

I ignored the cold sweat dripping down my back and approached with a smile. I went directly to their apparent leader, a hand outstretched. Immediately, two of the Knights moved to intercept. But the woman said something in Sperethiel. It took my brain a moment to consider the word and translate it to Throalic. She had told them to wait. I supposed that would have to be enough for now.

"Err, yes, greetings," I responded in Throalic. Pushing other thoughts aside and attempting to think back to my training, "I am Ambassador Gerindal of House Mikul of Throal. We were not expecting an escort. Who do I have the pleasure of addressing?"

The elven woman looked at my hand but made no move to take it. She responded in a lightly accented version of my native tongue, "I am consortis Milde, of the Escalanas. You have a pallor about you. Are you feeling quite well?"

It seemed a rude question, but I brushed it aside. Perhaps it was just how her kind greeted one another. My arm was still suspended between us and was beginning to grow sore. "Ah, yes. I will be fine, I'm sure. We hit a storm late last evening. I'm afraid the turbulence of the experience has gotten to me. Once I can set my feet on firm earth I am sure I will recover quickly."

"A storm?" the woman quirked a brow, "Over the Wastes? It is fortunate then your little fleet remains in the sky." She flashed a look of distaste and turned away. I gave up on my attempt at a handshake.

She walked toward the edge of our vessel and I could see the two small drakkar-sized vessels on which the elves must have arrived. Each of the vessels held another six cloaked knights. While the ships were sized similarly to troll longboats, their design had clearly been influenced by elven riverboats. Their hulls were ornately carved, each figurehead was exquisite; one an ornate rose, the other a finely regaled horse. While the ships were of fine construction and well maintained, even I, a layman, could tell their rigging seemed overly complex. The furnishings, while fashionable, had long ago been outdated in Barsaivian designs.

Before I could think of a kind word, consortis Milde spoke again, "As we mention your fleet, High Steward Iolyn allowed Throal to send one ambassador with honor guard. This is eight ships, each packed with fire cannon. Do you march to war with the entire *Gwydenro*?"

My head throbbed. Clearly this consortis was not interested in starting off on a pleasant footing. I held up my palms. "War? No! Of course not. We have no dispute with you or your people. These eight ships are a standard guard for such an important mission. I assure you, if we were on a war footing this fleet would look far different."

Milde turned back to me. I thought I saw contempt in her eyes, but if it had been there, she covered it with a condescending smile. "The Court of Sereatha expects you to have a right-hand, and perhaps as many as a dozen other nobles to accompany you. Even I, a consortis of Sereatha, come to you with just five guard. You must send these other ships away."

My brow furrowed, and I looked at the captain. He spoke, directly addressing Milde. Again, I cursed him for his lack of tact, "Ma'am, er... consortis... woman." He tugged a forelock absently as a poor show of respect. "We cannot send



any of our ships back. The storms in the Wastes have grown worse behind us. We wouldn't be able to make such a journey. We require time in a harbor to resupply and wait out the weather if we are to return the way we came."

Milde sighed, "The Wastes are an affliction, to be sure. Do not pass through that land of death. Travel east, to Clogwynn. We will send one of our own vessels to accompany you and notify the Trisrora of your arrival. This ship, *Upandal's Mercy*, is it? It may continue on with us."

My heart lodged in my throat. How could I refuse this woman her demand? I would have to reduce my guard or risk an international incident. Worse, I would have to send my fleet where none in Throal would be prepared to look. Our intelligence was enough to know that the Western Kingdoms and Blood Wood had cut their contact and turned Clogwynn into a backwater. But I could see no other option. I did as the consortis bade. This land was hers, and I would have to meet her expectations if I was to make any headway at all.

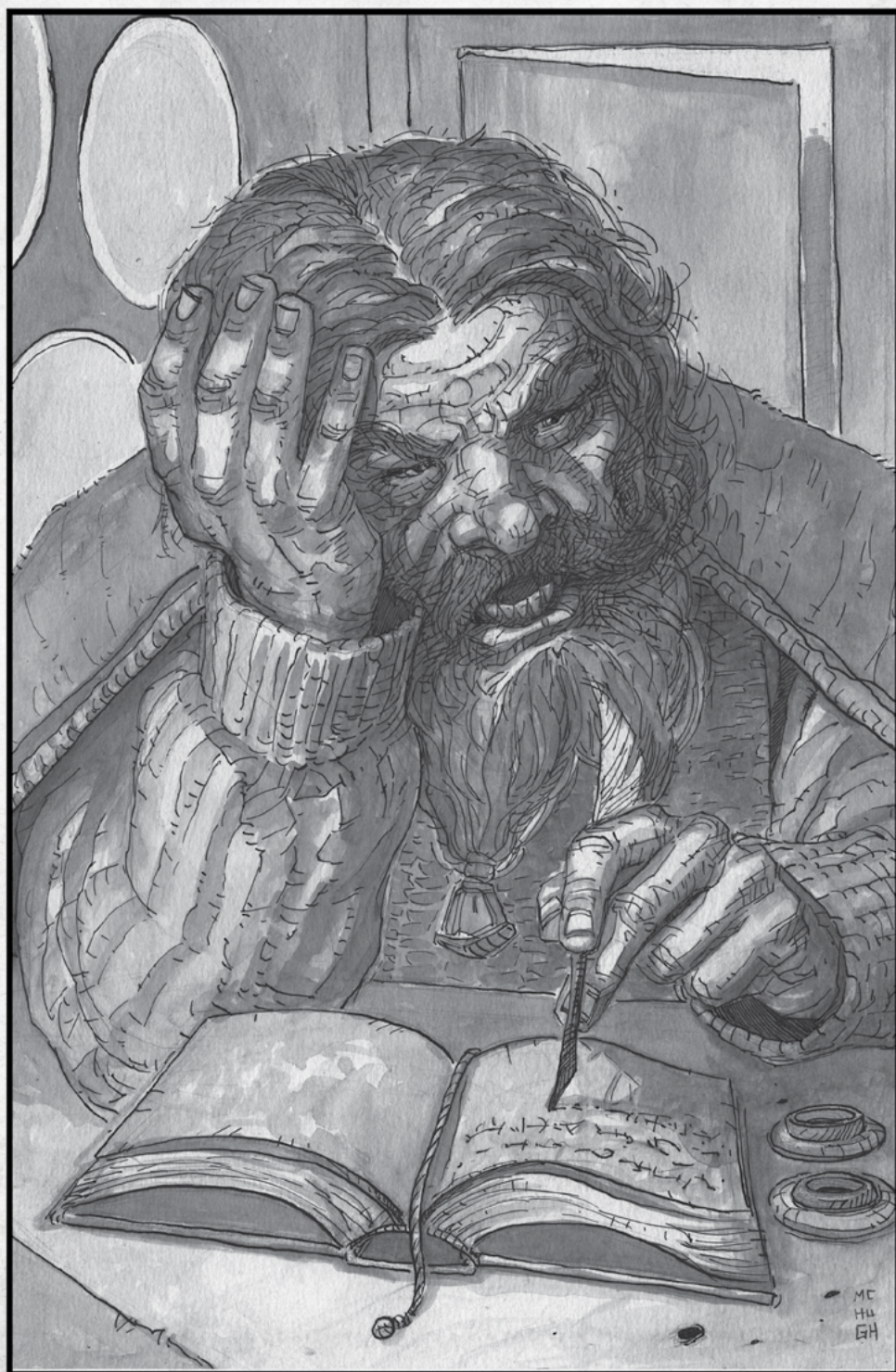
I told Captain Fikenzie to spread the word and get the fleet its orders as quickly as possible. I thought him capable of that, at least. Once the work had been delegated, I fell into the pilot's chair on deck, the morning exchange leaving me exhausted. The elven delegation was still standing on the starboard side of our vessel. Milde's eyes never strayed from me. Her gaze unsettled me, boring into me as I wondered what she was seeking.

Within an hour the rest of the fleet had departed, heading east with one of the Sereathan craft. Only then did the consortis approach me again, "Tell me more of the storm. Did you come into the contact with the varju? What equipment did your people use to protect themselves?"

The barrage of questions caused my deck chair to suddenly feel uncomfortable. I met her gaze as best I could, though I felt sweat come unbidden to my brow, "Varju? I'm sorry, I do not know this word. It was a simple sandstorm. The crew has experienced the like near the Badlands many times."

Milde frowned and said a clipped phrase in Sperethiel to one of her guard. She had spoken quickly, and my mind spun to translate it. Before I could work out the details she spoke to me





again in Throalic, "What protections did you and the captain take from this... sandstorm then?"

I waved a hand toward the captain while my sluggish head continued working away at the Sperethiel. Fikenzie took his cue and began explaining the procedure, "Covering up is every sailor's first action. The whipping sand can rend exposed skin to the bone in seconds, so our crew moves to protect themselves before securing their vessels. When it comes to the rigging, we need to furl..."

"You were covered then? Head to toe before the clouds encroached?" Milde interrupted, apparently uninterested in the other minutiae.

The captain seemed uncomfortable for a moment, looking to me for assurance, but my face remained a congenial mask as I continued working on the Sperethiel. Fikenzie coughed, then spoke. "Well, yes. All of my crew acted in accordance with regulation. The ambassador did not have the equipment, but we kept him below as much as possible. He seems to have only suffered from a little air sickness..."

Milde cut in again, turning back to me, "So you, diplomat, were on deck in the heart of the storm?"

Annoyed, I shrugged. The elven words sounded different from these western folk. She had said something about a disease risk, something about the captain and the nobleman. I could not glean any more with my head throbbing as it was.

Milde turned back to the captain, "You will have to take charge of the vessel. Your nobleman is suffering from varju poisoning. Over the heart of the Wastes the substance is concentrated and toxic. We should turn away from Sereatha and set course for Aiqua. We can leave him there, then continue on. You will represent Throal when we arrive in Sereatha."

I let out a squeak of protest but found my words had left me. The captain looked wide eyed at me, but my vision blurred. I couldn't see clearly, but I was sure I could see a smile spreading on his face before all went dark and I collapsed.

I write this entry from my quarters. I have been told I've slept for days. My brown beard has turned charcoal gray and my head still throbs. I feel as though I am recovering, but neither the consortis nor my feckless captain seem willing to meet with me. The crew slides my rations through the door like I am some common animal. They think I do not know, but I have heard some of the crew speaking. They mean to leave me at a horrid place called "the Hospital of the Damned."

What has this witch done to me!? This cannot be right! If the crew abandons me for accolades, I will not let Fikenzie get away with it. I will take my leave of their hospital and return to the Kingdom to reveal their treachery!

I have heard the call, above and below. The vessel is descending. They will come for me soon. I must plan my escape.





THE WESTERN KINGDOMS

The Western Kingdoms is the name of a large region northwest of Barsaive. The kingdoms hug the Bwydvir, a large sea to the northwest. To the east lie the rocky crags of the Grand Cataracts. The southern and western borders are marked by the desolation known as the Wastes.

Between these inhospitable locales, tens of thousands of Namegivers live out their lives in individual kingdoms known as *gerryth*. These gerryth are typically ruled by a single noble elf family (a ranelle). Ideally, the ranelle gathers the local resources and distributes them in a fashion that both meets obligations and benefits the kingdom. A small percentage is always paid as tax to the gerryth's liege, some may be provided to vassal gerryth in need, and the rest is reinvested in the local kingdom's infrastructure.

Most gerryth are modest in size, with the local king's influence extending from a trading town out to a handful of tiny farming villages. Smaller and less influential kingdoms swear fealty to more powerful neighbors. The stronger kingdom vows to protect the smaller in exchange for resources and manpower. This system of fealty is used throughout the land creating a complex web of loyalties and obligation. These unified Kingdoms refer to themselves as the Gwydenro, or "the Heartland" in Throalic. A single gerryth could be as small as a village of one hundred Namegivers led from a manor-house. The most influential gerryth is Sereatha, the City of Spires. Every kingdom in the Gwydenro eventually owes their fealty to Sereatha.

Sereatha is frequently spoken of in the legends of Barsaive as a perfect and opulent land far to the west. While this may once have been true, Sereatha suffered greatly during the Scourge. Most of the spires for which the city is known have fallen but its people emerged without the permanent scars borne by those who underwent the Ritual of Thorns. Within the city, the web of oaths and obligations becomes increasingly complex. Political power is spread between the five consortis who lead the city and each consortis has their own goals, allies, and desires. The consortis choose one from among their number to act as a High Steward who is expected to speak for the Gwydenro as a whole.

Only a member of the ranelles of the Western Kingdoms may officially rule a kingdom and a person's birth frequently determines the trajectory of their life. A strong enough personality, or a devout enough follower of the Wheel, may manage to buck tradition and climb the social order, but such exceptions are rare among the elven population and nearly unheard of with regards to other Namegivers.

The brutal storms of the Wastes have been calming in recent years, the winds from the sea pushing the worst of the storms inland to the southeast. The people of the Gwydenro explore further into these blasted lands every year. The eagerness of expeditions looking to discover lost ruins is tempered by the toxic soot and other hazards of the region, natural and unnatural.

The Western Kingdoms is a region on the mend. With ancient beauty and extravagance replaced by intrigue and excavation, it is a land of opportunity for those bold enough to face the challenge.

THE HISTORY OF THE WESTERN KINGDOMS

As told by Sereathan Troubadour Maeliona Trisrora

The Founding Ranelles

The people of the Gwydenro have a history as ancient and complex as that of Wyrn Wood. While our histories are often shared, the people of the Western Kingdoms grew into their own without knowing of the Wyrn Wood's beauty and grace. Instead of the Passion-created Oak Heart, we owe our origins to the three Founding Ranelles.

The first of these were the Escalanas. They approached from the sea and the setting sun. They brought the enlightenment of the Wheel and were driven to discover more. The second, the Fensalor, brought martial knowledge and force of arms. Finally, the Trisrora, overland travelers from the direction of the dawn who had learned much of society from those they had passed. Hundreds of miles northwest of Wyrn Wood, these three families met.

When the Escalanas made landfall, their family split to find the truths that had brought them across the Bwydvir to the shores of the bay Tyrnvir. While many moved inland, others stayed behind and began construction of a permanent home. Before long, an army of Fensalor arrived and challenged the Escalanas. The Fensalor claimed the coast was under their protection and only those born within sight of the sea could remain. The Escalanas refused to leave, arguing that all intelligent life should work together and seek the world's greater truths. The Fensalor remained unmoved.

As the Fensalor prepared to push the Escalanas into the sea, the Trisrora made their appearance. The Trisrora were shocked to find elves on the shore of the Bwydvir and were compelled to intervene. The Trisrora spoke of the other cultures and Namegivers they had discovered throughout the land. They spoke of t'skrang and dwarves. They spoke of the exotic and distant east. They shared their journals and legends and pointed out the rarity of elves. With this evidence of kinship, the Fensalor were calmed, and the three families sought to work in harmony.

Together, the three developed a plan for a city to be built near the shore, high atop the hills. The Trisrora would see to the city's infrastructure, the Fensalor would see to the city's defense, and the Escalanas would see to the city's enlightenment. This city would grow to become Sereatha, the City of

Spires and, as it struggled to its feet, the families spread their influence across the land.

They battled fearsome barbarians and made a safe haven in which all elves could flourish. They established the tradition of Lew Teyrn and the founding of gerryth, small and self-sufficient kingdoms vowed to support one another. In these ancient times, each day brought its own battles. Our people were growing, but their struggle was only to survive, and their spirits were left unfulfilled. They cast about for enlightenment, looking for beauty in their dangerous world.

Eventually, news of Wyrn Wood and the transcendent Queen Melyora arrived in Sereatha. The lost Escalanas had found purpose in the Wood. Many elves left the City of Spires on a pilgrimage to meet with this queen of the forest. After the perilous journey, many chose to stay in the queen's warm embrace. Whether the travelers stayed in the Wyrn Wood or returned to the austere construction of Sereatha, it was agreed that the queen was a being of beauty and love. All in Sereatha recognized her power and bowed to their new liege.

In Service to the Wood

To better serve their distant Queen, her subjects to the west chose to come together under the shared banner of her love. Combined, their kingdoms would be known as the Gwydenro, the Queen's Heartland. The ranelles all swore fealty to Sereatha and the city organized its leadership into a court, in homage to Melyora's efforts. This court would be led by an appointed High Steward who would be the mouthpiece of the Queen in her absence.

A favored servant named Harwyn underwent the journey to Wyrn Wood and delivered these plans and proclamations. Melyora, in her brilliance, immediately appointed Harwyn the first High Steward and granted him rulership of the City of Spires. The queen was so pleased by the actions of her faithful subjects that she showered Harwyn with gifts. She provided her new right hand with a hundred of her best soldiers and a hundred and one of her best artisans. The soldiers and the Steward would establish the Knights of the Crimson Spire. The artisans would come to be known as the Order of the Amethyst Spire. Both organizations have survived the Scourge, and still serve in Sereatha.

The Tragedy of Loss, The Ecstasy of Love

For generations the reach of our people expanded. More gerryth embraced the love of our queen and the Gwydenro became a land where even those of lowest birth could grow and prosper. Alas, this time of love and prosperity could not last forever. A dragon sought to ruin our people. All know of Alamaise and how he slew Queen Dallia. Our beloved queen would have been beyond the beast's reach had it not been for Shosara's heresy, but that is a story for another day. Instead, it is my sad duty, to tell you how our people wept at the loss of their queen.

For a year and a day, the people of the Gwydenro mourned. The High Steward could not let his people suffer longer. He sent a proclamation across the land that there would be a contest. *Cariad Castald*, the Contest of Love, would seek the favor of the Passions. The winner of the contest would have the Passions' grace with them as well as the hearts and minds of the Gwydenro. The hero would journey to Wyrn Wood and beseech Oak Heart for aid on behalf of the entire elven race.

Hundreds of elves from across the Gwydenro competed. One such elf was a maiden named Failla. Her original kingdom had been lost in war. She had lost everything and suffered terribly during her life, but the Passions saw something in her. She won the contest and became Annwyl, the Beloved. Before the year was out, she had made the pilgrimage to Wyrn Wood. Her plea for aid was answered and she received Oak Heart's blessing. The Western Kingdoms cheered as Failla ascended to the Rose Throne.

Failla ruled justly. She punished Shosara for their transgressions and kept her people safe. There were those that were discontent, but it was a hard time and it called for a stern queen. While she made difficult decisions, she ensured that those around her would not seek to abuse their power. She created the consortis and the people of Sereatha adopted the practice, choosing five consortis to lead the local Court. These five would choose amongst themselves and appoint their High Steward to commune with the Queen. One representative from each of the Founding Ranelles would serve in this way, as would the head of the Knights of the Crimson Spire. The final consortis would be the year's Annwyl, a champion of the Contest of Love, to represent the common folk.

The Rise and Fall of Alachia

The Court continued to flourish and expand. Century after century our people grew, only challenged by the coming of the Therans and the Orichalcum Wars. The Orichalcum Wars dragged on as the world battled for resources. This ongoing struggle pushed our people into a malaise not felt since their time without a queen. The sitting queen, Liara, ruled with an iron fist. She was a well-regarded commander on the battlefield, but she could not bring the beauty and love that every elf desperately needed to feel in their hearts.

It was with muted excitement and an unspoken hope that the people of Sereatha held the annual *Cariad Castald*. Alachia, an unknown woman from a distant gerryth, surprised everyone. She drove the people to tears and, in a swell of public opinion, became their Annwyl. When offered her position amongst the consortis, she tearfully rejected the honor her people wished to bestow upon her. She spoke to the adoring crowd and told them that, as long the people of the Gwydenro felt melancholy in their hearts, there could be no Annwyl. She vowed instead to travel to Wyrn Wood and present herself before Oak Heart and the Queen. She would represent the western elves at Court and would not rest until the hopelessness had faded into a distant memory.

Alachia proved as good as her word and the strain of the war shifted away from the Gwydenro. As beauty returned to their land, Alachia would return year after year to compete in Cariad Castald. She continued to win the position of Annwyl but always turned down the role of consortis, claiming that she did far more for her people in the Court of Wyrn Wood. Though the local Annwyl's seat remained officially empty, all amongst the consortis continued to seek out Alachia's wisdom.

Eventually, Sereatha's Annwyl followed in Failla's footsteps. None could have foreseen Liara's tragic disappearance, and few would have dared hope that the Court of Wyrn Wood would discover Alachia's true lineage as the ancient heir to Failla's dynasty. Queen Alachia took her place on the Rose Throne and returned hope to our people. She ruled justly and guided our people in the dark times that led to the Scourge.

Once we were all in our isolation, however, Alachia fell to corruption. In all the ways that matter, our queen died the day she betrayed her people and committed herself to the Ritual of Thorns.

Alachia's Lineage

There are historians amongst the Learners' Guild who have trouble believing Alachia, a minor citizen from an unknown gerryth, could possibly be related to the distant Queen Failla. They contend that any of Failla's lineage would have been granted attention and influence amongst the nobles of the Western Kingdoms. How then, could an entire spur of her family tree remain lost for centuries?

Such beliefs were dismissed as conspiracies and radicalism before the Scourge. Since the Ritual of Thorns and the Queen's apparent madness, however, this claim has gained more credence. The current High Steward seems particularly interested in Alachia's unknown past as well as the Cariad Castald in which she first gained favor. So far, precious few facts from this time have been uncovered.

The Gwydenro and the Scourge

As the prospect of the Scourge approached, the people of Sereatha faced their first crisis of faith. The Therans offered the Rites of Protection and Passage, but at a terrible cost. The Theran rites were outlawed by Queen Alachia, but what could be done in their stead? From Wyrn Wood we heard only silence on the matter for decades. Many gerryth, such as those of Roheline Wood, turned away from their queen and chose to join the Therans, beginning construction on their kaers. Their oaths of fealty were broken and they were left to go their own way.

As the years wore on, the number of loyal gerryth dwindled. Somehow, an incomplete version of the Rites of Protection and Passage fell into the hands of the council. With this unauthorized copy in hand, Thera was unable to make its exorbitant demands. The council sent word of this document's possible

use to their queen. Again, the people heard nothing. As the Scourge drew ever nearer, many Namegivers of the Gwydenro chose to take Wyrn Wood's silence as tacit approval to use the document and began work on their own kaers and citadels.

Sereatha refused to abandon its queen and use the potentially illegal Theran documents. For their patience, they were blessed with a final decree from Alachia. She informed her true and loyal subjects that she had devised a protection for them based on those she would use for Wyrn Wood. A mixture of True Earth and True Wood would allow for the people of Sereatha to survive underground. The elves of Sereatha rushed to complete the project before the coming ruin.

The project was finished, but at great cost. Even buried away the people of Sereatha heard calamitous sounds all around them. I was born during these dark times and remember the constant feeling of pressure. In our hearts, we felt that any moment our home could fall. Indeed, many lost all hope beneath the earth and took their own lives from the strain. We died of hopelessness in droves, but we were again to be saved by an Annwyl.

The Sealing of Sereatha

Few in Sereatha question the nature of their survival during the Scourge. However, the fate of Wyrn Wood makes it clear the protective spells given to them were incomplete. The storms, quakes, and mysterious deaths reported by those who took shelter beneath Sereatha do not match the reports from other kaers in the region. Those who have studied tales of Sereatha during the Scourge have come to the same conclusion: a powerful Horror must have been targeting Sereatha directly. Yet, for some reason, this unknown entity failed to crack the flawed protections and the people of Sereatha survived. Perhaps it was luck that kept the people safe, or perhaps instead the Horror found easier prey elsewhere.

Rebuilding the Gwydenro

The Cariad Castald continued in our time of isolation. Our elemental clocks had stopped, but the storms above remained unrelenting. None dared leave the safety of their underground home until Maldwyn won the role of Annwyl. Maldwyn refused the role of consortis and instead demanded a seafaring vessel and a crew of two dozen: one dozen old hands who had sailed before the Scourge and one dozen apprentices to gain the experience required in a brave new world. Maldwyn intended to sail the sea of Bwydvir and discover if the surface was truly safe.

We all believed our brave Annwyl would perish but, after two hundred days, he returned triumphant. His crew of twenty-four had been reduced to four stalwart companions and their vessel was held together with little more than loving words, but they were alive. A swell of adoration saw him chosen as Annwyl time and again and he accepted the role of consortis. His bravery

and intellect caused the council to name him High Steward, where he reigned for decades. His first act as High Steward was to open the doors to the surface.

Our City of Spires lay in ruins, less than a dozen gleaming peaks standing where once there had been hundreds. The rolling hills had been torn asunder and massive cliffs isolated what remained of our city from the rest of the Gwydenro. The very earth had failed around us, but the rites protecting our shelter had held firm and we had survived.

Maldwyn led our people through these trying times and focused on rediscovering as many gerryth as possible. Our people discovered the tragedy of the Wastes and wept at the loss of life it represented. We contacted the Shosarans and Maldwyn brokered a temporary forgiveness so that we might work together to contact distant Wyrn Wood.

Each year the Knights of the Crimson spire would send a unit of their best in an attempt to contact Wyrn Wood. On the twentieth of these journeys, a sole survivor returned with the terrible news of Blood Wood and of the fall of Queen Alachia.

I was still young, but I remember the hurt of those days. Everything grew dark and tasteless again, like the years underground. Those that survived this shock knew the Gwydenro could not follow the path of their queen. For the first time in a millennium, the Gwydenro would have to find its own way.

A Final Hope

We discovered the Therans and their Rites had worked when they returned to enslave the people of Vasgothia. Without the strength of Wyrn Wood unifying the elven people, the Gwydenro grew concerned the Therans would reach still further. Queen Alachia demanded her lost colonies return home to her Court. A demand that held within it a clear threat to the uncorrupted lands of the Western Kingdoms.

Maldwyn sought to play peacemaker with these powers. He opened up trade with the Therans in the repurposed fort of Caelshara, a practice outlawed since the Orichalcum Wars. He sent emissaries to discuss options with both the Queen of the Blood Elves and the High Prince of Shosara. Nevertheless, his honeyed words and peaceful speeches did little to dissuade the people's growing fears.

The Therans made a demonstration of power and burned the forests of Vasgothia. Blood Wood continued to press for the nobility of the Gwydenro to transition into Blood Wood. The Shosarans denigrated tradition by spreading their belief that Separation had served them well. The Western Kingdoms could no longer supplicate their neighbors, they would have to take a strong stance against these foreign powers. Desiring a firmer hand than Maldwyn's at the helm, the consortis appointed a new High Steward, Iolyn, Duke of the Crimson Spire.

In the three years since Iolyn was named High Steward, he has sought to remind his people of their ancient history. He praises the Founding Ranelles. He claims to pursue enlightenment and see the creation of a pure Oak Heart.

He vows to find the gerryth lost beneath the Wastes and restore them to their former glory. And he swears to keep the Namegivers of the Gwydenro free of foreign influence.

It is in High Steward Iolyn we place our trust. We do not have faith in the fallen of Blood Wood, and we certainly cannot trust the heretics of Shosara. We must return to our roots, and we must rely on ourselves for enlightenment.

GEOGRAPHY

The Northern Gwydenro

Tales of the Gwydenro from before the Scourge speak of green valleys, riotous blooms of flowers, and peaceful forests. These tales remain mostly true, though a traveler through the wilderness must now also contend with rocky bluffs, deep clefts, and long, impassable ridges.

The region features calm and temperate weather. Two months of cold interrupt a long growing season that often allows for two harvests. Storms can appear suddenly, whipped in from the Bwydvir by stiff and frigid winds. These storms can cause significant flooding, ruin crops, and even flatten homes.

With the threats on the open sea, and the difficulty traveling overland, most travel is done along the coast. The bay of Tyrnvir is calm throughout the year and rarely wracked by storms. Travel into the larger Bwydvir opens one to the risk of storms, which makes smaller ships capable of beaching the preferred method of travel.

During his reign as High Steward, Maldwyn pushed for lieges to build proper roads to reach out to their vassals. While this project lasted decades, only the larger gerryth have managed to make decent headway. Even with these cobblestone roads, the area's geography presents a challenge and travelers should invest in a good map to ensure their meandering road leads to the desired destination.

Outside of those networks, the closest thing to roads in the wilds are little more than well-trod paths. These paths have sudden elevation changes that make them difficult for carts and wagons to navigate, requiring merchants to invest in longer trains of loaded pack animals. Hostile wildlife and the occasional storm can prove hazardous to such travelers, so those who brave the paths typically wait until they can form into larger groups, ideally under the command of a well-traveled Sword of Justice (p. 195).

For those with the silver and the need, airship travel is available but uncommon. While it is the safest and swiftest way of getting around, airships are rare in the region and the demand for their use allows them to charge quite highly for their service. The Trisrora Ranelle (p. 168) operates a small handful of ships that have regular routes around the Gwydenro while wealthy businesses and ranelles possess at most one airship for their most time-sensitive business. Foreign airships are rarely found in the region, though Theran vessels are sometimes seen near Caelshara and ambassadors from Throal or other foreign nations visit Sereatha with increasing regularity.



The Wastes

The area known as the Wastes was once a lush forest called Roheline Wood. Even though its trees were not as ancient as the great oaks of Wyrn Wood, Roheline's beauty was renowned across the lands of the west. It was because of this the elven people were attracted to the area and decided to settle there. Beneath the soil of this region, mineral veins from both the Caralkspur and Delaris mountain met, and their rich True Earth deposits drew dwarfs to Roheline. The area prospered as more Namegivers set down roots and it became a significant source of timber, ore, and elements for the entire Gwydenro.

As the Scourge approached, the dwarfs' pragmatism allowed the gerryth in Roheline to push past loyalty to the Court. The residents were happy to accept the Rites of Protection and Passage. They repurposed the extensive networks of mineshafts to construct dozens of underground kaers. Many of the non-elves in the Gwydenro sought the protection afforded by these Roheline kaers, leading thousands of refugees to flood the region in fear of the coming terror. Little is known about what happened after these shelters were sealed, but whatever assaulted the land managed to devastate the once beautiful forest and left behind the barren expanse of black soot known today.

After the Scourge

The black soot is referred to locally as *varju*. The name coming from journals of a failed dwarf expedition just after the Scourge. In these journals, a clear distinction is made between the sand and grit and the black soot. The word itself is of a dwarf dialect meaning 'darkness'. The *varju* at the time was more dispersed and frequently whipped up into horrible storms and whirlwinds. Even in these old texts, the soot is thought to be toxic in nature and is avoided at all costs.

Storms were common in the early days after the Scourge and the *varju* spread across the wastes. Today such storms occur infrequently, leaving the soot settled in large black pools throughout the Wastes. As Namegivers began to explore the area, it quickly became clear that many kaers fell during the Scourge. While reliable records of the chaotic days before the Scourge are difficult to come by, current studies believe that less than a fifth of the kaers within the Wastes survived intact. The death and destruction wrought in the remains of Roheline has resulted in a noticeable taint to astral space throughout the entire region.

The only standing remnant of the former Roheline Wood is the Poison Forest of Barsaive. Previously the eastern edge of the region, these trees have been twisted by the land's corruption and are mere shells of their previous beauty. It is believed that the *varju* is blown up into the clouds to eventually rain down on the region, the prolonged contact causing some form of infection.

While storms and twisted creatures are always a danger in the Wastes, the prevailing winds push the worst of it further inland, allowing for the Western Kingdoms to send out regular expeditions. The Learners' Guild (p. 194) is particularly interested in sending groups out to rediscover lost kaers while it



seeks a means to remove the astral taint infecting the region. Only time will tell if this once beautiful land can be restored to its former serenity.

THE FATE OF ROHELINE WOOD

While only speculation exists to explain the creation of the Wastes, many theories have been put forward. Legends, rumors, and conjecture all tell different versions but boil down to three basic ideas. Tales of Horrors clashing during the Scourge and stories of an incurable disease are the most common themes presented. Some on the radical fringe claim Queen Alachia ordered the area sacrificed in retaliation for their defiance. Scholars continue to research the area in hopes of discovering the truth, but the dangers of the Wastes have thus far restricted the available avenues of study.

Titans Collide

The central premise of one theory is that several powerful Horrors laid claim to Roheline Wood and the Namegivers within. These tyrants battled each other for control of the area but were matched in strength and stamina. One of the more clever combatants used its power to drain the forest's lifeforce in an effort to drive out its rivals. A small section of the forest crumbled into black soot. When this soot came into contact with living creatures, they too crumbled into the darkness. All living things inside Roheline disintegrated into varju and their remains spread the Horror's corruption on the winds. With the kaers being the only sustenance left intact, the Horrors turned their efforts towards penetrating these strongholds for the rest of the Scourge.

While it is certainly true that, in a battle between Horrors, there would be no winners, many scholars believe that this theory is fueled by the panic and hysteria prevalent in the early years of the Scourge. The underlying truth driving these stories is that Horrors had been active in Roheline Wood for decades before its kaers sealed their doors. Reports of these terrifying beings spread to every corner of the forest, causing many to fear for their beloved homeland. Conjecture about the Wood's fate may have turned into stories about these creatures fighting amongst themselves to lessen the uneasiness brought on by life inside a kaer. However, tales of the devastation caused by clashing Horrors in Parlainth leads many in the Gwydenro to believe Roheline experienced a similar fate.

The Black Death

Another theory is that the varju is merely a side effect of the area's astral taint. While no grand design created this substance, its toxicity was enough to desolate the wood and destroy all life. The black soot is so fine that it can take months to settle into dark pools only to be easily stirred by strong winds into fierce storms or even blown up into clouds that travel miles to the southeast. The greatly dispersed dust falls frequently in both the Poison Forest and the city of Jerris, with both suffering from obvious ill effects.

While the varju is a mysterious substance, everyone who has studied the Wastes agrees on three points: it was not present before the Scourge, it is connected to the corruption of astral space in the area, and those who come in direct contact risk a lethal infection. The earliest journals that report the name 'varju' tell of large clouds of dust moving across the skyline. These clouds would frequently touch down onto the surface and form towering black vortices. Many feared the varju and the storms were guided by the influence of a powerful Horror. As the time passed, and the soot settled, it has been generally agreed that the fearsome storms were natural disasters and not targeted strikes. With the varju contained within pools, travel in the area became safer and allowed researchers to explore the region and gain access to the substance.

The origin of the varju is a debate typically left to scholars. The locals are far more interested in the effects of exposure to the substance. Any contact with varju is deemed unwise, though it is difficult to pinpoint what is required for infection set in. The infection seems capable of lying dormant for years within a subject before becoming problematic and there is rarely any physical manifestation to suggest that the subject has been sufficiently exposed. Some subjects do present physical symptoms mere hours after exposure. These symptoms could include their hair color darkening or the whites of their eyes taking on a smoky hue. But even these manifestations might only emerge once the other symptoms begin to present themselves.

In minor cases of varju poisoning, the subject becomes lethargic. Many believe that the general malaise of Jerris is due to varju contact. As the poisoning case worsens, the subject experiences a decline in motor control and the lethargy begins to affect their every action. The latest stages of varju poisoning are categorized by intense muscle pain. The subject's muscles experience painful and debilitating cramps that can last for hours or even days on end. At this point, even should the subject be successfully treated and distanced from the soot, the recurring pain can plague them for the rest of their life. Any further exposure to the substance results in the subject's painful, twisting death.

Alachia's Wrath

A small number of radical nobles in the Gwydenro believe Queen Alachia sacrificed the population of Roheline Wood for their defiance during the Schism. They believe the Ritual of Thorns shielded the elves from the Horrors but to do so required a blood sacrifice for everyone taken under its protection. They claim this is the reason Alachia was originally hesitant to enact the Ritual, since doing so would destroy lives she would prefer to save. After running out of options, she allowed the ritual to be enacted and sacrificed the lifeforce of Roheline. Plants, animals, and Namegivers alike were drained of their essence and transformed into black soot.

While the queen has been known to take drastic action against those who defy her judgments, it seems unlikely she would be capable of transforming

Roheline Wood into the Wastes. Even if it were possible, it seems an unlikely punishment. After all, the region was only one of several elven populations who chose to ignore her decree about Theran kaers. The queen has publicly professed the loss of Roheline Wood as a blow to the heart of elven culture and even her political opponents doubt she would empathize so greatly with the tragedy if she had a direct hand in it.

Fallen, But Not Forgotten

While less than a fifth of kaers seem to have survived the devastation intact, many Namegivers have been lost so thoroughly that they cannot be accounted for. Learners' Guild's study into the old Roheline Wood indicate that more than a quarter of the Namegiver population seems to have completely vanished. Dozens of kaers have been uncovered in pristine condition but entirely devoid of life. It is as if the people within simply walked out into the Scourge during a normal day.

These empty kaers are enough to explain the disparity in numbers for most researchers. Less well known is the unnerving fact that many recorded kaers appear to have disappeared along with their inhabitants. It is possible Sereatha's records have some flaws, but the number of missing shelters indicates something more than bad bookkeeping is at play. Unfortunately, Sereatha's disdain for Roheline's actions leading up to the Scourge make detailed accounts difficult to come by and complicates further research.

TRADITIONS OF THE WESTERN KINGDOMS

While the people of the Gwydenro have long emulated the Elven Court of Wyrn Wood, their earlier founding and distance from the Wyrn Wood have seen them develop a handful of rituals and beliefs that are entirely their own.

Draesis ti'Morel: The Wheel of Life

With few exceptions, the Gwydenro follows the traditional Sa'mistishsa path along the Wheel of Life (see p. 20). The idea of following the Wheel of Life is romanticized by the common folk, their life focused on survival rather than the esoteric requirements of the Journey. Following the Wheel is seen as a lifestyle more appropriate for the nobility, those born amongst the ranelles.

Nobles who strictly adhere to the Wheel are more respected by their peers and subjects, thus they rise through the ranks more quickly. A common elf that finds themselves able to follow Draesis ti'Morel may earn the respect of the nobles around them and even marry into power. It is just as likely, however, that they are perceived as upstarts trying to reach above their station.

In the Western Kingdoms, it is not seen as appropriate for members of other Namegiver races to follow the Wheel.

Followers of the Path

While typically few Namegivers are capable of becoming adepts, members of Western Kingdom ranelles take to Disciplines far more frequently. They almost universally follow a strict interpretation of the Wheel, which greatly restricts the number of Disciplines followed by the nobility and forces individuals to begin anew multiple times throughout their lives. While still available to them, it is considered a grave trespass for followers of one Path to rely on talents from a previous Path's Discipline. Only upon treading the Path of Lords are all the traveler's skills freely available to them. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all noble followers of a Path successfully received training in previously acceptable Disciplines.

Lew Teyrn: The Oath of Service

The tradition of Lew Teyrn predates the Gwydenro's unification with Wyrn Wood. Lew Teyrn is a special oath made between lords of different gerryth. One takes on the role of liege and the other of vassal. A single liege can enter into Lew Teyrn with multiple vassals, but a vassal may only have a single liege.

The Oath of Service between liege and vassal lasts for a year and a day or until the death of one of the parties. The liege vows to protect and aid the vassal while the vassal vows to help their liege in any way possible including the payment of a pre-arranged tax at the end of the agreement. These oaths are typically sworn during the week of Cariad Castald.

Every gerryth is involved in at least one Lew Teyrn. Sereatha is a sworn liege to a handful of influential kingdoms including Caelshara. Caelshara, vassal to Sereatha, is liege to several neighboring smaller kingdoms, one of which is Aiqua. Aiqua could enter into Lew Teyrn as liege to another kingdom, but is struggling to support itself and does not have the resources to promise aid to other kingdoms. Bound together through the tradition of Lew Teyrn these kingdoms make up the larger Gwydenro.

Cariad Castald: The Contest of Love

The first Cariad Castald was enacted by the High Steward during a dark time in the Elven Court. The winner of the contest became Annwyl, the Beloved. This Annwyl was promised the blessing of the people and the Passions and was expected to bring hope during trying times. The first Annwyl succeeded in all that and more. She travelled to Wyrn Wood and received the blessing of Oak Heart, becoming Queen Failla and ruled for centuries.

Every year since, the contest has been held with few breaks in the now ancient tradition. The contest takes place over an entire week in the mid-summer. All seven days are recognized as a holiday throughout the Gwydenro. Any elf may enter the competition but they must complete each day's challenge to move on to the next and those who have completed the first five may present on the final day to be considered for the role of Annwyl.

The trials over the first five days represent the Journey of the Wheel and are usually devised by respected Questors from throughout the Gwydenro. Traditionally, the trials are performed in clearings in Sereatha proper, with spectators observing from overlooking spires.

The first day of Cariad Castald is the Trial of the Warrior. While this may mean combat, it is more typically an internal test of valor or endurance that lacks an immediately clear answer. The second day brings the Trial of the Scholar. The challenge presented here is usually an intricate puzzle that requires general intelligence and quick wits. The third day is the Trial of the Traveler and requires the challenger to recall lore and things long past. The fourth day is the Trial of the Sage and typically involves a truly difficult test of character. The fifth day is the Trial of the Lord, developed by members of the Founding Ranelles. This challenge could be anything but is likely to thematically bring together aspects of the previous challenges.

After all of this, the sixth day is an enormous celebration to congratulate all of the competitors and highlight those who have successfully completed the trials and will be allowed to partake in the seventh day, the Trial of the Beloved.

The seventh day, which falls on the longest day of the year, has each qualified person present a labor of love which they alone have created. The nature of this project is up to the challenger. It is said that Failla and Alachia both won the contest with beautiful poems conceived in the moment of performance. On the other hand, Maldwyn has been Annwyl for decades and always wins with a painting depicting the progress and unity of the people of the Gwydenro. These works of art require hundreds of hours over the months leading up to the competition itself.

The year's Annwyl is then selected after the sun has set on the seventh day by an outpouring of acclaim from those in attendance. After this informal process, the four consortis of Sereatha approach the victor and offer their fifth seat. Technically, the Annwyl may make any request of the consortis though it is exceedingly rare that other boons are requested. Alachia asked to attend Court at Wyrn Wood for a time. At the end of the Scourge, Maldwyn requested the finest vessel and a hand-picked crew to sail out from Sereatha. The consortis have thus far never refused a request from an Annwyl. To do so would symbolically be denying the desires of the entire Gwydenro.

The Next Annwyl

Some fear the tradition of Cariad Castald is being threatened. When Steward Iolyn took over the Gwydenro three years ago, it was a time of turmoil and fear. For the first time in centuries, the contest was not held due to concerns of outside attack. Two years ago, Iolyn ruled Queen Alachia had been irrevocably tainted, and the tragedy was marked by cancelling Cariad Castald. Last year, Iolyn delayed Cariad Castald again. He stated the Annwyl would surely wish to be presented to Oak Heart. With Wyrn Wood lost and Oak Heart tainted, there was little reason to appoint an Annwyl unable

to achieve that goal and unite the remaining elven nations. This year, the people are clamoring for their week of celebration, and it may prove difficult for the High Steward to delay the contest a fourth time.

THE FOUNDING RANELLES

Elves of noble birth in the Western Kingdoms are afforded certain permissions as determined by the local king. Any elf related to a ranelle is considered nobility. Most ranelles are minor and only rule a single gerryth. A few minor ranelles are powerful enough to have their own vassals or rule over another gerryth, but this is uncommon.

Three ranelles have significantly higher status and influence than the rest. These are the "Founding Ranelles." Each of these families lead multiple influential gerryth and have a seat among the consortis of Sereatha. Each Founding Ranelle is led by a Patriarch or Matriarch and this leader selects one from their ranelle to serve as consortis. If one of these families do not directly rule a gerryth, they have influence there through oath or investment.

The Escalanas Ranelle

The Escalanas are closely associated with all things mystical. This reputation was earned over centuries of research and dedication to the magical arts. With a branch of the family renowned in Blood Wood as the creators of the Ritual of Thorns, the Escalanas of the west are eager to establish their own identity and prove their power.

Dathule, the legendary first Matriarch of the Escalanas, accompanied her family across the Bwydvir in search of enlightenment. When they made landfall on the future site of Sereatha, she chose to continue inland. She tasked her sister, Naesala, with gathering the elves of the west and make for them a haven on the gentle shores.

After the Scourge, when contact was established with Blood Wood, the two distant branches of the Escalanas ranelle worked in an uneasy alliance. Iolyn's recent rise to power has fractured that peace and the Escalanas loyal to the Gwydenro eagerly returned home.

In recent years, the western Escalanas have spearheaded many expeditions into the deep wilds and have a particular interest in the Wastes. The family is focused on uncovering lost gerryth wherever they might be found and expends considerable resources seeking out these lost cities. The family often views the Learners' Guild (p. 194) as allies of convenience, though this relationship is sometimes one way; the Escalanas are not always interested in sharing their discoveries.

Out of the three Founding Ranelles, the Escalanas oversee the fewest gerryth, but those few they hold tend to be fiercely loyal.

Matriarch Alyndra Escalanas

Despite her seniority, Alyndra continues to walk the path of Scholars. She was only beginning her Journey down that path when she became Matriarch. The previous Matriarch was Alyndra's older sister who went mad during Sereatha's final years underground. Pronouncing the death a direct result of Alachia's failed leadership, Alyndra has always been a vocal proponent of the Gwydenro elves standing apart from Blood Wood.

Alyndra spends most of her time in Sereatha. Visits to her holdings and vassals are infrequent, as she prefers to perform her duties in the Foundation Spire (p. 176). She travels to a private estate in the Imerit Wood for a few days every month and she keeps a small personal airship on retainer for these journeys. Alyndra has refused to set foot in the underground chambers of the Foundation since Sereatha emerged. Rumors among the court suggest she is afraid to return to her childhood home.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5
PER: 9 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

Adventure Idea

Alyndra's private comings and goings have become a matter of interest to Ierus Laimin (See p. 185) and he hires the players to investigate the matter. Tailing her or bribing the right officials is enough to uncover the location of her private estate, but travelling there only raises further questions. A large area near her home has been turned into a grove where dozens of oak saplings struggle out their first years.

Before the players can investigate further, they observe a group of Songbirds (See p. 92) accompanied by a member of the Carithasca ranelle uprooting one of these saplings and fleeing into the woods. The players must decide who to trust with what information as they become embroiled in a political game over a young tree grown from an Acorn of Oak Heart.

The Fensalor Ranelle

The Fensalor are best known for their prowess in battle. Their early recorded history traces back to Caelshara (p. 188), where their first Patriarch, Gaelin, ruled with an iron fist. He built the locals into a fearsome fighting force and used his influence to build the immense stone fort that stands to this day.

The Fensalor unified with the other Founding Ranelles grudgingly and have always been staunch defenders of their own rights and gerryth, focusing on their own needs before that of the Gwydenro as a whole. Perhaps due to this inward focus, the Fensalor lost the least during the Scourge and today have more sworn gerryth than any other ranelle.

After reclaiming their lands, the Fensalor have focused on rebuilding their infrastructure. While they respect the power of the consortis of Sereatha, the

Fensalor prefer to keep their most promising members away from the capital. As such, Leja (p. 183) has comparatively little sway in Fensalor lands and her opinion is held in the same regard as any one of the Patriarch's vassals.

The Fensalor military and the Knights of the Crimson Spire (p. 193) often have common cause and many ambitious young Fensalor join the organization to gain a reputation. Upon transitioning out of the Path of Warriors, many Fensalor leave the Knights to undertake their next challenge. While the Knights protect the Gwydenro from external threats or natural disaster, Fensalor forces spend most of their time enforcing peace between loyal gerryth and building public works. The Fensalor have formed a profitable trade alliance with Thera and do a brisk business from their seat, Caelshara. Thera's cultural influence can be seen in the dress and behavior of many of the family's younger nobles, a trend that has not gone unnoticed in Sereatha's court.

Patriarch Itham Fensalor

Itham grew into adulthood while Caelshara was going into isolation. Itham's brother fell to Horror taint during those chaotic times, galvanizing the young soldier's determination to defend the Gwydenro by any means necessary. Itham acted as an honorable commander while ensuring the safety of his people and proved himself a capable politician during the Scourge. Already elderly when his father passed on he took his position as head of the ranelle a few decades before their emergence.

A follower of the Path of Lords, Itham is primarily renowned for his skill as a Warrior and a Troubadour. Even his allies concede that he was never particularly talented with Elementalism or the deeper mysteries of the arcane arts. Due to his extreme age, Itham delegates most of his duties and rarely travels from his home in the fortress of Caelrasha.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 6 TOU: 4
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 7

The Trisrora Ranelle

The Trisrora grew from little more than a few carts and their talent for spotting a good deal. Originally operating as several nomadic camps, the Trisrora caravan established its first permanent settlement in the Gwydenro's northeastern region. While that kingdom, Wersedd, still exists, the Trisrora have shifted their focus from their ancient home.

The family's first Matriarch, Shyonia, had amassed great wealth during her travels. Wishing to extend her trade network further, she made her way to the sea and encountered Naesala Escalanas and Gaelin Fensalor. According to the legend, she brokered peace between the two and personally set the first flagstone for the city of Sereatha.

Today, the Trisrora command many gerryth on the eastern fringes of the Gwydenro. Jastra leads the family from Sereatha and works closely with her

family's consortis. While she advises her people to look for opportunities throughout the Western Kingdoms and the Wastes, she also sets her sights beyond their borders. She worked hard with former High Steward Maldwyn to establish ties with Shosara and was doing profitable business with them until Iolyn declared the region once again Separated.

There is no love lost between High Steward Iolyn and the Trisrora leadership, and the ranelle's presence in the City of Spires has decreased over recent years. Many of their kin are returning to their home gerryth to look for new opportunities. While Iolyn has outlawed business with the elves of Shosara, the family continues to deal with the Free Companies (p. 240), claiming non-elves are, by nature, exempt from any decree of Separation. The Trisrora have also made many profitable deals with the people of Iopos. The Denairastas seem to care little for this relationship, however, as they recently broke a contract with the Trisrora, refusing to build the promised merchant ships in their Jerris shipyards.

Adventure Idea

The Free Companies are charging higher rates for their goods. Since the Trisrora need to be circumspect in their dealings with Shosara, they hire the characters to investigate on their behalf. The merchants in the Gwydenro have limited control over the prices, claiming the higher costs are being demanded by the Council of Princes. The characters will have to accompany the airship to Shosara and get to the bottom of the increased expense. In the process they uncover a foreign cell working to keep Sereatha and Shosara at one another's throats.

Matriarch Jastra Trisrora

The current Matriarch of the Trisrora is young, and one of the wealthiest Namegivers in the Gwydenro. She is not shy about showing off her wealth, adorning herself in the finest garments and jewelry the City of Spires has to offer. She is charitable, giving frequent donations to questors and holding an annual feast for the downtrodden in the lower kingdom of Dion (p. 172). These actions serve to protect her image and that of her family, and Jastra cares little for the details of how her money is used to help others. Her primary focus is working to expand her family's trade portfolio and she spends much of her time in the Spire of Ambition (p. 179).

She frequently invests in up-and-coming tradesmen and often clashes with High Steward Iolyn over what constitutes an 'acceptable' business partner. She is currently on the Path of Travelers, and a moderately accomplished Troubadour.

Attributes

DEX: 6 **STR:** 5 **TOU:** 5
PER: 6 **WIL:** 5 **CHA:** 8

THE HISTORY OF SEREATHA

The three Founding Ranelles came together in a forest high atop a hill that sat on the coast of the bay, Tyrnvir. Each family built a massive tower of alabaster stone transported from across the sea. These three towers operated as lighthouses, lookouts, and status symbols. Beacons of civilization in a barbaric time.

Soon after, the elves of the Western Kingdoms had united and sworn oaths of fealty to Wyrn Wood. High Steward Harwyn returned to the city with representatives from their new queen. The honor guard of soldiers and group of revered artisans each had a spire built in their name, these would become the homes of the Knights of the Crimson Spire and the Order of the Amethyst Spire.

These five towers established a tradition all nobles sought to follow. The practical purpose for these towers was forgotten and every group in the growing city began to acquire land and build a spire. Each of the Passions had a dedicated spire. All ranelles of means built their own spires. Each stage of the Journey was granted a spire. Spires were built in honor of queens and of deeds. Some were named for an ideal and populated with those who fought to preserve it. In the last days before the Scourge, over a hundred spires ran the length of the hill and some had even been built upon the sea.

Today, only eleven spires remain.

The First Pilgrimage

The Gwydenro had been thrown into chaos in the days before the Scourge. Many had broken faith with Alachia and done business with the Therans. Others had used the illicit and incomplete Rites that had been spread throughout the land. Only Sereatha had remained true to the Queen of Wyrn Wood and built their underground home following her specifications.

Despite the tension and political infighting of those dark days, the isolated elven pockets throughout the Gwydenro yearned to return to Sereatha and reunite with the elven court. This need caused many to head toward the fabled City of Spires once their homes had reopened to the world.

The first travelers to arrive were the Darga ranelle, a small family from a minor kingdom. When they arrived, they could see the hill and the standing spires, but the gentle slopes had been cut away, leaving nothing but stark cliffs reaching hundreds of yards into the sky. Towers torn asunder lay strewn about the ground and made the bay treacherous to navigate. Where once had stood fertile farmland, there was instead a rock-filled quagmire.

After inspecting the ruins and making dangerous climbs to the abandoned city, the Darga concluded the shelter in the mesa remained intact. Though the people inside were likely still alive, the Darga had no way of communicating with them. It was decided they would stand guard over their nobles until they emerged. They named their new home Dion or 'Sentry' and treated it with the respect one reserves for ancient kingdoms and titles. The people of Dion

began rebuilding the structures at sea level, cultivating the nearby soil, and making the bay usable once more.

Renewed Contact

In the years after the Scourge, more survivors gathered in Sereatha's shadow. A few of these survivors were representative nobles from reopened gerryth, though far more were desperate survivors looking for a home in those dangerous early days. The Darga managed the influx of Namegivers. They peacefully absorbed groups into their own infrastructure, took to officially adopting nobles of lost ranelles, and banded together into a respectable militia.

After eight years establishing control and growing larger, the people of Dion made contact with those beneath Sereatha. Maldwyn, aboard his small vessel with two dozen sailors, emerged from the side of the mountain and into the cleared bay. The people of Dion had eagerly awaited this moment. They rushed toward the opening, the entire Darga fleet moving for the mountainside.

Maldwyn was dismayed. To him, the city on the mesa seemed a ruin, and the elves rushing forward desperate savages looking to attack or founder his vessel. The passage into the mountainside closed as suddenly as it had appeared and Maldwyn fled for the open sea. His vessel's speed could not be matched by those cobbled together by the Darga, and Maldwyn eluded them.

Five months later, Maldwyn's vessel returned to the bay. His ship was battered, and nearly the entire crew had been slain on the open water. The Darga approached more cautiously, and Maldwyn met with King Skyddyn Darga (See p. 176) personally. They spoke in private aboard Maldwyn's vessel for days. Maldwyn needed to return to beneath Sereatha, but the way was blocked and the Elementalist who had helped open it had died at sea. Skyddyn offered to repair Maldwyn's vessel and treat his crew while the king's Elementalist would work to return Maldwyn to his people. In exchange for the aid and hospitality, Maldwyn would, upon his return, confess to the dangers of the world, but would urge the court to open its doors and return to the surface.

Two hundred days after he first emerged from the mountainside, Maldwyn sailed back in. After another two hundred days of silence, the people of Sereatha rejoined the world.

The Scourge's Toll

Under the earth, in the tunnels that had held the people of Sereatha, passages to the lost city remained intact. The nobles emerging above wept to see their city destroyed. More than two-thirds of Sereatha had been touched by the Scourge's depredations. Of the founding spires, only the Escalanas's remained intact. Only half of the Crimson Spire remained standing and the Amethyst Tower had fallen into the sea. Where once had stood a ring of towers to the twelve Passions, only five remained. The elegantly connected

towers that symbolized the flow of the Path had fallen into ruin, leaving only Cirolletishsa and Raeghsa. Of the spires that had been home to minor nobility only two stood; the ancestral homes of the Laimin and Praiket.

While the nobility took to the grim task of rebuilding their ravaged home, the people of Dion rejoiced to have their court returned to them once more. Together, they worked with the elves above to excavate tunnels into the mountainside and organize efficient passage between the City of Spires above and the tilled earth below.

THE KINGDOM OF DION

Dion and Sereatha are considered two distinct kingdoms under Lew Teyrn. While technically separate—and citizens of either are eager to point out the distinction—the difference is rarely considered by the rest of the Gwydenro or world at large.

Sereatha is ruled by the consortis, while Dion is the seat of the minor Darga ranelle. The Darga are a sworn vassal of the consortis of Sereatha, and have no vassals of their own. While Sereatha has many other vassal kingdoms, its proximity and shared resources with Dion pair the kingdoms more closely than any other in the Gwydenro.

With Sereatha atop the mesa, Dion controls all land and sea trade. The peak has little arable land and requires frequent shipments of food from the groves available to those below. These realities mean the City of Spires is heavily dependent on Dion. Even so, Sereatha is seen as the more prestigious of the two gerryth due to its cultural significance.

So far, the Darga seem happy with this arrangement, ruling the land below while the more influential nobles play their games at the court above. If the more numerous Darga were to try and make demands of Sereatha, they would have to contend with the rigorously trained Knights of the Crimson Spire and the large number of adepts that make their home within the City of Spires.

Cultural Divides

Dion is sometimes called “the Surface,” a legacy of the time when the kaer first opened after the Scourge. When used by residents of the City of Spires, it is usually a derogatory way of referring to the common masses—especially non-elves. Sereatha’s presence on a mesa looking down on Dion from above enhances this divide, reinforcing feelings of cultural purity and superiority.

Some residents of Dion have taken the term as a mark of pride, building around it an identity of honesty, practicality, and common sense. In slang and other turns of phrase, it has connotations meaning “down-to-earth.” This is more common among the lower classes, less devout followers of the Paths, and Namegivers other than elves.

Population

Fewer than 5,000 Namegivers live within the City of Spires. Living in Sereatah proper usually requires an appointed position or sufficiently respectable ties to a ranelle. This leads to a population that is almost exclusively elven. A few organizations allow entrance to non-elves, but they are by far the exception. Other Namegivers in Sereatha are considered a curiosity at best and a threat to the city's reputation at worst.

Many more Namegivers live in Dion, which surrounds the mesa. There has never been a complete census, and such a task would be challenging considering the transient nature of much of the population. Estimates suggest that about 25,000 Namegivers make a permanent home in Dion, with that number doubling during the summer due to increased trade and Cariad Castald. Dion's population is more diverse but still predominantly elven. Of the remaining, humans, dwarfs, and orks are not uncommon, each making up approximately ten percent of the population. Other Namegiver races have only a token presence in the kingdom.

Districts of Dion

Dion is divided into three districts: the Harborage, the Foundation, and Imerit Wood. Each of these districts are in the shadow of Spire Mountain on which Sereatha stands. The farmland to the east and south is not considered a district and, while each is overseen by small satellite villages, are considered unremarkable.

Harborage

Harborage is the first district most foreigners will see when entering Sereatha. All foreign vessels entering the bay are stopped for inspection. Nobility can avoid the long and laborious inspection process by paying a small fee. Eventually, all but the wealthiest ships are given documentation and advised of a pier where they might dock in the Low Harbor with smaller vessels usually berthed further from the mountain.

Sufficiently wealthy vessels, or any vessel carrying a representative of the Sereathan court, can avoid the Low Harbor entirely. They are brought to the northern side of the mountain and guided through one of a handful of water entrances. The interior wharfs are known as the High Harbor. Disembarking here takes travelers directly into the Foundation and gives them a direct route up to the City of Spires.

The Low Harbor has many businesses which appeal to visiting sailors and idle dockhands, but the inns and taverns of varying repute draw all levels of society. Unfortunately, crime is common in the district despite the Darga's efforts. Those caught stealing or committing a violent crime are often branded and banished from the kingdom. More severe crimes such as murder, or crimes targeting a member of nobility almost always result in execution. If a young noble from Sereatha proper is involved in the crime, things become

more complex for the Darga guard and no punishment is allowed without first consulting the court above.

Elves of the Harborage

Iolyn has been increasing pressure on the Darga. Upon gaining the mantle of High Steward, he ordered the family to remove all Blood Elves and Shosaran elves from their kingdom and bar them from re-entry. The Darga did their best to comply, but such removals were complicated by the vessels constantly entering and leaving the Harborage. Blood Elves could easily be identified, but the loyalty of an Unprotected elf is a far more difficult thing to prove. After doing all they could with the existing population, the Darga placed strict requirements on land ownership in their kingdom and set guard posts to question all elves wishing to leave the Harborage on foot.

Since the construction of these guard posts, crime in the Harborage has increased significantly. Many of the locals see the guard as their enemy and the mounting hostility makes it nearly impossible for the guard to work alongside the community.

The High Steward has expressed grave dissatisfaction with the situation and stated that, if crime cannot be brought under control soon, he will put the Knights of the Crimson Spire in charge of the Harborage's security. While the Knights are often called upon in times of emergency, permanently replacing a local king's standing army would be viewed as an indictment of the king's capabilities and would be a shameful moment for the Darga.

The general opinion at court is that Iolyn's primary concern is not the area's crime, but rumors of growing spy networks in the district. It is suspected he is especially afraid of encroaching Songbirds (p. 92) from Alachia's Court.

Foundation

The Foundation encompasses the buildings constructed around the base of the mountain and the repurposed chambers under it around the High Harbor. The mountain exterior presents five approaches to the City of Spires. To the east and west are magical lifts that connect the warehouses below and the city above. To the southwest, south, and southeast are staircases which are a long climb and rarely used. Under the mountain, only one path from the old shelter remains serviceable, a finely appointed and winding stairwell that takes travelers into the basement of the Foundation Spire.

Entry into Sereatha from Dion is closely monitored. Elves with the proper patents of nobility can come and go as needed, while all others require official sponsors and must pay a daily fee. The lifts charge an additional fee by weight and travelers must schedule their journey at least a day in advance due to the busy schedule.

Members of the Darga ranelle jockey for position in the Foundation, with the most prestigious quarters under the mountain and closest to the

City of Spires. Craftsmen also vie for space in the district. Particularly skilled craftsmen may be called up to the City, but most work their whole lives below. Armorers, tanners, carpenters, and skilled laborers of any kind can be found living in the Foundation. The services in the district cater to locals more than transients.

Imerit Wood

Before Sereatha opened, the Darga tried purifying the miles of bog west of the mountain. While they failed to make much of the region arable, they successfully drained the swamp and removed all but the largest ruins. Within a few decades, the soil was rich enough to support native flora and today a sprawling wood has grown.

While the east and south have become fields to feed the people, the west has become an enormous forest held in high regard by the locals. Timber is carefully harvested from this wood for local construction, and wild game is hunted by nobility for meat and sport. The wealthy who prefer a secluded estate to the status of Sereatha make their homes here.

Few Darga are interested in making their home here, preferring to live among the stone structures of the Foundation. There is little reason for the traders and common folk of the Surface to make their way out into the wilds of Imerit Wood and any non-elves can expect to be watched closely by the local guard.

The Secret Groves

Many high-ranking nobles from Sereatha regularly visit this region. The increased presence of guardsmen and the close monitoring of any private industry has led to speculation there are places in Imerit Wood purposefully hidden from prying eyes.

None in Sereatha comment on these speculations, but with High Steward Iolyn's bounty on Oak Heart's Acorns and the dispute with Shosara over the seat of elven culture, it doesn't take a scholar to make the pieces fit.

If the High Steward is establishing a secret grove in which to grow a new Oak Heart, it raises the question of why the entire Imerit Wood is being so fiercely secured. The Steward could be trying to obfuscate the grove's location, or perhaps he has ordered multiple groves throughout the wood.

The Darga Ranelle

The Darga found their kaer's protections failing in the final years of the Scourge. They were pushed into the world sooner than expected and a lack of resources forced them to abandon their home gerryth. In desperation, they traveled to Sereatha and discovered the massive mountain of rock.

When the Sereathan court emerged, the Darga were gifted the land at the base of the City of Spires for their devotion. Whether this gift was out of kindness or due to the fact the Darga had more loyal followers than the

survivors of Sereatha's shelter is a question few know the answer. Even so, the Darga fulfill their duty proudly. The guards of Dion are all affiliated with the Darga, most related by blood or long ago adopted into the sprawling family.



King Skyddyn Darga

Skyddyn has been king of the Darga ranelle since they fled the ruin of their gerryth. Dion is the largest kingdom in the Gwydenro and explicitly Skyddyn's realm. Walking the Path of Scholars, the Troubadour works day and night organizing guard efforts and escorts for the important people who pass through his kingdom.

More recently, Skyddyn's security detail has been increasing and he is usually accompanied by at least a dozen highly proficient bodyguards. Most attribute this increased security to the rising crime of the Harborage which he frequently patrols. Others theorize that

tension is growing between King Skyddyn and his new High Steward.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 6 TOU: 5
PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 6

THE CITY OF SPIRES

Sereatha has come a long way since its return to the world. The population, while much smaller than that of Dion below, grows steadily. The well-maintained streets are full of nobles going about their day. The graceful spires and beautiful landscaping are almost enough to make one forget the pain the world suffered during the Scourge.

The city's illusion is broken when one realizes the many construction projects being undertaken atop the mesa. Projects that are slow to be completed due to the Sereatha's strict border control policies.

The Foundation Spire

The oldest tower still standing once belonged solely to the Escalanas. The alabaster tower shines as brilliantly as it did when built centuries ago and it reaches 500 feet into the sky. When the people of Sereatha returned to the surface, they emerged through the sub-basements of the Foundation Spire.

After seeing the damage suffered by the city during the Scourge, the Escalanas opened their tower to the leadership of Sereatha, explicitly relinquishing control to High Steward Maldwyn. The Sereathan court has

since been held within the Foundation Spire's grand antechambers. All three Founding Ranelles are promised a place in the tower and any who serve those families or the court are permitted a room within the structure. The Foundation Spire struggles to hold all courtly visitors during the week of Cariad Castald and the intrigue that builds around room assignments can have far reaching political repercussions.

Habitation Towers

Most of the surviving towers are today used as places for specific business. All towers have private rooms which members of the elven court call their own, but only two towers are used exclusively for housing. These are the towers of Naunamai and Viestern. The towers are of similar construction, standing 100 feet tall and having a significantly larger diameter.

Before the Scourge, these towers would have been overlooked due to their lack of opulent or graceful architecture. The gardens covering the entirety of the structure's roof seemed a minor trick of Elementalism. Today, these structures house more than three-fourths of the nobility. Two additional towers are being built intentionally emulating the efficient construction of these ancient homes.

Naunamai

Before the Scourge, the Laimin ranelle constructed a modest tower that went unnoticed as one among many. During the Scourge, as the taller and more elegant spires collapsed around it, the Laimin Tower held firm. The Laimin survived the Scourge in the shelter beneath the city, and after the Sereathans emerged, followed the Escalanas example by gifting their ancestral home to the consortis.

The tower became known as *Naunamai* or "New Home" and it was repurposed into living quarters for minor nobility and visiting dignitaries. In exchange for the ranelle's gift, High Steward Maldwyn granted the tower's top floor to the Laimin and took members of their family on as his staff. Once Maldwyn had a Laimin advisor, other members of the court were quick to follow suit and the family has gained a reputation for being skilled advisors and tutors.

Today, the structure is filled to capacity even with impromptu wooden homes built in the rooftop garden. Despite the crowded conditions, or perhaps because of them, any who manage to maintain permanent quarters in the tower earn a measure of respect from their peers at court.

Viestern

Viestern was once home to the Praiket ranelle. The family did not last the Scourge, but their tower survived relatively undamaged. The consortis inherited the spire and, as Naunamai was quickly filling with minor nobility, it was decided Viestern would be remodeled for a similar purpose.

Unfortunately, twenty years after Sereatha's emergence, the inhabitants of Viestern were afflicted with a mysterious wasting disease. The malady killed many and the tower was evacuated and left abandoned. Questors and scholars did their best to purify the location and the spire was reopened a decade later. Less than five years later, a terrible fire tore through the tower in the middle of the night. The inferno raged for days and Elementalists were unable to calm the fire spirits. The exterior of the tower remains scorched and black.

Viestern has since been refurbished and no fresh tragedy has struck the tower in decades. Still, few wish to make the building their home. The local nobles quietly whisper the tower is cursed by the fallen Praiket family. Even if the whispers are false, the stigma of the tower remains and those that live in Viestern are looked down upon in court.

Adventure Idea

Thirty noble elves have emerged from the Wastes claiming to be members of the lost Praiket ranelle. Their leader, Agis, claims they are owed compensation for their unjustly taken spire. While the court was suspicious of his demands, Praiket's training as a Troubadour sees him accruing supporters. Consortis Leja Fensalor (p. 183) hires the group to investigate Agis and his claims. The only way to prove Agis' story is for the players to venture into the Wastes themselves.

Option 1

Agis is who he claims. The kaer beneath the Wastes was mostly stripped of resources prior to being abandoned, but records found within tie Agis to a minor branch of the Praiket on Sereatha's census. The records include a journal Agis left behind when the survivors were forced to depart, unsure of whether or not he is leading his people to their doom.

Option 2

Agis is not who he claims and is merely an enterprising Shosaran. The kaer beneath the Wastes is preserved but abandoned, similar to many recent discoveries in the region (p. 159). An investigation of the kaer reveals members of the Praiket family did shelter here, but all of the Namegivers have long since been lost. Agis discovered these records in Shosara and came up with the story looking for a payoff.

The Spires of the Passions

Before the Scourge, each of the twelve Passions had a tower of their own. Today, only five remain standing: Astendar, Chorrolis, Floranuus, Jaspre, and Thystonius. Each of these towers are easily distinguishable, but all stand about 150 feet high and tend toward being slender. While the towers were built with the traditional alabaster, many have since taken on unique colorations.

The Spire of Inspiration

Astendar's tower houses the finest artisans in the Gwydenro. The galleries of these artisans are displayed throughout the tower, with chambers dedicated to workshops or living quarters for the artist and their families. Many questors of Astendar live in this spire and offer instruction to the future craftsmen of Sereatha. The Spire of Inspiration gleams and sparkles in the sun as though flecked with gold and is topped by a masterful carving of abstract shapes. As the sun moves throughout the day, the shadows of the carving depict the life of a courtly elf girl growing up and passing on peacefully.

The Spire of Ambition

The tower of Chorrolis serves as a library of information concerning the post-Scourge world. Most important are the records of trade through Sereatha's harbors. Many business ventures in the area pay a fee for access to the spire's records and actuarial tables. The Spire of Ambition seems to sag under its own weight, with tiny cracks in the stones tinting the entire structure a dark gray, reminiscent of a storm cloud. The tower is capped with an enormous light crystal that can be seen miles away by those sailing within the bay.

The Spire of Unification

The tower of Floranuus is the traditional place to swear oaths of Lew Teyrn. The Learners' Guild operates out of this tower as they have since the Orichalcum Wars, recording the history of every gerryth. This spire is the slenderest of the Passion's towers. An imperfection in the alabaster has caused the stone to turn pink over time. The ornate dome atop this tower holds an enormous bell that counts the hours of the day.

The Spire of Life

The Spire of Life was once Jaspree's tower. Today it serves as hospital, ward, and charity. Many nobles turn up their noses at the poor who live in the Spire of Life, but none would speak against the tower's purpose openly. The medical knowledge of this spire's residents exceeds anywhere else in the Gwydenro, save perhaps Aiqua (p. 186). Vines have climbed up the tower's exterior, making the structure seem almost alive. The teardrop-shaped tip of this spire is elegant and functional, collecting water from clouds and rain and distributing it down to the gardens cultivated by the spire's residents.

Spire of Meraerthsa

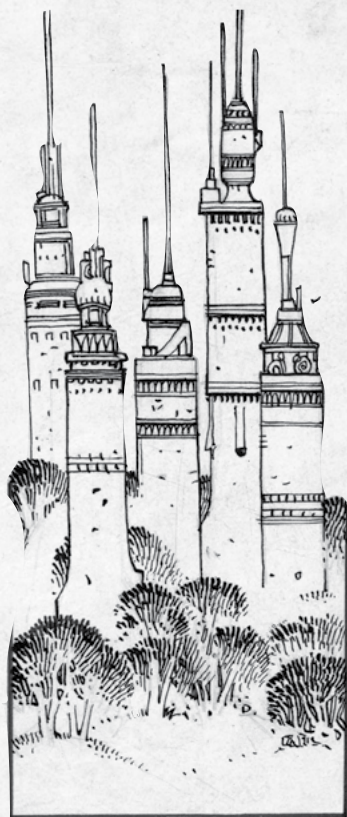
Thystonius's tower has been reNamed the Spire of Meraerthsa, or the Spire of the Warrior, taking the place of the fallen spire to help elves along their Path. While questors of Thystonius are always welcome, it provides support for the Swords of Justice (p. 195) and, to a lesser extent, the Knights of the Crimson Spire. It also provides training for the most promising guardsmen of Dion.

Cirolletishsa Spire

The Tower of Travelers is an unassuming structure, standing only 75 feet high and largely unadorned. The duties of this spire have grown to encompass all things related to the Wheel, particularly the Path of Scholars, the Path of Travelers, and the Path of Sages. Any travelling the Wheel are welcome to stay within Cirolletishsa Spire. Enormous texts serve as a visitor's log that stretches back to the pre-Scourge days. Access to older books is restricted but boast signatures from the queens of Wyrn Wood and other notable figures of distant lands.

Regshaysbwir

The Tower of Lords is barely a tower, only 50 feet tall. What it lacks in size it makes up for in decoration. Fine carvings and colorful mosaics adorn the tower on all sides. Private meetings are held in Regshaysbwir every new moon. These meetings can only be attended by those who have reached the final Path of the Wheel. The purpose and traditions of these meetings are unknown to all but the few dozen Lords allowed entry.



The Crimson Spire

The Crimson Spire suffered significant damage during the Scourge but remained standing. Today, the tower stands just over 100 feet in height where once it stood three times that. Despite the damage, the red ivy from which the spire gained its name clings to what remains. The formerly dangerous ruins have been refurbished and made safe for habitation. There is a plan to restore the Crimson Spire to its original glory, but the project is still in its early stages with fifty feet of scaffolding a reminder of Sereatha's desire to rebuild.

The Knights of the Crimson Spire (p. 193) were quick to move back into their tower and their numbers swelled as the Gwydenro was reunited. They have since outgrown their facilities and most of their leadership has moved into the Foundation Spire. The Crimson Spire hosts hundreds of fresh recruits and it is common to see groups training in the grounds around their home.

THE CONSORTIS

Since the days of Queen Failla, a council of consortis has ruled over the Gwydenro. They are selected from eligible candidates and, with one exception, serve for life. The Patriarchs of each of the three Founding Ranelles (p. 166) appoint one consortis from their own family while the Duke of the Knights of



the Crimson Spire serves as a fourth. The fifth seat is filled by the champion of Cariad Castald (p. 164), acting as a mouthpiece for the people. In the rare case the Annwyl is unwilling or unable to serve as a consortis, the chair remains empty until the following Cariad Castald.

The five consortis select one among them to act as High Steward. Traditionally, the High Steward is meant to follow the direction of the Queen in Wyrn Wood while seeing to the needs of the Gwydenro. After the Scourge and the Ritual of Thorns, the official role of Queen Alachia became uncertain. The consortis found the Ritual of Thorns an abomination, but their position as her servants was an awkward concept to redefine.

From the end of the Scourge until three years ago, the role of High Steward was held by Annwyl Maldwyn. Under Maldwyn's leadership, the surviving Western Kingdoms were united and contact with foreign powers reestablished. With the tragedy of Blood Wood apparent and the Theran threat looming, the consortis decided Maldwyn's approach to foreign policy was too risky for the Gwydenro. Three of the five agreed to elect Duke Iolyn to replace Maldwyn and the motion was passed.

High Steward Iolyn, Duke of the Crimson Spire

Iolyn arrived in Dion before Maldwyn made his voyage. Despite his low birth and lack of ranelle, Iolyn was already a potent Wizard and well on his way to completing his journey along the Path of Sages. Iolyn's aid in those early days kept the elven people alive until their court emerged from isolation.

As Iolyn transitioned to the path of Lords, the pinnacle of elven achievement, he joined the Knights of the Crimson Spire (p. 193). His low birth mattered little in that order and his skills helped him rapidly climb their ranks. Ten years ago, he was appointed leader of the Knights and joined the other consortis.

Three years ago, Iolyn attained the rank of High Steward. While most of his peers conceal their goals as though playing an elaborate game, Iolyn is brusque and direct. In his short time as High Steward, he has officially spoken out against Alachia's corruption, unequivocally asserted Sereatha is to be the new seat of elven culture, and taken a hardline stance against Thera and the Separated nations.

While he closely follows the ancient ideals of Wyrn Wood, his critics accuse him of quashing unique aspects of the Gwydenro's culture. Iolyn has cancelled Cariad Castald for three consecutive years. He claims the Contest of Love should be seeking a new queen, and without a purified Oak Heart, a new Queen cannot be appointed, therefore the tournament has no use.

Iolyn has acquired many opponents and his Knights of the Crimson Spire have thwarted more than one attempt on his life. In the political arena, there are some who claim Iolyn cares little for elven culture and seeks only power. Iolyn takes pains to denounce this idea, claiming all he does is for his future Queen. Sereatha's minor nobles are growing restless under his leadership,

though he has so far managed to keep a majority of the consortis on his side. If the discontent continues to grow, however, Iolyn may see himself removed from the role of High Steward.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 6 TOU: 6
PER: 9 WIL: 8 CHA: 5

Milde Escalanas

Milde is the only consortis still serving from the days of the Scourge. She claims no affiliation to the distant Escalanas of Blood Wood. Rarely seen in public, she is a vocal supporter of High Steward Iolyn and frequently reminds detractors, "Difficult times call for difficult actions," warning, "If we all waited for the perfect moment, nothing would ever happen."

Despite her advanced age, Milde has the appearance of a far younger elf. Those who know her well say you can only tell Milde's years by the weight they leave on her. While she and the Escalanas matriarch Alyndra share many opinions, they rarely consort with one another or even attend the same events. She has reached the Path of Lords on her Journey.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 9 WIL: 8 CHA: 6

Leja Fensalor

Leja is the youngest of the consortis at sixty-seven years old. She served with the Swords of Justice and became a renowned follower of the Path of Warriors. She opted to leave the organization when she moved to the Path of Scholars. Her training as an Elementalist has been less successful. According to rumor, Leja has trouble dealing and bargaining with elemental spirits. This failing could explain why the Fensalor were willing to send the young woman to Sereatha instead of keeping her close.

Leja rarely works magic in public and even eschews the traditional robe of her Discipline, adding to the scandal. Leja has served as consortis for nearly twenty years. She supports Iolyn's firm stance on Blood Wood but has yet to make any statements about the High Steward's policies towards Thera or Shosara.

Attributes

DEX: 8 STR: 7 TOU: 6
PER: 6 WIL: 8 CHA: 6

Bourtin Trisrora

Bourtin was appointed consortis only four years ago, making him the least experienced of the five. What Bourtin lacks in political savvy he makes up for in

practical experience. He has served many expeditions to the Grand Cataracts and the Wastes and has progressed along the Paths with deliberate speed. Barely one hundred, he is already recognized as a potent Wizard on the Path of Sages, though his true talents lie in his previous training as a Troubadour.

Bourtin's inspirational personality has some whispering he is betraying the Wheel and relying on his former Discipline. If such claims were to be proven true, Bourtin would lose many of the supporters he has worked so hard to gain. Politically, Bourtin seems reluctant to stand with the High Steward and was the only consortis who stood with Maldwyn against Iolyn's rise to power.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 7 WIL: 6 CHA: 8

Annwyl Maldwyn

Maldwyn rose to prominence in the final days of the Scourge. The common-born elf defeated those of higher birth and became Annwyl. Instead of taking the traditional seat among the consortis and staying the course, he gathered the finest possible crew and set out on a potentially suicidal expedition. His journey was a success, though many of his crew lost their lives. Maldwyn returned to the underground tunnels of Sereatha and told his tale. After winning Cariad Castald for a second time, he joined the others as a consortis.

Popular opinion of the Annwyl was so high he was immediately given the role of High Steward, and he served with distinction for seven decades. Time and again he won the Cariad Castald and kept his position among the consortis. Despite the constant accolades and public adoration, he kept a level head, pursuing a policy of forgiveness and acceptance. He even sought to work with the elves of Blood Wood despite their horrific transformation.

Maldwyn's philosophy of acceptance and unification were what the region needed at the time, but once the Gwydenro was back on its feet the threat of outside influence loomed. The Therans had been allowed to trade and even the Separated Shosarans were being welcomed back. A majority of the consortis voted Maldwyn out of power three years ago.

Despite this setback, Maldwyn seems content with his lessened role among the consortis. As one vote among five, he gives speeches and keeps himself in the public eye. He speaks out against Iolyn's policies, claiming the enemies of the Western Kingdoms are not all bad, nor are those from the Gwydenro all good. He maintains a middle path should be taken. His opinions echo the commoners of Dion, but few in Sereatha share Maldwyn's ideals.

Maldwyn does not follow the Paths, instead pursuing the Beastmaster and Troubadour Disciplines. This is a remarkable trait for one so highly placed in Sereathan society and enhances his popularity and fame among the commoners. So far, his Nal'mistishsa status has not been used against him, but

it could be a wedge to reduce support among more devout elves.

Eleventh Circle Elf Beastmaster, Ninth Circle Troubadour

DEX: 8 STR: 6 TOU: 7

Annwyl Gone By

There has been no Cariad Castald since the change in High Steward. With no Cariad Castald, Maldwyn's title of Annwyl could be called into question by any of the consortis. It is unclear how the people would react if such an action were to be taken as Maldwyn is still well loved by many. Even consortis nominally loyal to Iolyn might be against this move as it could set a dangerous precedent.

PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 7

LAIMIN RANELLE

While the five consortis are responsible for the well-being of Sereatha and the Gwydenro, they begin their careers with only a handful of personal servants and attachés. A city of thousands and a region many times that requires significantly more aides to run smoothly. To that end, numerous Laimin serve Sereatha's court and see to the everyday bureaucracy of running the Western Kingdoms. There is a crass saying in Dion that highlights what commoners think of the Laimin, "Behind every great noble is a Laimin carrying his waste."

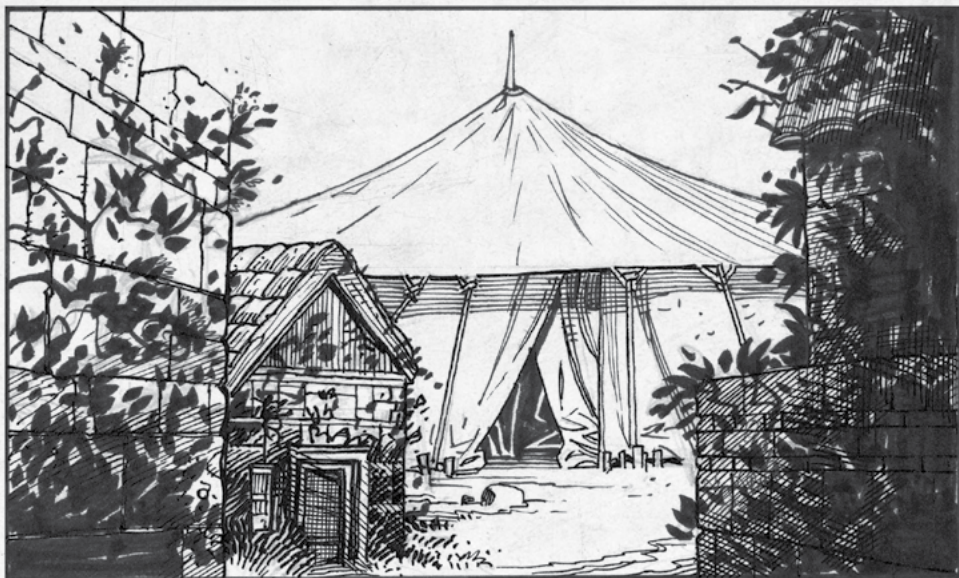
Ierus Laimin

Ierus operates as Laimin Matriarch and chief aide to the council of consortis. She personally records most meetings and works to ensure the consortis' needs are met even before they think to ask. Ierus is not an adept, though she does follow the Wheel, wearing the regalia of the Path of Sages. While everyone in the court has met her at one time or another, she blends in with the powerful and influential people around her, and few give her a second thought.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 5

PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 6



OTHER KINGDOMS

Aiqua

Ruled by the Fensalor ranelle and vassal to Caelshara, Aiqua stands on the small stretch of coast where the Wastes approach the Bwydvir. The village was founded after the Scourge by healers who discovered locally-growing blood ivy. Today, the healers are overwhelmed treating the injured and sick that come out of the Wastes.

History

During a coastal survey fifty years ago, Aiqua was founded by a questor of Jaspre who requested landfall be made near the Wastes. After a cursory search of the area, blood ivy was found growing naturally amid the desiccated and twisted plants at the edge of the Wastes. This was the first known colony of blood ivy outside Blood Wood. When news of this potent healing reagent reached the rest of the Gwydenro, the Fensalor sent a unit of soldiers to secure the area.

Over time, physicians and botanists made their way to the village to investigate the unusual flora. While tales of the village spread, explorers were venturing into the Wastes with increasing regularity. These expeditions exposed more Namegivers to the varju (p. 160). Desperate for treatment, the afflicted sought out the nearest skilled physicians. This took them in large numbers to Aiqua. As more injured explorers arrived, so too did more healers to treat them, and a self-perpetuating cycle began.

Aiqua Today

The settlement of about one thousand Namegivers is still quite isolated. Approaching the city by land is complicated by the large pools of varju that have settled to the east and west. Other than coming up through the Wastes, the only practical approach is by sea, though the village dockyards leave much to be desired.

A large tent stands in the village center, and is where the healers of Aiqua practice their craft. While no sick Namegiver has ever been turned away, the healers have yet to discover a reliable treatment for varju poisoning. The abysmal cure rate has caused the common folk to call Aiqua the "Hospital of the Damned."

Because of the village's sinister reputation, the healthy do not seek out Aiqua unless they have no other choice. Optimistic explorers avoid the grim site, setting out for the Wastes overland to the east. Few expeditions begin in Aiqua, but it is where many end.

Pijan Fensalor

Pijan was sent to Aiqua fifty years ago. He became the gerryth's king and swore Lew Teyrn with his great-uncle in Caelshara. Pijan is a Cavalryman and chooses not to follow the Wheel, to his family's chagrin. The young king spends little time in Aiqua, preferring instead to reside in Sereatha's court. His chosen Discipline and his time away from his kingdom have given him a reputation of being lazy and uncaring. That reputation does not appear to bother him in the least.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 6 TOU: 6
PER: 5 WIL: 5 CHA: 6

Mino Silverfall

Mino has been obsessed with varju since the death of his husband on an ill-fated expedition, becoming a questor of Garlen in addition to his Wizard training. Mino believes the substance is not merely an infection, but hundreds of tiny living magical creatures. The human has little proof to back up his claims and all his reports have been dismissed by the Learners' Guild (p. 194). While Mino's beliefs are frequently called into question, he has proven himself competent and compassionate treating those in his care. Due to their absentee King, Mino has served as the gerryth's de facto leader for the past several decades and few seem interested in contesting his role.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 5
PER: 7 WIL: 5 CHA: 6

Caelshara

Many titles have been given to the bustling kingdom of Caelshara: Gateway to the West, the Sunset Bastion, the Open City, or the Arsenal of Gwydenro. It is a city of dual natures; from the standing army that makes its home in the fortress to the foreign traders skittering about the shore. Caelshara's success is perhaps the greatest testament to the fidelity of the kingdom's Fensalor rulership.

History

Caelshara began as a simple stone fort at an easily defensible location along the Bwydvir coast. The proving ground was irresistible to the young Fensalor Ranelle, who devoted resources expanding it into a proper fortification. From this fort the Fensalor marched against the Escalanas before Sereatha's founding. The fort also defended the land from Vasgothian raiders. Centuries later, when the first Therans began visiting the Western Kingdoms, diplomatic relations were established and it was decided this remote location, settled by warriors, would be the best place to keep these foreigners at bay.

The consortis of the time could not have known the austere fortress would become a major trading post but, as the gateway to the Western Kingdoms, it grew explosively as merchants from surrounding regions sought to make their fortune trading exotic goods. Some found the city's safety and sophisticated nature irresistible and permanently settled. When the Scourge came, the Fensalor cut off outside access with military efficiency. They evicted any believed to have foreign allegiance and put to the sword those who resisted. Once the Scourge ended and the Western Kingdoms re-established contact with the outside world, tales of the city caused the cosmopolitan atmosphere to resume almost overnight.

Caelshara Toda

Caelshara is a city with a dual identity. The Open City is a riot of activity, buildings in styles evoking far-flung lands share space with little rhyme or reason. Brisk trade between Namegivers from foreign nations keeps the markets busy from dawn until dusk. It is cosmopolitan, with art and scholarship from as far west as the Misty Sea to distant Indrisia. This creates an avant-garde atmosphere spawning work that would not have been possible elsewhere. Long-time residents of the city have even developed their own dialect, a patois of



Sperethiel, Theran, and a smattering of other Namegiver languages.

The old fortress the city is named after looms over this hive of activity. The hustle and bustle of the markets gives way to the ringing sounds of hammer on anvil and the shouts of officers training troops. Caelshara is the seat of the Fensalor Ranelle, and they take great pride in their home and their responsibility to guard elvenkind from the depredations of outsiders. The fortress maintains its own docks and is constantly improving its sea and air defenses.

The Fensalor support their cosmopolitan kingdom and even the most militant concede the coin gained from trade is a powerful asset that can be used elsewhere in the Gwydenro. More traditional nobles argue to limit those allowed to trade in the Open City while the younger generation are enraptured by their exposure to the whirlwind of different cultures. The distant High Steward Iolyn seems concerned with the growing Theran fashion trends taking root in the court of Caelshara but so far has made no official statement.

While the Fensalor nobles are permissive of foreign culture as needed to foster trade, they take a hard stance on crime. If a suspected criminal is not of elven descent, the ranking guard on the scene may pass judgement as they deem fit. Minor crimes such as theft are met with the loss of a finger or hand while violent crimes will see the perpetrator branded, expelled, or executed

Adventure Idea

The characters witness a group of skilled thieves rob a Fensalor stall and frame a pair of young orks. As the guard rush in to dispense justice, the characters are the only ones who have a chance to clear the orks' Names. The guard are difficult to slow down, bowing only to the demand of noble elves or particularly charming individuals.

The guard sergeant gives the characters until sundown to track down the real culprits. The thieves are a group of Vagothian rebels trying to run equipment to their forces to the west. Their leader has groups winding their way through the markets, directing them from a secret base outside the city.

depending on the crime's severity and the sergeant's mood.

Talana Elrieth

Having proven herself a competent and trustworthy general in the early days after the Scourge, Talana had her loyalty rewarded with command of the largest elven army in the west. Her close personal friendship with the much older Patriarch Itham (p. 168) is well known across the Gwydenro and rumors of a closer relationship circulate among the nobles. No one speaks such words in her presence, however, as her prowess as a Warrior is only overshadowed by her explosive temper. While Itham rules Caelshara, his age has prevented him from patrolling the lands himself, leaving Talana to become increasingly involved with the kingdom's day to day affairs.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 5
 PER: 7 WIL: 5 CHA: 6

Kaer Oribella

Closely tied to the Seekers of the Heart (p. 83), Oribella sealed itself in the final days leading up to the Scourge. The kaer's council made it clear their purpose was to offer a safe haven to all Namegivers in need. Their role as a fiercely independent village has continued after the Scourge and, while this could be considered the Kingdom of Oribella, the council refuses to swear into Lew Teyrn with the rest of the Western Kingdoms.

History

As Oribella stayed open after its peers had closed, many grew concerned they were allowing in the very corruption from which they fled. The council would not budge in their decree and they closed their gates at the last possible moment.

During the Scourge, Oribella suffered its fair share of disaster. A malign force found its way to the kaer's hidden doors and assaulted them at length. The magicians in the kaer struggled to support the barriers, but each failed in turn, some suffering grievous injuries. An unknown hermit emerged from the pack of frightened survivors and managed to turn the force away. The stranger faded back into the crowds and his identity was lost to the myth. Decades later, the lives of many of the council and several members of the Byre ranelle died in the night and a force of corruption was discovered and defeated by those who survived.

Oribella Today

Kaer Oribella has struggled back from the brink many times. Expeditions into the Wastes frequently begin at this kaer and catering to these groups has provided the small colony enough wealth to maintain their independence. Oribella does not recognize any elven courts and has politely, yet firmly, declined all invitations to rejoin the Gwydenro. Many of the founding members of the Seekers of the Heart were born and raised at Oribella. While no official connection exists, many believe the village's ruling council supports the group whenever possible.

Nadha Flinthorn

A skilled hunter and Archer adept, Nadha took over Oribella's ruling council after her father's death near the end of the Scourge. Many on the council defer to her guidance on all but the most crucial matters. Nadha currently struggles to maintain Oribella's neutrality among the various elven courts. Some believe their loyalty should lie with the Western Kingdoms as their family lines trace back to the Gwydenro. Others believe Sereatha turned

its back on Oribella as the shadow of the Scourge loomed. Nadha does not believe any of these options are right and is doing her best to keep the village from tearing itself apart.

Attributes

DEX: 8 STR: 6 TOU: 5
PER: 7 WIL: 5 CHA: 6

Tel'Shos

A quiet town built into and around a forested cliffside, Tel'Shos was a pleasant though unremarkable settlement before the Scourge. Since then it has grown into a busy port that proudly supports High Steward Iolyn and his traditional views. Tel'Shos shuns those its leadership considers radicals, while promoting traditional elven arts and culture. The Sylraalei ranelle has led the city since the Scourge and is sworn as a vassal directly to Sereatha.

History

Tel'Shos was founded long ago as a coastal retreat for the region's nobility, a quiet place where they could scheme and jockey for position away from the court's prying eyes. The town soon gained influence as a hotbed of intrigue and a place for courtiers to curry favor, especially prior to the Cariad Castald.

After the Scourge, representatives of High Steward Maldwyn brought the kingdom back into the fold. The Sylraalei had inherited control of the kingdom during the Scourge and held very traditional views. They frequently found themselves butting heads with the more liberal consortis of the time and were pleased when Maldwyn was replaced.

Tel'Shos Today

Tel'Shos follows an interpretation of the Wheel even traditionalists find strict. While most believe those further along the Wheel are deserving of greater respect, the people of Tel'Shos take that a step further. Those on a later path are thought to be socially superior to their less experienced peers. Those who have not yet begun the Path of Warriors have few rights. They are seen as lazy, cowardly, and lacking in their resolve to preserve and advance elven culture. The sprawling woodland idyll has quite a few of these "sleepers," who are made to carry out menial tasks and are punished harshly if they do not meet expectations.

Since High Steward Iolyn's ascension, ranking members of the town's court boldly speak out against Maldwyn's policies and sleeper status. Tel'Shos refuses all foreign vessels docking at their harbor, even in emergencies, citing Iolyn's edicts of cultural independence. While Iolyn seems to approve of the local court's choices, the decreased income to Sereatha from docking fees and tariffs is an annoyance for most of the other consortis.

Adventure Idea

Justicar Helmar Dengar of the Swords of Justice has recently arrived in Tel'Shos following rumors of disappearances in nearby settlements. The grizzled veteran was welcomed as an honored guest but has found his investigation stifled at every turn. With all the attention on him, he recruits the characters as deputies to investigate the crime away from the local court's prying eyes.

Option 1

The Sylraalei are directly responsible for the deaths of sleepers in neighboring villages. Every year in late summer, the nobility takes Namegivers that will not be missed and releases them into the local woods. They then launch a great hunt to find and kill the quarry, believing the death is a sacrifice to Thystonius that ensures a bountiful harvest. Unfortunately, it is the mad Passion Raggok who has inspired the ritual.

Option 2

The Sylraalei court is not responsible for the deaths but is covering up the investigation in fear of losing status. Further inland is the kaer where the people of Tel'Shos survived the Scourge. Hidden in the kaer is an intelligent Horror that made a pact with the Sylraalei. It would remove the kingdom's original noble family, giving the Sylraalei the chance to claim power. The ranelle sought to bury their shame, sealing the kaer behind them with the creature within. Recently, the creature has found its way back to the surface, though it still lairs in the trapped and tainted kaer.

Sandev Sylraalei

The undisputed Lord of Tel'Shos, Sandev claims lineage from an ancient, yet minor ranelle. He continues that tradition, focusing on making sure his gerryth cleaves as closely as possible to elven traditions and notions of elven superiority. While some outsiders claim this is more of an iron fist than a velvet glove and his motives are far darker, he is the epitome of a refined elven noble and frequently funds expeditions to recover elven lore lost during the Scourge.

Sandev is on the Path of Sages and wants very badly to reach the Path of Lords. His pursuit of this goal is equal parts devotion to the Wheel and political ambition.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 6 TOU: 5
PER: 6 WIL: 6 CHA: 6

ORGANIZATIONS OF THE GWYDENRO

In the City of Spires, lineage is frequently considered a Namegiver's most defining feature. A ranelle sets the expectations of those in court. It likely defines an individual's desires and political motivations and it assuredly paints their worldview.

However, many strive for something more than their blood. These elves join an organization and make that group's goals their own, standing for something larger than increasing their personal stock. While a family's immediate goals are likely to shift over the decades, an organization's ideals tend to last much longer.

The Knights of the Crimson Spire

The Knights of the Crimson Spire are as old an organization as they come. The order has its roots in the one hundred warriors gifted to the first High Steward by Queen Melyora. Since that day, the Knights have bent their purpose to spreading and protecting elven culture. For centuries, the High Steward of Sereatha and the leader of the Knights of the Crimson Spire were one and the same.

The unofficial relationship between the Knights and the High Steward became official policy with Queen Failla. She instituted the position of consortis and the elves of Sereatha were quick to adapt (p. 29). In honor of the Knights' influential position in the Western Kingdoms, they were granted the fourth consortis seat, the leader of their order given the title Duke. Since then, the Knights have served as Sereatha's standing army. The High Steward can call on the order to defend the Gwydenro from foreign attack. Far more often, the knights spend their time aiding gerryth in states of emergency.

Elves from any walk of life are welcome to join the Knights of the Crimson Spire, though nobles joining are frequently granted leadership roles. Joining the Knights requires a vow to put the order and safety of your fellow knights above those of your family. It is possible to leave the Knights upon completing a Path of the Wheel, though the Knights are typically reluctant to let former members rejoin. Only those who have proven their dedication to the Knights above all others are given the opportunity to rise to the order's highest ranks.

Baron Krau Elrieth

Krau Elrieth is second in command of the Knights of the Crimson Spire granting him the title of Baron. Traditionally, this officer handles the organization's daily affairs while the Duke sits with the consortis. As Duke Iolyn must also tend to the matters of High Steward, Krau shoulders even more responsibility than usual. Krau is frequently seen at court and has taken to wearing the regalia of a Wizard, indicating a transition onto the Path of Sages. Krau is credited with recent successful membership drives in Dion and the Crimson Spire has never had more fresh recruits.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 6 TOU: 5
 PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 7

The Learners' Guild

The Learners' Guild was founded during the Orichalcum Wars. At that time, they operated out of the Spire of Floranuus and focused on uncovering the motives and tactics of the Elven Nations' enemies. As the wars ended, their role changed from military intelligence to general scholarship.

After the Scourge, the Learners' Guild reformed and continued their work from the Spire of Unification and were instrumental during the early days uncovering lost gerryth and charting long term plans of growth and discovery. The Guild has recently been willing to take larger risks. The Wastes claim three expeditions in ten sent by the Learners' Guild and the group has little to show for it. Some believe the Learners are desperate to prove they are still relevant, while others believe they are desperately looking for phantoms beneath the soot and sand.

Devotees of the Learners' Guild may be granted the title *Perritaesa* or "Sage." Such a status grants significant respect from the court and allows the Perritaesa to request funds for research or expeditions from the other active Perritaesa.

Perritaesa Eysta Escalanas

Eysta is the youngest of the seven Perritaesa that lead the Learner's Guild. This young Elementalists is pursuing the Path of Scholars and obsessed with the mysteries of the Wastes. She frequently gets involved in expeditions to the most dangerous portions of the land and has, so far, managed to return unscathed. Despite her relatively low status she has received multiple visits from Milde Escalanas (p. 183) and Matriarch Alyndra (p. 167).

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5
 PER: 8 WIL: 6 CHA: 5

Rebuilders of the Amethyst

The Order of the Amethyst Spire was founded alongside the Knights of the Crimson Spire. While the Knights were meant to defend elven culture, the Order was meant to establish and further that culture among the queen's subjects. It was critical in the planning and construction of the spires that give the city its epithet and many of their great works can be seen throughout the Gwydenro.

Unfortunately, the Amethyst Spire, which once stood in the waters of the bay of Tyrnvir, collapsed during the Scourge. The Order was offered land elsewhere in the City, but refused. Instead they vowed to restore their spire

to its rightful place. Today, the Order mostly lives in Dion, working on ways to retrieve their ancient flagstones from the bottom of the sea.

Ninkas Elrieth

Little is known of Lord Ninkas's history. His ranelle is a vassal of the Trisrora, but it is unclear how important those ties are to the scholar. He is a powerful Weaponsmith and Wizard who has completed his Journey along the Wheel. Despite this impressive feat and his noble birth, Ninkas never attends court events and spends his time in Dion's Foundation (p. 172) in an enormous workshop which holds all the Amethyst Spire stones that have been retrieved so far.

Wrinkled yet burly, Ninkas could make a fortune forging weapons and armor for the elite but instead chooses to build complex machinery to trawl the sea floor, a task for which he has few investors.

Attributes

DEX: 8 STR: 7 TOU: 7
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 5

The Swords of Justice

The Swords of Justice have existed in some capacity since the earliest days of the Gwydenro. Legends claim the Swords were directly founded by the Passion Mynbruje who traveled the land with a half-dozen Namegiver companions, each of whom have epic poems and songs told about their deeds. In these ancient days, the order acted in a manner reminiscent of a mercenary band. They would arrive at a gerryth in need to battle whatever threatened the desperate kingdom. The legendary group has battled barbarians, rooted out corruption, and even brought in harvests before a deadly frost.

When Queen Alachia took the throne, she officially recognized the group and commanded the High Steward to give the Swords official space in the Spire of Mynbruje. The group moved into the City of Spires and took to enacting the Queen's goodwill in the distant reaches of the world. They are said to have traveled as far west as Arancia and as far east as Cathay. Despite these extensive travels and honorable service, few legends remain to describe the Swords' actions in the century leading up to the Scourge.



The Spire of Mynbruje was lost during the Scourge, but the Swords of Justice were given space in the Spire of Meraerthsa. The group chose to take less than half the space they were offered, instead returning to their roots as itinerant Namegivers eager to help the downtrodden. They converted their space in Sereatha into a rarely used mustering hall.

While a handful of Swords of Justice can be found at any time in the Spire of Meraerthsa, hundreds of Swords wander the Gwydenro. All gerryth recognize their official role as arbiters of justice and wisdom. Some smaller and less educated gerryth revere the Swords for their ancient connection to Mynbruje, treating them with an almost religious deference.

Sword Bendrin

Bendrin is a questor of Mynbruje, one of only a handful of humans who make their home in the City of Spires. He acts as bookkeeper for the Swords of Justice and takes pride welcoming every new member. A reasonably skilled Illusionist, he replies to questions about how an Illusionist could properly seek truth and justice with, "Who could do it better?"

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 5
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 6

THE GWYDENRO AND THE KNOWN WORLD

Dealing with Shosara was outlawed centuries ago and treating with the Therans has been heavily discouraged since the Orichalcum Wars. Other than these limitations, each gerryth has historically been allowed to do business as it deemed fit. After the Scourge, Maldwyn sought to forge new relationships and officially relaxed these few restrictions. After seventy years, this situation has been turned on its head as High Steward Iolyn has reinstated the embargo on the Separated and advises caution when dealing with foreigners.

Iolyn has strictly limited Thera's mercantile efforts to Caelshara alone and has established in no uncertain terms the ancient Separation of Shosara is still in effect. While Iolyn's stance on these issues is clear, he does not have an iron grip over the entire Gwydenro. Many nobles carry on as they did in Maldwyn's days, exploiting the gray areas around Iolyn's official decrees and awaiting specific correction or reprimand.

In general, the elves of the Gwydenro are suspicious of foreign vessels but are open to making cautious contact. An unexpected foreigner claiming no affiliation is usually brought to the king of the nearest gerryth. The responsibility then falls to that king to deal with the foreigner, or pass the problem along to their liege.

Blood Wood

The Western Kingdoms mistrust the blood elves. The Ritual of Thorns is seen as a deep betrayal of elven culture and Queen Alachia's declarations since the Scourge are frequently treated as the ramblings of a lunatic. The Escalanas

Ranelle tried to reestablish contact with their kin in Blood Wood but found the relationship unsettling at best. With Iolyn's recent declaration that Queen Alachia and her court are irredeemable, most of the Western Kingdoms were happy to cut ties.

A small but growing contingent of blood elves had taken to living in Dion (p. 172) prior to Iolyn's decree and the Darga were left with little choice but to evict these tainted refugees. Blood elves are not allowed in most gerryth and few remain in the Western Kingdoms. The nobles insist, however, that Alachia's Songbirds (p. 92) continue to worm their way into the region. If Maldwyn is indeed attempting to grow a new Oak Heart, the Songbirds would no doubt seek to stop him.

Iopos

The Denairastas have become an increasingly erratic trading partner over the past decade. Jerris-built airships are frequently seen winding their way across the Gwydenro, even to Sereatha itself. Their ships seem inexplicably to prefer trading with gerryth under Trisrora control and the ranelle has been pressing that opportunity. However, recent changes in Jerris have caused the Denairastas to unapologetically go back on their deal to make new Trisroran trading vessels.

While the nobility cares little about Iopan schemes in Barsaive, so too does Iopos seem to care little about the politics of the Western Kingdoms. The Denairastas are in talks with the Sereathan court about establishing an official and permanent embassy, but the shift in High Steward has set these talks back significantly.

Ghieron Denairastas

The first Denairastas officially arrived in Sereatha a decade ago and promptly left. Since then, many Iopan representatives have entered the Gwydenro and left without making waves. Four years ago, a representative arrived and remained. Ghieron Denairastas is officially looking to establish an embassy similar to that of Throal. However, once Iolyn took over the position of High Steward, Ghieron ceased pushing that agenda.

Ghieron has since grown much closer to the Learners' Guild and frequently takes sojourns to the bars of the Harborage. Rumors claim Ghieron is looking to mount his own expedition into the Wastes, though few can speculate on the exact target of his journey.

Ghieron is an accomplished Illusionist and Thief but hides his true skill with those Disciplines, presenting himself most commonly as a scribe and scholar.

Attributes

DEX: 7 STR: 7 TOU: 7
PER: 8 WIL: 8 CHA: 7

Grand Cataracts

The rough cultures of the Grand Cataracts pride themselves on their isolation. They have little interest in trade and, as such, are rarely bothered by merchants from the Gwydenro. The expense of reliable air travel serves to make expeditions into this region even less desirable.

Pelsaari

To the north across the Bwydvir are the harsh and frigid regions referred to as Pelsaari or "Wild Lands." Before the Scourge, the Gwydenro reached slightly further up the coast of Tyrnvir. While the people were in isolation, the area became little more than blasted rock. What few expeditions have explored to the north have found the kaers cracked and those beneath it long dead.

The northern coast of the Tyrnvir is the beginning of Pelsaari and the further one ventures into these lands the stranger things become. With few kaers awaiting recovery and even fewer viable trading partners, there is little to interest the people of the Gwydenro.

Every few years, vessels of creatures halfway between Namegiver and animal emerge from this distant north and raid along the coast. The vessels are usually turned back before they can do significant damage and have yet to bring enough strength to enter the Tyrnvir. Still, these northern barbarians are justifiably feared, and their vessels are attacked on sight.

Shosara

The Western Kingdoms have despised the people of Shosara since the death of Queen Dallia. From a young age, those of the Gwydenro hear stories of the Separation and blame the Shosarans for causing such strife within the court. After the Scourge, Maldwyn allowed for official dealings with the Separated elves. The Trisrora Ranelle was quick to make inroads wherever possible with the Laryskova (p. 233) and a small amount of trade was established between the two nations.

Recently, Iolyn reversed Maldwyn's practices and put an end to the trade. Many kingdoms continue to trade with the closely intertwined Free Companies from the region reasoning that, since only elves can be Separated, these other Namegivers are fair game.

Shosara is clearly displeased with the new High Steward and constantly sends envoys to Sereatha only to have them turned away without an audience. Shosara loudly warns the people of the Western Kingdoms that they are moving backwards, not forwards, and one need only look to Shosara's success during the Scourge to see the elven people require a new way. Still, despite their bluster, the Shosarans seem to be mirroring Sereatha's efforts to grow a purified Oak Heart. Traditionalist nobles take these actions as proof of Shosara's incompetence.

Prince Simifer Bezan

A young prince of Shosara, Simifer has been given the unenviable task of attaining an audience with High Steward Iolyn. He arrives via airship and is escorted to quarters in Naunamai (p. 177). Few in Sereatha have a personal issue with Simifer, and the representative does his best to stick to himself. After a few weeks of being shunned in the City, Iolyn officially tells Simifer he does not have time to meet with a Separated elf and sends the Prince home. After a few months, Simifer returns and the cycle repeats.

Nobles have noticed that Simifer's vessels have been approaching from further and further to the southeast, leading some to believe that the unwanted Prince is taking a more circuitous journey. A journey that might be purposefully taking him past sympathetic Trisrora gerryth and using his Troubadour magic to enhance his diplomatic efforts.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 5 TOU: 5
PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 7

Thera

Thera was founded by the followers of an elf expelled from Queen Failla's court. While this caused political tension, the relationship remained cordial until the Orichalcum Wars. Thera and the elven nations came to blows during this conflict and dealings were officially outlawed. After the Scourge, when Maldwyn encountered Theran forces in the Bwydvir near Vasgothia, new terms were negotiated. The Therans would be allowed to trade with the Gwydenro, but were forbidden from trading slaves and would have to submit their vessels to searches whenever docking at a gerryth. Thera agreed but quickly discovered some ports were still interested in harboring old grudges. They found Caelshara a welcoming and profitable port of call. Soon the two nations were doing brisk business.

Iolyn, citing the Therans as a military and cultural threat, has outlawed them from all ports unless they receive special dispensation. This has done little to interrupt business in Caelshara as the Fensalor were quick to provide the necessary permissions.

Theran vessels can rarely be seen in Sereatha, when they do make an appearance in the City of Spires, they meet with High Steward Iolyn behind closed doors. Nobles suspect that, with rebellion fomenting in Vasgothia, Thera is looking to station troops on the western borders of the Western Kingdoms. Were Iolyn to allow that, he would be undermining his platform of independence and closed borders. If he upsets Thera too greatly, trade in Caelshara might dry up and the High Steward might lose support of the Fensalor consortis.

Strategos Corinni Gascillium

Corinni, a human, has frequented the markets of Caelshara (p. 188) for decades and is well known to the Fensalor Ranelle. Nearly a year ago, he

made the journey to Sereatha and was officially allowed at court. He has accomplished little since then, sticking to Fensalor company. Surprisingly, Iolyn has taken many private meetings with the man, far more than would be expected given the Theran's relatively low station.

Corinni has a reputation among the nobility for being quiet and off-putting and seems more comfortable on one of his many day trips to Dion. He spends most of his time in the Foundation and has reportedly even met with King Skyddyn Darga. Though what the two would have to discuss is unknown. He is an experienced Thief but hides his true Discipline behind several Troubadour talents he has learned through Versatility.

Attributes

DEX: 7 **STR:** 5 **TOU:** 5
PER: 7 **WIL:** 5 **CHA:** 5

Throal

The Kingdom of Throal began doing business with the Western Kingdoms after their victory in the Second Theran War. Trade has been picking up in recent years, but the journey is long and arduous and the profit margins for these trips remain razor thin.

Throal has officially opened a full-time embassy in the tower of Viestern (p. 177), a move that has damaged their public opinion more than aided it. Ambassadors from Throal arrive in Sereatha with surprising regularity, with the nobles whispering the



dwarf kingdom could be a powerful ally if war breaks out between Blood Wood and the Gwydenro.

Ambassador Lirenzie Ludi

Lirenzie is the only dwarf to call Sereatha home and sole employee of the Throalic embassy in the City of Spires. Lirenzie has operated out of Viestern for nearly five years but remains hopeless when it comes to Sereathan politics. She is frequently responsible for social gaffes and makes blunders that are obvious to those who have grown up in local noble circles.

Recently, she was seen asking Ierus Laimin (p. 185) questions about the recent cancellations of Cariad Castald. The administrator reportedly looked pained as she attempted to deflect the awkward and direct accusations Lirenzie put before her. Whether Lirenzie is wiser than she appears or consortis Bourtin set her to the task is a topic of debate amongst the court.

The only positive relationships she has formed are with the clerks in the Spire of Ambition, which grew from her status as a questor of Chorrolis.

Attributes

DEX: 4 STR: 5 TOU: 6
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 5

Vasgothia

Vasgothia is rarely considered by the Western Kingdoms. It is seen as a Theran province and little more. Vasgothia is in near constant rebellion and has asked the Gwydenro for aid multiple times, but so far, the consortis have avoided these conflicts. However, the word in Caelshara's markets is that a new rebellion is growing in the deep jungles along Vasgothia's eastern border. These rebels have reportedly been seen with high quality elven weapons and armor.

The Wastes

As the dangers of the Wastes become increasingly catalogued, the region has become the frontier of the Western Kingdoms. A few bold groups have attempted to move back into old settlements, but these efforts fail far more often than they succeed. The region is still exceedingly dangerous but, if it could be tamed, the Western Kingdoms could secure profitable land routes to Barsaive, Vivane, and beyond.





INTO THE UNKNOWN

"The sea's full of great danger, but great opportunity, too. The trick's braving the former to seize the latter."

When he was a child, Lavro took his grandfather's words to heart. His family passed down stories of their elven ancestors plying the Gwyn Sea. Lavro devoured them all as he heard them, his head filling with dreams of becoming a dashing explorer on the high seas. He'd always been a bookish sort, though, and his family kept him on a tight leash. They spent their time training him to be a masterful and ruthless merchant. He'd worked his way up through the cutthroat markets of Shosara, all the while stashing away silver to pursue his dream. *I've outsmarted or outsold everyone who's crossed me to get where I am*, he often thought to himself, *what's next is just another conquest.*

And now he was proud owner of a ship and captain of a seasoned crew. It may have been his first voyage, but he would make a big discovery and return to acclaim. Or, at least, that was the hope. Walking to the end of the dock, inspecting the newly repainted *Birdsong*, Lavro could see the crew lined up on the ship. All eyes were on him, eyes that were already appraising him, seeing if he was just another foolish noble with dreams of adventure. He approached confidently, casting his own appraising look back on the crew.

"Greetings... err... Namegivers of the *Birdsong*! It is I... err... your new Captain, Lavro of House Salucar." *Too weak, too friendly*, he immediately thought to himself after an uncomfortable pause. "Who among you is First Mate Artem?"

A wiry human stepped forward, various carved bone charms sticking out at odd angles from piercings in his ears. "That'd be me, Captain. Sir. M'Lord... Jaspree favor you this day," he responded, tripping over the honorifics as he tried his best to bow politely. *The man's nervous*, Lavro noted, and maybe had a right to be. The merchant had seized the ship, and the crew's contracts tied to it, from a debtor to help pay for this venture.

"Captain will be fine, Artem. Serve me well and I have no doubts we'll get along smoothly," he announced, looking out again among the crew. Deckhands exchanged knowing looks, and he noted their quiet insolence. He'd have to discipline them later if they got out of line, to show the others he meant business. "Now, shall we do an inspection, officer?"

An awkward tour of the ship ensued. Lavro hadn't bothered to look over the vessel up until now. He knew the debtor had invested everything he'd

had in it, so it was a labor of love, the debtor's dream realized in the form of a lightweight, seaworthy ship in the Khistovan style. A ship that would now serve Lavro's dream, he thought to himself as he was led around the vessel. He and some of the officers made stilted small talk for a time before he headed back to the ship's stern and Artem.

He stood by the helm, looking over the crew again, to make such a speech as they were preparing to cast off. "Men, the task before us won't be easy... it will be... very difficult," he began, and the thought came immediately after, *Too hesitant. You need more force in your voice.* "But if we can fulfill our duty we'll be heroes! Heroes of Shosara," he added quickly. *Too quickly.* "We're going to... sail through the Gullet to the cold north, and we're going to uncover a forgotten ruin from before the Scourge." He fumbled with a rolled-up parchment, waving it above his head. "I have here, right here... in my hands... a map that will lead us there. It'll... it'll take bravery! And hard work! But we'll all come back from this famous... and wealthy!" *Work on your pauses,* the self-criticism came unbidden.

The crew's response was muted, mostly concerned muttering. They'd known they'd be out for a long time, but Lavro had wanted to make the destination a surprise. That surprise, he noted, seemed unwelcome to these seasoned sailors.

Artem stood next to the captain, his expression neutral. After he'd let Lavro gauge the crew's reactions, he finally offered his own.

"Captain, this is just about the most dangerous trip you can take on. Even seasoned captains can find themselves fighting for their lives when they hit the Sea of Ice. Are you sure this is the journey you want to take on?"

A defiant one, and one the men respect. Lavro's jovial demeanor melted away with his sharp response. "Never doubt my commitment, officer. Everything I've earned, I've earned through hard work and determination. This is just the next challenge, the great unknown. I've led men for years, and I've never failed at anything I've set my mind to. Don't question me in front of the crew. Just keep your head down and do as you're told. Do you think you can handle that?" He'd had to cow reluctant suppliers or sluggish employees in the counting house into submission before, and he saw this as more of the same.

He got a curt, "Yes, Captain" in response, and nodded to dismiss Artem. He paced the rear deck as the first mate barked orders to the crew and the ship left port, watching the bright flame atop the Great Lighthouse shrink as they made their way to sea. The sailors handled their assigned tasks with skill, but he couldn't help noticing their little gestures. A small warding sign here, an offering of food thrown overboard there. He watched their superstitions with disdain. He'd always been a man of logic, and these little acts irked him.

Not long after they'd set out, though, the feeling began in the pit of his stomach. Bile. Lots of it, burning all the way up to the back of the throat. It didn't matter what he did, it was as if his stomach was folding itself up, climbing out his mouth. He remembered short hops into the waters around

Shosara as a child having no ill effects, but now that he thought about it, he hadn't been to sea since childhood. He cursed his ill luck and cursed again as he noticed the crew members keeping their distance. He was certain they were mocking him for not having his sea legs, exchanging snide remarks out of earshot. Then, the bile would rise again at the back of his throat...

The next few days were quiet. The weather was in a rare good mood, cooperating with the *Birdsong* as it cut across the waves on a northeasterly course. Lavro had established his authority, he felt, and now he'd take the time to get to know the crew. He wasn't the strongest but had had to do his share of manual labor at times. He hated it, but he wasn't about to let on as he helped out around the ship, learning more about the countless day to day tasks required to sail the vessel. He was sure this kind of attention would help him win the crew over, so he put his all into it. But the lack of activity started to grate on him. In all his years coordinating shipping across the Gwyn Sea, in all his romantic daydreams about traversing it, he'd never stopped to think how mundane these daily tasks could be. He started to pace the decks, growing restless.

All that changed, of course, as soon as they were within the Gullet. First, they fought freezing winds, having to tack furiously to make any progress. The crew handled this with defiant good cheer, but occasional pangs of nausea still hit Lavro as they zig-zagged to catch whatever wind they could. Then the ice came. Not sheets of it, as the young captain had imagined, but small floating boulders that Artem assured him could be razor sharp below the waterline. The jovial atmosphere evaporated as the crew set with grim determination to survive the deadly course. Those who weren't busy with the sails lashed themselves to the rails and held oars and long poles out, on the lookout for any ice that came too close to the hull.

This went on for another few days, the crew catching a wink or two of sleep whenever they could as they traversed the treacherous waters. Lacking their experience, Lavro could only look on and nod approvingly at Artem. The first mate barked orders and joined in wherever he was needed with the ease of a seasoned officer, keeping the crew in line. Deep down, Lavro seethed. *It should be you calling out the orders, and not letting this man usurp your authority*, he thought to himself as the days passed, but he kept these frustrations to himself.

Finally, the Gullet opened out and they were in the frigid waters of the Sea of Ice. The winds calmed once more, an eerie silence settling in as open water stretched ahead of them. The boredom returned, and the inability to contribute during the dangerous passage grated on Lavro. He found himself restless, wanting to show the men he was just as capable as them. A proper heroic act would salve his pride, he felt, as well as cement his appearance of strength to the crew.

The opportunity soon arrived. A few days north of the Gullet, a woman's plaintive wail cut through the silence, and Lavro was among a few crewmen



who rushed to the rail to find the source. Most, however, including the First Mate, kept to their posts.

"Artem, what are you doing? Someone needs help. Get a boat ready, drop them a line, do something!"

"Captain, look around you. We haven't seen another ship for days. There's things out at sea, creatures that try to lure you in. Pay your respects to Jaspre and keep the thing out of your mind."

"Are you mad? Can't you hear the voice? It sounds like a woman drowning. And in this cold water, she won't last long!"

The officer just shook his head and made a warding gesture Lavro had recognized among the most superstitious of his colleagues back on land. Rather than ready lines, some of the crew ran to the stores and re-emerged with rations, chanting prayers to the Passion of Nature to protect them as they made offerings of food to the sea. As the ship approached the source of the sound, Lavro could clearly make out the form of a young woman, thrashing in the sea as she drowned. That put to rest any question of professionalism. He'd save this woman, and show his men he was brave, that he was a hero.

Over Artem's protests, Lavro took over, barking out orders to pull in as close as possible to the woman in distress. The wailing grew more frantic, and so were Lavro's orders as he imagined her time growing short. Finally, the browbeaten sailors complied, the first mate deferring to the captain.

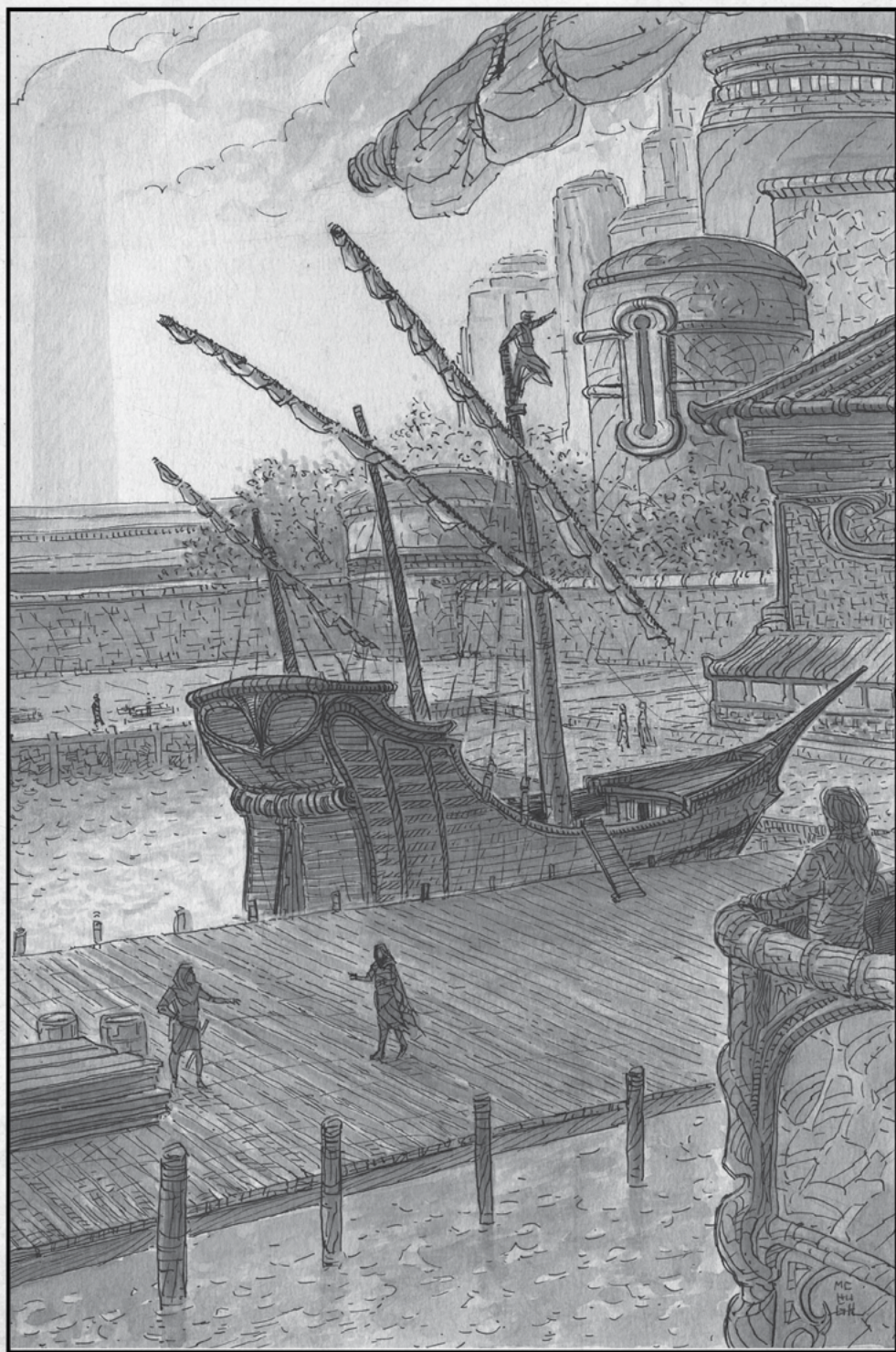
The *Birdsong* pulled alongside the thrashing girl and a line was dropped, but in her panic, she couldn't get a hold. Lavro called out another set of orders for a boat to be lowered over the side and chose a small group of sailors to row them alongside the woman so she could be pulled up. The crewmen were nervous, jumpy, and kept throwing small bits of food into the water as they rowed.

As the boat returned to the ship, Lavro got his first good look at the poor woman. She was a beautiful young elf, but her skin was an unhealthy tinge of blue, a telltale sign she'd been in the cold water too long. Forgetting the line, he leaned out as far as he could, extending his hand to the hapless girl... then in an instant, he was in the water.

The freezing cold was a shock, and for a moment he thought he'd simply fallen overboard. But then he noticed the blue arms locked around his, claws at the end of elven-looking fingertips. He saw long, sharp teeth and screamed for his men to pull him up. But all he could see was the crew hesitating, and a glimpse of Artem on board the ship, looking grimly at the scene.

The men on the boat were still hesitating, and he cursed at them to come save him. Their eyes weren't on him anymore, however, but on more of these blue women swimming with unnatural speed toward him as he flailed. His curses became pleas for aid, then screams of pain as he felt the long teeth biting into his flesh. He realized help would not come. With a whistle from the first mate, the men on the boat just began rowing away. The last thing Lavro saw was churning red, his own blood mixing with the boat's wake as he was dragged into the deeps.

Back on deck, Artem began calling out orders to turn around and set sail for Khistova. He took over command with the practiced ease instilled from years at sea, coming about to leave this misadventure behind. When they pulled back into port, some might ask questions, but he knew few would doubt his story. *Another young fool with too many dreams in his head, and not enough sense*, he thought as the ship picked up speed. *Bravery's good, but wits are better.*





SHOSARA AND THE NORTH

A treatise by Thaisin Dulino, Scholar of the Grand Lighthouse

Renewed efforts of friendship and cooperation have led an influx of visitors to our glorious city. In his wisdom, the illustrious Beranis Laryskova, Grand Prince of Shosara, has commissioned this humble servant to create a guide to our proud land. Our people are still gravely misunderstood and unfairly slandered due to injustices perpetrated centuries ago. It is my hope that my work can dispel these regrettable falsehoods and enlighten others as to the rightness of our way of life.

To most outsiders, ours is a mysterious land only reachable through a long, dangerous journey. To those loyal to the false Queen, it is an oddity or mark of shame. But to our people, it is a monument to perseverance in a land of bounty and harmony, a blessing and a crucible from the Passion Jaspree. In Shosara, those who have cut ties with the corrupted Court see a shining example of how they can chart their own path.

ON THE CITY

The crown jewel of the region is the grand city of Shosara, built on a peninsula reaching north into the Gwyn Sea. On that spot the first settlers in the region experienced Jaspree's blessing and knew this was to be their home. The shore is full of bustling docks bristling with the sails of seafaring ships. At one end of the docks stands the Arsenal of the Free Companies, ever vigilant for threats. At the other, on a long spit of land providing some shelter from the waves, stands the Great Lighthouse, its shining flame visible from the farthest reaches of the Gwyn Sea.

Past the wharf stand the homes and businesses of Shosara's common folk. The older buildings still display their pre-Scourge splendor, as our citadel was not breached. Farther inland are the central square and halls of power, where the Council of Princes and Grand Assembly interpret and enact the will of the citizenry. Past those, the inland hills hold the grand estates and manicured gardens of Shosara's most prosperous families.

ON THE LAND

Venturing out from Shosara by land, one crosses paths with a few pioneering farmers or shepherds before reaching the human city of Khistova on the southeastern shores of the Gwyn Sea. The intrepid Khistovan seafarers ply the sea alongside seasoned elven sailors, engaging in trade with small settlements, and finding new sources of goods to help fill Shosara's coffers.

They are aided by the soldiers of the Free Companies, who draw warriors from all Namegiver races to protect Shosara from strange creatures and interlopers. Thanks to their efforts the Gwyn Sea, despite its stormy nature, remains safe to traverse by ship.

The lands ringing the Gwyn Sea, with few exceptions, are wild. Jaspree's blessing is one of rampant plant growth and intense weather, and the storms which cross the region can seem to come from nowhere on a clear day. Dense forests predominate but are broken up by a variety of other features. To the north, the trees fade to a near-barren scrubland before giving way to the Sea of Ice. To the east, the forests thin until vast, open plains stretch as far as the eye can see. To the south, the terrain grows more difficult as one approaches the crags of the Grand Cataracts, while to the west the land becomes dotted with more lakes and swamps before one reaches the seas more often plied by Sereathan craft. Across the region, one can find rivers great and small emptying into the Gwyn Sea. Khistova lies at the mouth of the Severyn River, the mightiest of these waterways, leading into the lands surrounding the sea.

Countless small settlements dot the shores of the Gwyn Sea, many little more than a wharf and a few outbuildings. These tend to be guard posts, waystations for expeditions into the interior or stop-over points for entrepreneurs looking for sources of valuable goods. Some identify rich reserves of valuable resources and grow into permanent villages or towns. Others are little more than boom towns, bustling in their time but abandoned once their purpose is fulfilled.

The wildlife of the region has always included many larger, more ferocious versions of the animals that typically stalk other lands. Since the Scourge, these have been joined by a variety of minor Horrors and other corrupted beasts. Researchers still occasionally find new creatures prowling the Gwyn Sea, the most prevalent among these being the vila, strange beings that attempt to draw brave sailors to their doom. Thanks to the valiant efforts of the Free Companies, such threats rarely do significant harm.

ON THE PEOPLE

The true strength of the Shosaran people, and the lesson we hope our distant kin may learn, are the deeper mysteries of the Paths and the Wheel. As the Wheel is ever-turning, so are all individual elves, and all Namegivers, on a never-ending journey. As journeys necessarily involve movement, so we as a people must be prepared to move. Much as the land is still the same despite the changing of the seasons, so our culture remains strong despite the changing world around us. This is the truth our ancestors learned as they adapted to life in these harsh, beautiful environs, even as they were splintered and shamed for it.

Hard circumstances and harder work forged a new covenant between Shosara's rulers and her subjects, giving even the lowliest commoner a voice in councils and assemblies. In their wisdom, the Grand Princes have extended

the invitation of citizenship to all Namegivers in the region who come in peace, allowing them to live in Shosara and be part of its prosperity.

The Laryskova Ranelle and their staunch allies of the Navalok Ranelle are the strongest voices in this Council of Princes, while the Namegivers of Khistova and the Free Companies observe and provide reports on events throughout the kingdom. But Shosara's citizens have their voices heard as well, and they come together in the Grand Assembly to petition the Council, elect officials, and pass laws. The tradition of the Assembly dates back to Shosara's earliest days, when our ancestors had to band together to survive in the face of nature's fury, no matter their place in society.

ON THE WORLD

Since the world emerged from the safety of their kaers, our people have wasted no time extending good will to other nations. Though past transgressions and ongoing misunderstandings have left us suspicious of our neighbors, Shosara is determined to take its rightful place among the elven nations.

Despite the shocking news of our wayward kin's transformation, our Grand Prince has deemed it prudent to maintain a dialogue with Alachia's court in the Blood Wood. Jorealla, an accomplished Questor of Jasprey, was sent as ambassador so that she may forge closer friendships while enlightening others as to the truth of the Shosaran way. Our artisans learn from Daevenar masters even as that ranelle's own craftsmen study within the walls of our city. While relations with our western kin in Sereatha are strained, we continue to make efforts to build bridges. I am certain our kingdoms will see eye to eye soon enough.

As for non-elven nations, Shosara's distance prevents the forging of strong bonds, but we strive to connect with all who seek peace and prosperity. Shosara remembers Elianar Messias with fondness after his defense of our people against Separation, and that cordial relationship with his disciples has persisted to this day. We have fewer occasions for contact with the Throalic people but have been honored to host some of their scholars in the Great Lighthouse in the last few decades.

We are a peace-loving folk, eager to show our kin the path forward for the elven people, and forge ties with all Namegivers who believe in peace, prosperity, and a life of harmony with the world. To this end, Grand Prince Beranis has begun an ambitious campaign of sending envoys on goodwill missions across the world, to learn more of our fellow nations and engage in a fair exchange of ideas. It is our hope that such efforts will show the world the rich culture that our people hold so dear.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Our people have always been wanderers, inspired to see what lies beyond the horizon. Those who chose to stay settled in the south forget our roots,

but the founders of what would become Shosara kept to that tradition in the earliest days of elvenkind.

Inspired by a divine vision, they followed the path the Passion Jaspree had taken after creating Oak Heart. Eager to prove their devotion and deepen their understanding of the Great Wheel, they gathered like-minded elves and struck out for the uncharted north. After a long and grueling journey, they found themselves in a harsh and beautiful land where they felt the primal forces of nature calling to them. Out of supplies and forced to live off the land, many felt the hardships were a sign they should turn back.

Setting up camp on the shore of a cold sea the travelers were battered by freezing storms. Many argued for returning to Wyrms Wood, believing they had been wrong to try and follow the footsteps of the Passion of the Wilds, and the land itself didn't want them there. But their leader, a questor of Jaspree named Nazrana, had been guided by the visions and would not be deterred. If the pilgrims were wavering in their conviction, she said, their fears would soon be laid to rest. That very night, the sky above them filled with unearthly dancing lights. Bathed in a kaleidoscope of color, the elves knew they had been rewarded with Jaspree's blessing. This land was unforgiving, yes, but Nazrana and her followers had been chosen as its stewards.

Their resolve renewed, the pioneers settled on the shore of the stormy sea. Their first years were difficult, as they were all but cut off from the rest of elvenkind, but in their fervor the pilgrims endured. Led by Nazrana, they foraged and hunted and fished, living in harmony with the primal wilds even as they fended off attacks from predators. Noble and commoner alike dirtied their hands to do their part, and hardship broke down barriers between the mighty and the humble.

As the settlement expanded and the elves explored the area, they found the wilderness was rich in True elements, another sign of Jaspree's favor. Those traveling back to more settled elven lands brought stories of the land's beauty and bounty, and soon a steady trickle of settlers braved the long and dangerous journey to see it for themselves. As the population grew so did the power entrusted in Nazrana to see to the elves' affairs, and under her wise rule the Laryskova Ranelle was born. The foundation for Shosara—"Blessing" in an archaic dialect of the elven tongue—had been laid.

New Neighbors

Scouts had been ranging further afield from their settlement, and it wasn't long until they found other inhabitants of the land. Most were small, guarded nomadic tribes who gave the growing settlement a wide berth. Others were tiny homesteads that rarely lasted more than a few years. But eventually the scouts made a startling discovery: a human settlement called Khistova lay to the east. Initially reluctant to interact with non-elves, preconceived notions gave way to pragmatism as the humans were prosperous and eager to forge links with another settlement. Trade grew, and with it the Shosaran understanding of its seafaring human neighbors.

The Khistovans were ruled by a prince, but many decisions were decided through popular councils and assemblies, where residents from all walks of life had a voice. Because of their early experiences in the land, the Laryskova felt a kinship with this radical approach, and as the elven community grew, its government began to echo such sentiments. Khistova, meanwhile, eagerly adopted elven art, architecture, and philosophy in their own lives, with a particular fascination toward the Paths and the Wheel.

The Khistovans merged the elven philosophy with their own beliefs, creating a unique system of reverence of nature and continuous spiritual growth. Elven reactions to this adoption and adaptation ranged from alarm to amusement. Many saw it as proof of the supremacy of elven culture, unaware or too stubborn to admit the exchange of ideas had been going both ways. This exchange was the source of our people's greatest anguish, and the foundation of their liberation.

Fortune and Fracture

Shosara grew into a grand city off the land's mineral wealth. As its fortunes grew, so did demand for the area's bountiful True elements, in particular the True water that could be found in great quantities. But elven artisans had only constructed ships for river travel, which struggled in the choppy waters. The Laryskova, noting the ease with which Khistovan seafarers could navigate the storm-wracked Gwyn Sea, embarked on a generous campaign. They would send artisans to their human neighbors and learn the principles on which Khistovan vessels were built, incorporating these ideas into elven ship designs. In exchange, they would share elven crafting techniques the Khistovans craved, tying their neighbors to them more closely.

With the expansion of trade, the trickle of visitors to the lands of Shosara grew. Visiting elves were alarmed by what they saw as divergent local practices. They could be dismissed at first as an eccentric branch of elven culture, but once Laryskova shipping operations began in earnest, the sight of the elven ships alongside similar-looking human ones caused a scandal.

Had the leaders of Shosara compromised elven ideals, and in doing so been led astray from propriety? Many in the Elven Court called for sanctions and after Queen Dallia's attempt at understanding led to her death, Shosara found itself shunned by its fellow elves. Few believed the Queen would abandon her subjects by Separating them, but Queen Failla did just that, leading to the greatest crisis in Shosaran history.

Shosara was sundered from the Elven Court and other elven kingdoms. The despair that swept its people was great. Ranelles in Shosara with ties to Wyrms Wood packed up and left, including most of the Laryskova. Desperate to plead the Shosaran case, the family took much of its wealth and left for Wyrms Wood. But Queen Failla's fury was not sated, and she heaped insult upon insult on the ranelle and its matriarch, Arianne. Eroding the power of Shosara's founders due to her personal vendetta, the queen played favorites and began the Court's corruption.

In time, Arianne and like-minded nobles found only one recourse left to them. They began gathering evidence of the Queen's favoritism and the damage it was doing to the Elven Court. This evidence spread quickly through the Court and increased tensions among the elven nobility. While some of them balked at the accusations and stood by their Queen, others were shocked at the scale of what Arianne and her allies had uncovered. Many quietly prepared for a civil war, fearing terrible reprisals from the Queen and her loyalists. What they didn't expect was Queen Failla's abdication. When she did, it threw the Laryskova and their allies into disarray.

Exile and Return

Failla's successor, Liara, seized on this moment of confusion to enact a swift and terrible revenge. For daring to question the Elven Court, the Laryskova Ranelle and all those who had sided with them were stripped of their titles and lands and expelled from the Wyrms Wood. While a grievous blow, this cemented Arianne's view of the Elven Court and its moral bankruptcy since Dallia's death. She led her followers on a great exodus, following the path of her ancestors when they first reached the Gwyn Sea. The journey was as treacherous as it had ever been, but as it had hardened their forbears, so did this journey convince the Laryskova their homeland was the true keeper of elven ways, understanding the spirit of the Wheel and avoiding the stagnation of the Elven Court.

They returned to a Shosara wracked with unrest, as its citizens had struggled to cope with Separation even as so many had left. Shosara was a shadow of its former glory, its people directionless and violence threatening to erupt. What little peace remained had come from Khistova, the elves adopting the humans' communal assemblies to maintain stability between neighbors. Many greeted the Laryskova's return with suspicion. After all, the founding family had abandoned them in their time of greatest need.

Arianne explained her decision to stay in Wyrms Wood, followed by the exodus to Shosara, had been a test from Jaspre, to remind the elves of their true place. She railed against the corruption of the elven court and praised the Shosaran way. Her words stirred a new fervor in the hearts of the people. A new age of growth and trade began, and the elves' embracing of adaptation and innovation only grew. In time, they sent envoys to other elven nations. While initially viewed with suspicion, these envoys and their message—that Wyrms Wood no longer represented the truth of the Wheel—found fertile ground. A new identity united the Shosaran people, and they began to forge a destiny apart from the false Elven Court.

Allies and the Long Night

There were some who had defended the kingdom when Separation had been declared. Chief among them was Elianar Messias, exiled for speaking out. Shosaran families maintained sporadic but cordial contact with his followers

at Nehr'esham and took Messias' pronouncements of the coming darkness to heart.

Shosara was one of the few nations that could accommodate the Therans' demands for True elements without straining their resources, helping maintain continuity as the leaders of other nations rose and fell, and as war raged across Barsaive and beyond. They rejected Wyrn Wood's solution and set into motion their ambitious plans for the Scourge. The city-state of Shosara would become a grand citadel, with all the outlying settlements, including Khistova, relocated to its confines until the world was safe to walk again.

The race to stockpile resources and True Elements led to the creation of the Free Companies, mercenary forces who held predators and lesser Horrors at bay, allowing prospectors to secure the resources needed for survival. It further deepened the Shosaran reverence for nature, as the people worked to recreate and preserve their lands in miniature within the safe confines of the citadel.

While the rest of the elven world debated how to handle the upcoming Scourge, Shosara was left to its own devices. Even before news of Queen Alachia's solution reached the area, Shosara had prepared itself to wait out the Scourge, formalizing the system of assemblies that would keep it stable.

During the Scourge, the close contact between the ruling elves and other Namegivers strengthened their traditions and philosophies. The elves were undeterred, believing in the true spirit of the journey along the Paths. When Shosara emerged, they found their lands damaged, but not destroyed. A period of intense rebuilding followed, with Khistova and smaller settlements repopulating and the web of trade across the Gwyn Sea being rewoven. Shosara restored contact with the outside world and learned of Wyrn Wood's corruption. The news led to a great sorrow among the Shosaran people, warring with a feeling that justice had been served for the Wyrn Wood's errant ways.

Our world may be more dangerous now, but we stand resolute, ready to show the world the strength of an Elven nation able to adapt and grow, and the wisdom of such a course.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Shosarans refer to their lands as wild. Plants grow bigger and faster than their counterparts in other parts of the world, the weather can change in the blink of an eye, and the animals are bigger and fiercer. The wilds are full of exotic plants and reagents outsiders may have never seen before. These would fetch exorbitant prices in the markets of Throal or Iopos, as would the caches of True elements, exotic wood and deposits of metals and gems for those skilled or lucky enough to find them. Shosarans also swear the land, for all its voracious growth, changes over time, and is never quite the same on successive visits.

Many who wish to document Shosara's environment start with the city-state at its heart and the Gwyn Sea, which is a critical part of the locals' lives.

Yet the lands bordering the sea are also called Shosara when the region is described, since the nation's reach extends all around its shores. These shores tend to be craggy, giving way to thick forest. Sandier beaches are more common along the southern edge of the Gwyn. Aside from this common feature, the nation can be broadly divided into four distinct regions.

The Western Fens

Making landfall on the craggy western shores of the Gwyn Sea, explorers find the forest grows particularly thick. Travel is difficult in the undergrowth, and only gets more difficult as the forest gives way to small lakes and creeks. These begin to dominate the terrain and even in the middle of winter, the area radiates warmth. Pressing further west, travelers find the trees thin out further until the lakes are broken up by bogs and marshlands. Shosarans refer to this region as the Western Fens.

While trudging around in swamps may not sound appealing, determined travelers make their way out because they hide great wealth. The pools are fed from underground springs and warmed by the fires of the earth itself. A pool that's steaming, even in summertime, is a sure sign a kernel of True fire has bubbled to the surface. The pools and bogs stretch out for about a week's travel, but few dare go beyond them; there are tales of strange beastly creatures attacking prospectors and scouts who travel that far, and most prefer a quick payday and hasty departure. It's believed Sereatha can be reached by traveling southwest from this region, but the danger makes overland routes impractical.

There are several theories about the beastly creatures that walk like Namegivers far to the west, but the most commonly believed is that they're some bloodthirsty group of Namegivers (or former Namegivers) who gave themselves over to Mad Passions or Horrors during the Scourge. Reports of the region from scouts who have made it there and back are striking, with mountains, deep inlets cut into cliffs, and large islands of ice floating in the waters. Given the persistent threat of this region's denizens, however, few venture there unless well-disciplined and heavily armed.

The Grand Cataracts

Landing on the southern shores of the Gwyn Sea, travelers find the beaches and dense forests the region is known for, but the terrain is uneven and treacherous. Those making their way overland traverse occasional steep slopes, but these become deep ravines and sharp rises as they continue south. The occasional lake breaks up this craggy landscape, but the forest stretches as far as the eye can see. Since the foliage is so dense, it's an ideal environment for predators, and more than a few travelers have found themselves ambushed traversing the wilderness.

Continuing south and veering just a bit west, travelers reach the northern limits of the area called the Grand Cataracts, a rugged highland of high cliffs and fast-rushing rapids. The strange magic that keeps Shosara's wilds

so mutable and difficult to map is still strong in the area, which can make traversing the rocky foothills dangerous and disorienting. Wide, clear paths once easily traversed in one direction can be impassable on the way back, or a clearing can turn into a dense forest. Fortunately, these changes can sometimes work to a business-minded Namegiver's benefit. They can uncover deposits of True earth that pay for the cost of an expedition several times over. The most difficult part of the journey, as some would-be prospectors have found, is returning to civilization with their gains.

Barsaive's Serpent River originates somewhere in this region, and travelers can follow it to the province if they are willing to brave the rapids, sheer slopes, and Ishkarat patrols.

The Plains of the East

Striking out from Khistova is the easiest way to reach the limits of Shosara's influence, such as it is. The city lies at the mouth of the peaceful Severyn River, so booking passage aboard one of the humans' riverboats is trivial. The river runs to the east-southeast, and the region's forests thin out quickly, giving way to pockets of extremely fertile farmland. Some enterprising Khistovans and Shosarans have formed farming and trapping communities here.

Whether continuing by boat or striking out overland, the forests dwindle to occasional copses of trees and then end altogether in vast open plains of tall grass. Shortly after venturing into this expanse, travelers notice the howling winds that cut across the plains. The sound can be unnerving but where the winds are free to roam, True air can be found if prospectors can get high enough to reach it.

The interest in a sea of land may seem strange for a maritime people, but rumors abound of lost elven ruins in the plains, and where the ranelles smell profit, they'll happily fund expeditions. The full extent of the plains is unknown; most explorers run out of supplies before they've made it too far. So far, the only signs of life are small bands of nomads scratching out a living, and no rumors of found ruins have made their way back to Shosara.

The Frigid North

The lands ringing the northern shores of the Gwyn Sea bear the brunt of storms coming in from the north. While the other regions shift more gradually into their respective landscapes, travelers venturing north are greeted by the snow-capped trees of the northern shores before they even land. The hardy trees seem to huddle together thickly for warmth, and a thin film of snow usually covers the ground.

On this northern sea border, the foliage grows briskly despite the cold, and lumberjacks are convinced the forest grows back faster than anywhere else in Shosara. Many come to the area seeking True wood, but it is exceedingly rare. Free Company patrols work with explorers to find what little there is and sell it under exclusive contract to the ranelles, and the occasional independent prospector defies them at their peril.

For those foolhardy enough to make the journey overland rather than sail through the Gullet, the thick tree growth gives way after a few days' walk to a vast, icy plain with no protection from the freezing northern winds or storms that accompany them. Visitors are rare, and rarer still are those who keep going north beyond the tree line, where they eventually reach the icy shores of the Sea of Ice.

Foreigners who hear tales of the Gwyn Sea's extreme weather are often surprised to find Shosarans speaking of the Sea of Ice in the same fearful tones, but explorers occasionally set out to find whatever might be on the other side. Other than ice and freezing winds, nothing remarkable has yet been reported.



THE GWYN SEA

Visitors would be hard-pressed to find a Shosaran who has never dreamed of boarding a ship for adventure on the Gwyn Sea. As in many coastal places, the sea provides a source of life and bounty for the people of the nation, and their lives are bound closely to it. Its fish keep the Shosaran people fed, and its True water is a source of wealth and fuels their magical works.

Winds and storms may batter the shores of the Gwyn, but they also allow Shosaran sailors to cross great distances in a short time. A determined captain with a trained crew and speedy vessel can harness these winds to reach any corner of the Gwyn Sea from Shosara in four days, and the farthest shores of the sea are a week apart if the winds are favorable.

But whether elf, human, or other Namegiver, the Gwyn Sea captures the imagination of the Shosaran people in a way perhaps only the t'skrang who ply the Serpent River would understand. Shosarans see Jaspre's favor in the sea, whether it is a still, cloudless day or the fury of a pounding thunderstorm. The

sea is harsh, but locals are quick to espouse its beauty, and many a newcomer has been charmed by the sight of the sea.

The Sea and its Denizens

Many travelers to Shosara are shocked by the ferocity of the Gwyn Sea. Crashing waves, pounding rainstorms, frigid gales, and perfectly calm waters can be encountered during the same journey, sometimes on the same day. Outsiders see this as dangerous, but citizens of Shosara see it as Jaspre's favor in action. By thriving in such difficult circumstances, by braving the sea and learning from it, Shosarans believe they honor the Passion and prove themselves worthy of living in these lands. Even the least devout individuals will pray to Jaspre for guidance when they're out on the open water.

The Gwyn Sea runs deep, and even the smaller permanent settlements on its shores contain wharves where ships can dock, another testament to the sea's importance. These anchorages are fewer on the southern shores of the sea, where one finds more beaches - and with them, dangerous sandbars that can stall a vessel in the water. The tiny islands dotting the southern reaches of the sea help break up the choppy waves the north experiences, but sailors often prefer the north for longer voyages; the deep northern waters don't require them to navigate around obstacles the way the southern waters do.

Traveling further north, one finds the Gullet, a wide and dangerous ice-filled inlet connecting the Gwyn Sea to the vast expanse of what is called the Sea of Ice. Intrepid sailors still try to launch long-distance expeditions to find distant shores across the ocean, but none have yet returned to tell the tale.

A wealth of sea life resides in the waters, and rare creatures such as the giant horned whale can be spotted as one begins traveling north into the deeper waters and colder climes. Many such sea beasts are peaceful but will defend themselves against anything they see as a threat just as ferociously as their land-bound counterparts in the region would. Sailors know to travel armed, and to avoid provoking these larger sea creatures whenever possible.

Seafaring

The steadfast ships that ply the waters around the Gwyn Sea are the pride of Shosara and the Khistovans. They are among the finest achievements of both peoples, and a testament to their close cooperation. Centuries ago when the elves began trading goods and ideas with their human neighbors, Khistova had a long tradition of fishing and hunting the elusive horned whales in the cold northern reaches. Their smaller vessels could be rowed as well as sailed, navigating the placid Severyn River in search of new goods and opportunities.

When the first Shosaran ships arrived at Khistova's docks, they had been battered by the short journey, despite keeping close to shore. These ships were graceful galleys, built to float lightly in shallow river waters per traditional elven techniques. Such craft were ill-equipped for the storm-wracked Gwyn Sea.

For generations, the elves adapted and refined their ships on the basis of Khistovan designs, freely exchanging their knowledge of shipbuilding with their human counterparts. Today the craftsmen of both cities often work alongside one another, exchanging ideas and engaging in a friendly rivalry that culminates in the annual Feast of the New Dawn. For several days, travelers flock to Shosara and Khistova to celebrate the anniversary of emerging after the Scourge, ending in a grand race between the finest Shosaran and Khistovan sea captains, often piloting the newest designs. Not only is it a prestigious outing, but training and competing help sailors hone their considerable skills.

The Fantastic

A land as mysterious as Shosara is bound to have plenty of rumors and tall tales about what a sailor can experience at sea. Though they trust in the Passions to guide them through hardship, sailors in Shosara have developed many superstitions and rituals to ensure their safety. Offerings of gaudy ribbons, the first bite of one's meal, or fresh produce are regularly made to the sea to help keep evil spirits at bay.

In the southern islands, sailors tell tales of haunting melodies that lure them into the water from the safety of a ship or the shore. These creatures are known as vila. Their purpose is unknown and their intelligence uncertain, but they pose a mortal danger to any who are taken in by their song. The victims never return, unless the vila are stopped. Their powers make them dangerous opponents in a fight, so most sailors have developed a habit of throwing some of their rations into the sea when they begin to hear music on the waves, hoping to placate the vila and pay for safe passage.

Legends tell of a great leviathan living in the deepest reaches of the Gwyn Sea, and many sailors there swear they've seen it skimming the surface during a storm. Some speculate these are illusions formed by the crashing waves, and that the weather is to blame. Other tales speak of a dragon lurking in the depths, choosing craft to drag beneath the waves, taking care to leave no witnesses. If any have seen such a leviathan up close, they haven't lived to tell the tale, but this doesn't stop adventurers from organizing expeditions to meet or hunt down the creature.

OTHER PLACES OF NOTE

The Eye of Gwyn

The Gwyn Sea is known for violent and sudden storms that can test even the most seasoned navigator. These can erupt without warning anywhere over the sea, with one strange exception. Due west of Shosara, sheer cliffs jut out from the water, concealing a verdant island. Above this landmass, the weather is oddly calm. In reference to this phenomenon, the island is known as the Eye of Gwyn. The weather alone would make this place an oddity, but what makes the island notable is its residents. The Eye of Gwyn acts as the home and headquarters of Shosara's devotees of Jaspre, led by a small cadre of her questors.

The island has only ever been seen by a small number of people outside of Jaspre's faithful, as few are allowed on shore. Accounts differ wildly, leading many to dismiss them as fancies or lies. Some, however, believe these disparate accounts point to the island itself changing regularly, whether through the efforts of its inhabitants or something inherent to the place.

A few features remain consistent in these different accounts. First, a single quay can be found somewhere on one of the island's rocky beaches, though the location changes with each account, with a few vessels belonging to Jaspre's chosen moored there.

Second, there is a cluster of rustic huts somewhere on the island, arranged in a circle around a central clearing. Most accounts place this settlement in the center of the island, though others give its location as the beachfront or on one of the island's cliffs.

The final common element is a humble shrine to Jaspre in the center of this settlement. It is a simple stacked pile of flat stones, each inscribed with stories related to the Passion's deeds and those of her questors.

While Jaspre's questors spend most of their time performing their Passion's will across Shosara, the Eye of Gwyn serves as a place where they come to meditate, recuperate, and discuss matters important to their cause. The questors don't have a vote on the Council of Princes, but their word carries significant weight even in their advisory role. Some believe their island refuge is where they plot conspiracies to steer the Council toward certain courses, but few lend such rumors credence.

One other curious feature is that astral space around the Eye of Gwyn is strongly attuned to elemental magic, and the enchantments skilled crafters have developed there provide some unique items, including the Stormward Staff, an unassuming length of wood that helps its bearer bring some of the Eye's enchantment with them as they travel the wilds.

Severyn River

The mightiest of the waterways that empty into the Gwyn Sea, the Severyn River extends for hundreds of miles east-southeast of Khistova. Its source remains unexplored, as the people of Shosara and Khistova are more interested in the verdant, resource-rich forest closer to the sea, its fertile banks, and the open plains to the east.

Of greatest interest to explorers are the deposits of True air that can be found on those endless plains. These profitable ventures funded much of the Shosaran expansion before the Scourge, and since opening their citadel that process has begun anew.

The Severyn is placid, and wide enough for two ships to comfortably sail side by side for much of its length. This allows a large amount of river traffic to ferry goods and people up and downstream, with more congestion as one nears Khistova. The Council of Princes is organizing more formal expeditions to the river's source to survey new resources and assess potential threats that

may have come into the region since the Scourge. Adventurers who can locate the river's source stand to gain fame and fortune in Shosara.

The Gullet

At its northeastern reach, the Gwyn Sea narrows and connects to the vast Sea of Ice through a wide passage. Without the northern forests bounding the sea to protect from the frigid winds, this passage, known as the Gullet, is particularly treacherous. Islands of ice, some little more than boulders, float south with the cold winds, making passage through the Gullet hazardous. However, tales and rumors of riches on the shores of the Sea of Ice keep brave or foolhardy explorers working to brave the passage.

One of the most persistent rumors since the Scourge has been a strange castle standing in the waters just north of where the Gullet opens into the Sea of Ice. This otherworldly structure of coral towers laid out in an inscrutable geometric pattern is thought by some to be the home of the vila that plague travelers in the Gwyn. The stories claim these beings will treat with those who can navigate the treacherous waters and grant a boon. Critics point out the vila found elsewhere in the Gwyn Sea typically draw honest sailors to their doom, so such benevolent action would be uncharacteristic. And none have yet come back with the truth.

Adventure Idea

A young and ambitious scholar from the Great Lighthouse has established a lucrative bounty for some exploratory work on the shores of the Gwyn Sea. He's supplying a ship and crew to transport adventurers to a remote site and help him take some measurements using special equipment he'll provide. When the characters accept the job, they find the scholar, a noted critic of the questors of Jaspre, has been repeatedly rejected in his bid to study the Eye of Gwyn, and is looking to do research on his own terms.

Option 1

As they prepare for the voyage, the adventurers discover the scholar has ties to the Denairastas family and is studying these ancient enchantments to unravel them. They must thwart the plans, perhaps by getting the rest of the expedition to mutiny, and bring the suspected spy to justice.

Option 2

The scholar is what he appears but out of his depth. The adventurers arrive on the island and are intercepted by devotees of Jaspre, leading to a tense stand-off the group needs to defuse... or escape, if things go wrong.

CULTURE AND BELIEFS

The Separation of Shosara had a profound effect on the nation's cultural development, an effect still felt in the Shosaran way of life, as well as the tensions between the nation and more conservative elven powers. Rather than collapse into chaos, a strain of thought took hold, the belief Shosara's people could now truly walk the Paths of Draesis ti'Morel, the Wheel of Life, as intended.

Rather than hoarding such knowledge of spiritual enlightenment for themselves, Shosarans shared the map for these Paths with their fellow Namegivers. This allowed non-elves to devote themselves to the spiritual growth of the Wheel of Life, leading to greater spiritual understanding between Namegiver races in Shosara, even as it stirred controversy beyond its borders.

The differences between Shosara and the rest of the elven kingdoms date back to the earliest days of the nation's settlement. The pioneers who founded Shosara were devoted followers of a questor of Jaspree known as Nazrana, determined to retrace Jaspree's journeys across the world after bestowing blessings upon Oak Heart. If one such monument to elvenkind may stand in the world, Nazrana's teachings said, there must be others for elves to tend, and finding the Passion's path was the first step in finding new wonders left for the elven people.

A core part of Shosaran belief is that all elves possess a part of Oak Heart's essence within them. With this, they carry the Great Tree wherever they go, and spread its blessings around the world in their travels. Shosarans believe they have two reasons to chase what's beyond the horizon: following in Jaspree's footsteps and spreading Oak Heart's influence.

Oak Heart holds a strange place in the memory of the Shosaran people. On one hand, it is part of the founding myth of the elven people and the Wyrms Wood, a gift from the Passion Jaspree and a pillar of elven culture. On the other, Jaspree left Oak Heart to travel the land, and one of her questors seeking to follow in her footsteps helped found Shosara.

After Separation and the Laryskova's return to Shosara, Oak Heart took on connotations of stagnation, of blind adherence to ritual and stability. After the Scourge, news of Wyrms Wood's corruption led to speculation about whether Oak Heart even bore that Name anymore or had been twisted into something disconnected from true elves. All of these thoughts have given Oak Heart an ambiguous place in Shosaran spiritual and political beliefs.

Whatever the scholars and mystics may argue about the nature of Oak Heart, the Laryskova Ranelle firmly believes it is the key to seizing control of the Elven Court. In their eyes, whatever it is that stands in the depths of the Blood Wood, it is no longer Oak Heart but a corrupt imitation.

While they have long argued Wyrms Wood no longer represented the elven people, this is their proof they were right. While the mighty tree spirit

may not have commanded the same reverence from Shosarans it did from other elven kingdoms, it was still a powerful symbol. The lands where Oak Heart stood had the blessings of Jaspre and Astendar and was the true seat of the Elven Court.

As a result, Shosaran agents have begun traveling to other elven kingdoms and the nations of other Namegivers to recover all the uncorrupted acorns from Oak Heart they can find. While Shosara may be at a profound disadvantage due to its distance from other settled lands, the Grand Prince has one advantage he has used to great effect so far: the Laryskova are happy to use the Free Companies and non-elves to do their work. As a result, Shosaran agents can more easily move among Namegivers who may not be inclined to speak to the haughty Sereathans or unnerving blood elves.

While what lies within the Wyrn Wood may not be the real Oak Heart, Laryskovan adepts and scholars believe these acorns hold its true essence, and with enough of them in one place, a ritual can be performed to grow the tree anew. This ritual would, of course, be conducted in Shosara to show the other elven kingdoms what a profound mistake it was to Separate them in the first place.

Their ways may seem strange or even radical to traditional elves, but Shosarans believe they are the true stewards of the elven spirit, and that saving Oak Heart by regrowing it will prove this for good.

There had long been an exchange of ideas between the elves of Shosara and other Namegivers. Khistova was chief among these partners, but with few neighbors and a desire to learn more of the Jaspre-blessed land around them, the first generations of elves in the area observed and learned what they could from other Namegivers, adapting outside ideas with their own expertise to create something new.

Their kin in Wyrn Wood saw this and grew alarmed. To them, Shosara accepting outside influences meant they were betraying elven tradition. Much as traveling the Paths requires growth and change, the questors of Jaspre taught their charges in Shosara that even nations must grow and change to adapt to their reality. Today, Shosaran scholars and leaders seek to spread such knowledge.

Many *Eoerin* (scholars of the Paths) would call the Shosaran interpretation a radical one even among the Dae'mistishsa, or Free Followers. To Shosara, these opinions come out of a strict, narrow-minded interpretation of elven lore. These interpretations, however, are followed by most scholars of elven culture, and their prevalence elsewhere in the world has posed a challenge to those evangelizing the Shosaran interpretation.

The truth of Shosaran core spiritual beliefs is simple, however. The Great Wheel turns for everyone, whether elf or not, commoner or noble. Even nations and cultures adapt and grow during the course of their journey. Those that fail to grow stagnate or collapse. The Strict Followers diverge from this

truth the most, codifying so much of what an elf *is supposed to do* within each Path and insisting growth can only happen within one spoke of the Wheel at a time.

Shosara's Eoerin have engaged in countless debates, but inevitably the conclusion is the same. By sharing the teachings of the Great Wheel with other Namegivers, elves can affirm the power of elven belief as universal and bind all Namegivers more tightly together.

The truth Shosara's people espouse is even simpler. There are always opportunities for growth, often from more than one Path at the same time. One's spiritual well-being is maintained and cultivated through remaining open and flexible when responding to such opportunities, even when different Paths conflict with each other. A single trip along the Wheel may not be enough, since upon stricter interpretations, completing the Path of Lords would stop a soul from growing from that point on.

To Shosarans, this interplay is what truly prepares individuals for ascension, rather than following a strict set of lessons, which would be seen as a path toward stagnation. This belief is now common among Khistovans and other Namegivers in the region. To Shosara's scholars and leadership, this proves the superiority of the elven outlook.

The elves of Shosara also learned and adapted from their human and other Namegiver allies. The infamous debate over sailing ships is well known, but one needs look no further than the Grand Assembly to see Khistovan practices adapted by Shosaran scholars. Khistova had been ruled by a prince, but many decisions were handled through meetings of citizens, who assembled, debated and voted on important measures. This appealed to Shosara's ruling family, harkening back to the early days when they claimed commoner and noble alike had to toil to survive.

Refining the idea, these neighborhood councils soon grew into the Grand Assembly. Political dignitaries from mayors to ship captains gathered to discuss issues of the day and set policy. Smaller councils exist throughout Shosara, even down to the neighborhood level, as individuals have learned to band together.

The change is visible in smaller ways, too. Shosaran art and architecture display a blend of influences, with a strong foundation in elven design and methods combined with techniques learned from other Namegivers. Shosaran fashion frequently includes fur, with delicate elven fabrics saved for warmer weather. Even cuisine has changed, with a mix of cultural influences evident in the same dish. While much of this can be alarming to outsiders who still work from outdated assumptions, Shosarans believe this inclusiveness extends to hospitality for guests, also helping outsiders overcome their prejudices.

Shosara's ways still seem strange to many elves, but what has happened to the Blood Wood acts as a cautionary tale and has led many to consider whether Queen Alachia's path was the correct one. Shosara is not the same nation it was centuries ago, and perhaps there is no longer a reason to exclude them. To Shosara this is the perfect opportunity to discuss the dynamism and

ambition that fuels its peoples' actions and keeps their nation adapting to the changing world.

THE CITY OF SHOSARA

Shosara, sometimes called the City of Sails, shares its Name with the elven kingdom. This is not as confusing as it may first seem, since the vast majority of the kingdom's population lives in the city and, with the exception of Khistova, there are few large permanent settlements of note outside its walls.

Many of Shosara's citizens, whether of the elven ranelles, the Free Companies or other Namegivers, maintain some form of residence here. They may set out across the sea for long stretches of time, but most of them return to the city. As the lands around the Gwyn Sea are pacified, more Namegivers are establishing proper settlements on its shores. Such a process takes time and cleansing the land of traces of the Scourge is a process that may take generations yet.

Shosara stands at the western end of a hilly peninsula reaching into the Gwyn Sea, around a concave shore that provides a naturally sheltered harbor. A narrow finger of land to the north shields the harbor from the worst of the heavy northern tides, and at the end of this stands the Great Lighthouse, its beacon helping direct ships out of the storm-wracked sea.

At the other end of the harbor is the Grand Arsenal, the fortress of the Free Companies, where the mercenary group trains its soldiers and its corps of smiths and craftsmen make weapons, armor and even ships that allow the Free Companies to defend Shosara.

The docks, which see a flurry of activity throughout the day, sprawl between these two structures with warehouses, shipyards, fish markets and inns dotting the edges of the district. Further east and away from the shore are the bulk of the city's homes and largest part of the city. The district is known as Dockside and stretches from the docks in the west to the rising hills in the east.

In the hills beyond Dockside is the Old City, the site of the Citadel where Shosara and its allies weathered the Scourge. The Grand Assembly and the Navolok estate look out over Dockside, as do the homes of the city's up-and-coming merchants and artisans. Also found here are the chambers of the Council of Princes.

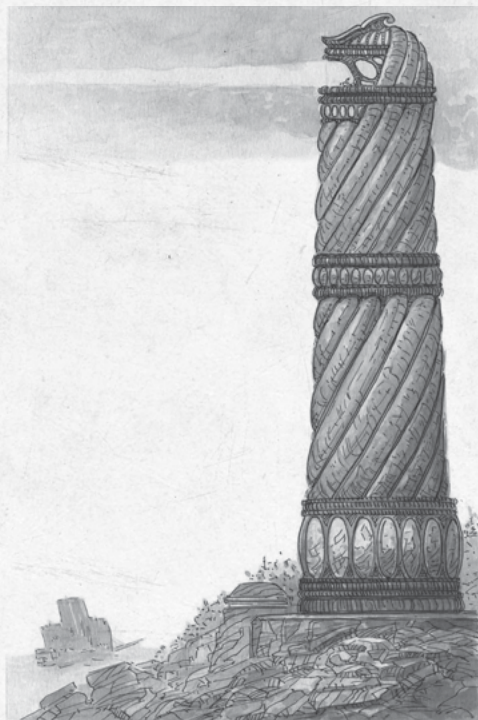
Beyond the Old City, the estates of most of the city's ranelles, including the Laryskova, are nestled among extravagant gardens that showcase beautiful flora from across the region. The Garden District, as it is called, is known for relatively calm weather, shielded from storms by the hills and the efforts of Elementalists on retainer to keep the families' status symbols in good repair.

The Great Lighthouse

For many visitors, their first glimpse of Shosara is the lighthouse. The monumental, graceful structure guides ships into the harbor, standing at the northern end of the sprawling docks where activity never seems to die down.

While a newcomer may assume there is no more to the lighthouse than getting ships into harbor, it's a center of culture as much as it is a center of safety for the nation's ships.

The Great Lighthouse hosts the keenest minds of Shosara, providing a place for scholarly and magical research. These scholars are sponsored by the ranelles, who fund their research and living expenses in exchange for lending their expertise when needed. While some families see it as a duty to the nation, others see sponsoring scholars as a way to project their wealth and success. The light may be the first thing visitors to the docks notice about the Great Lighthouse, but to those nearby the sound of the spirited debate in the halls of academia is unmistakable.



The light at the top of the structure is visible for miles across the Gwyn Sea. The beacon is a complex invention: a sphere of True fire suspended in a chamber of mirrors, open at one end, creating a giant lantern. Due to an enchantment by scholars who call the Great Lighthouse home, the beacon spins at a steady rate, projecting a bright light that guides ships home.

While Elementalists check the beacon regularly to ensure nothing goes awry, it has only stopped during the Scourge, when it was carefully sealed away in Shosara's citadel. The reclamation of the Lighthouse and reinstallation of the beacon were a powerful symbol of Shosara's return to the world. Airships that make their way to Shosara can find berths alongside the Great Lighthouse, allowing them to see the structure from up close, as well as a bird's eye view of the city.

Those who spend much of their time in nearby coastal areas take great comfort in seeing the beacon light up the area on a clear night. A common belief among Free Company mercenaries is that the beacon will be visible to soldiers stranded deep in the wilderness, even far beyond its range, guiding them home. Enough soldiers have taken on this superstition that they leave small offerings to Floranuus at the Lighthouse's foundation before setting out on dangerous journeys into the unknown, and the base of the building tends to be littered with charms and trinkets.

The Grand Arsenal

At the other end of the docks stands the Grand Arsenal, a sprawling, fortified complex of buildings working toward two goals: outfitting and maintaining the Free Companies in the missions they undertake for Shosara and providing a military command center for the Free Companies should enemies dare attack the city.

The Captain-General rules the Grand Arsenal with an eye toward vigilance for potential attack and keeping records of where the Companies' ships and soldiers are assigned at any given time. The Captain-General's preoccupation with the idea Shosara could be attacked has led to whispers of paranoia by some of the younger recruits, but the Arsenal makes a valuable addition to Shosara's defenses nonetheless.

The Grand Arsenal spreads out over the southern end of the city docks. The high-walled central keep stands near the center of the grounds, with a commanding view of everything around it. The keep is surrounded by barracks, smithies, and storerooms, all built with military precision. The Free Companies maintain private docks alongside their shipwrights, who are known as some of the most talented shipbuilders in Shosara and are often hired for private commissions from the ranelles. Should this commissioned work get in the way of a shipwright's assignment for Shosaran interests, they are encouraged to put it on hold. The ships are of such high quality, however, the ranelles are willing to wait.

The Free Companies also have dedicated artisans and Weaponsmiths, crafting weapons and armor for their mercenaries as well as a brisk arms sale. Those who can't afford the services of the Companies' soldiers often invest in their steel as the next best thing. More recently, the Arsenal has found itself home to a third function: one endpoint of an unofficial trade with Sereatha's Trisrora ranelle.

Dockside

East of the docks themselves are the tightly-packed homes of most of Shosara's citizens, arranged into blocks of homes and businesses around a central courtyard. The buildings closer to the docks do brisk business catering to seafarers, while the district beyond the main thoroughfares is more residential. Those of greater means tend to live farther from the shore, closer to the hills of the Old City. This eastward migration is common for the upwardly mobile, and many locals dream of ending up with an estate in the Garden District.

The Dockside is also home to the Shrine of Chorrolis, a sly name for Shosara's largest market built around an actual shrine to the Passion. Everything from foodstuffs, to rare plants and reagents, to arms and armor can be found in the market and merchants flock to pick up or offload gains from recent expeditions into the wilds.

Some balk at the Shosaran pursuit of trade, but natives believe these are gifts from the land and sea. As they see it, they braved the wilds to take them, so it's their privilege to share or trade them as they see fit.

The Old City

The central hills overlooking Dockside contain the building that hosts the chambers of both the Council of Princes and the Grand Assembly. The two parts of this imposing structure are where the nation's decisions are debated, voted on, and undertaken.

In addition to these structures, the Old City houses wealthy merchants and craftsmen, much of the currently non-commissioned artists and artisans, and compounds of smaller ranelles. These structures all stand within the grounds of the citadel that housed the residents of Shosara, Khistova and the region's other settlements during the Scourge. The citadel's once cramped homes and structures have been dismantled or repurposed. The Navolok Ranelle keeps its estate in the Old City in a conscious show of rebellion against the more traditional ranelles, including their Laryskova rivals.

The Palace

While most neighborhoods, guilds and outlying settlements have their own common space and government buildings, few of these compare to the grandeur of the Palace of Shosara, with its blend of architectural influences from across the known world. Indeed, the structure outshines the estates of some ranelles, even with the understated elegance of the Council chambers. To citizens, the Palace is a monument to the distinctive rule that keeps Shosara strong and true to its roots. To outsiders, it's an imposing reminder of the novel system that keeps the nation running.

The Palace houses the Grand Assembly and the Council of Princes and is the crown jewel of the Old City. The oblong structure is split into two distinct parts. The first, the massive amphitheater that houses the Assembly during its frequent meetings, is covered by a large dome. The delicate glass structure is magically reinforced to withstand even the strongest storms that batter the coast. Light shines through to illuminate the hall during the day and at night, the dancing lights in the sky known as Jaspre's Blessing bathe the dome in a multi-hued glow.

The interior contains enough terraced benches to seat a thousand Namegivers, and above them a recessed gallery offers spectators the opportunity to see governance in action. The benches and galleries form a U-shape around a raised platform. Here dignitaries deliver speeches or the proclamations, and the First Delegate (an elected position chosen to lead meetings of the Assembly) directs the spirited meetings that take place.

Several exits from the assembly hall lead to small rooms where groups of delegates can meet away from the vigorous discussion that takes place in the main hall. The cellars below the hall were once the administrative heart of Shosara's citadel, and still house extensive legal and bureaucratic records.

The second part of the structure is much smaller, a tower crafted by elven artisans incorporating Khistovan architectural elements, foremost among them an onion-shaped dome that prominent buildings in the area often display. Within the tower are the finely-appointed but austere chambers of the Council of Princes.

The entire structure and grounds around it are heavily patrolled by the household guards of multiple Princes as well as the Free Companies, and none are admitted inside without express invitation by a standing member of the Council. A small balcony overlooking a public plaza provides Princes with a place to make proclamations or speeches to gathered crowds as needed.

The Garden District

The oldest ranelles have carved out their own opulent community in the city's eastern hills. Their sprawling estates were built at great expense and with great speed after the Scourge, in an architectural style that is recognizably elven but uniquely Shosaran. Depending on the family, these estates contain private shrines, libraries or collections of art in addition to all the amenities and luxuries a noble can expect. Additionally, each maintains a private force of household soldiers, including adepts if the ranelle can afford them.

The reason for this district's name is readily apparent, as each ranelle maintains intricate, beautiful gardens on its lands. These are carefully constructed and tended to provide the illusion of a placid garden incorporating a variety of exotic plants. This feat is more difficult than it appears because of the blessing of rampant growth that suffuses the region. Left to their own devices the flowers and vines would overtake the grounds.

Maintaining the manicured gardens is expensive, and each ranelle pays well to have full-time staff. It has become fashionable to sponsor young Elementalists to the Great Lighthouse and call in favors by having them lend their powers to growing these gardens, and Elementalists arriving in Shosara to study may find themselves at the center of an intense competition for their services.

Foremost among the estates is the Laryskova's, an extravagant hall surrounded by various outbuildings, all constructed to stand in harmony with their gardens. The architecture is based on traditional elven designs, but blends Theran and Khistovan influences in a nod to the non-elves that have supported the ranelle over the centuries.

The Laryskova have chosen a theme of pre-Scourge Wyrms Wood in their gardens, claiming they contain several species of plant and tree that can no longer grow in the Blood Wood; a subtle jab at the blood elves, but not incendiary enough to cause trouble. They show these off at frequent parties to which Shosara's elite and distinguished visitors are invited, to project the elven kingdom's blend of elven tradition and innovation.

GOVERNMENT

Twin pillars of Shosara's governance, the Council of Princes and Grand Assembly work together to guide Shosara through difficult times, while providing an avenue through which ordinary citizens' voices can be heard. Shosara's citizens believe this blend of authority and equality gives Shosara the flexibility it needs to weather changes great and small, and the foundation of its rebirth after the Scourge.

The Grand Assembly

The majority of laws and decisions affecting the lives of Shosarans originate in the Grand Assembly. The institution traces its origins to the earliest days of Shosara, when a band of travelers following a divine vision settled these wild lands. Though they came from different backgrounds, the wisdom of each was needed to survive those early years. All were encouraged to lend their voice, and the tradition was solidified in the wake of Separation by the remaining ranelles.

This tradition can be found everywhere in Shosara, where individuals are grouped into small local assemblies. Every community, from a hardscrabble village on the distant northern coast, to a city block in Dockside, to an independent trading ship plying the Gwyn Sea counts as such an assembly. The right of all who are part of the group to meet and debate is held dear by Shosarans, and great weight is given to the decision-making that results from such debate.

These communities take the form of different neighborhoods in Shosara proper, but outlying communities may have only a single representative, or through ancient treaties have another arrangement. In some cases, ship captains have even had their crews recognized as a local assembly. These individual groups handle minor affairs for the place they come from, but each group picks an individual to speak for them on a larger scale. These delegates convene in the Grand Assembly chambers to help decide Shosara's broader policies.

The Assembly meets on a regular basis, gathering to discuss issues brought up by the people they represent and vote on measures to address them. In doing so, the Assembly handles the day-to-day management of Shosara by majority vote. Impromptu meetings are also possible; by tradition, a meeting can be held whenever the Assembly Bell (an ancient bell in a tower adjoining the Palace, said to be crafted by the questors of Jasprey) is rung, the True air woven into the bell allows its peals to be heard across the entire city.

While not all delegates can attend every meeting of the Grand Assembly, only a quorum of a simple majority of all delegates is required for decisions to be made. However, delegates who rarely attend or vote without thought for the people they represent may find themselves replaced. This is especially true if their absence or poor judgment are felt in decisions that run against the wishes of the people they represent. To have a voice in ruling one's homeland

is a rare gift, and Shosarans take it seriously. Those who exercise it well represent their local assembly for years.

Shosara's Grand Assembly was founded on lofty ideals of citizen representation. While this section describes how it functions at its best, the Grand Assembly is made up of many Namegivers with their own motivations, often working at cross purposes. Its delegates represent groups with widely varying interests, and this inevitably complicates the process of legislating Shosara's policies. Debates can devolve into arguments that go on for too long, votes can stall out, and a quorum might not be reached, prolonging the process.

This is compounded by the fact that the Council of Princes has its own interests, often working to influence delegates toward their viewpoints, or just to protect individual business interests. The worship of Jasprey is another element of Shosaran life that can steer a delegate's votes, and her questors often work behind the scenes to advance their agenda in the Grand Assembly. Finally, a body as large as the Assembly provides ample targets for spies to infiltrate, whether indirectly or even as delegates themselves.

The Council of Princes

In dire times such as war or natural disaster, the people of early Shosara looked to their most prominent citizens for guidance. The leadership of the settlement symbolized Shosara itself, as they not only survived but thrived in the harsh environment. Though all were encouraged to lend their voices, these leaders were entrusted by those early settlers to take decisive action, though even then they made sure to do so through their own consensus.

This tradition evolved into the Council of Princes, made up of the leaders of the most prominent ranelles in Shosara. The number of these Princes has varied over time but, since a consolidation that took place during the Scourge, has remained steady at five. The Council selects a High Prince from among their number, a position that has usually been held by the Laryskova family, though others have occasionally held the title of High Prince. Most of these non-Laryskova High Princes were during the earliest years of Separation.

While the Grand Assembly handles the broad strokes of day-to-day governance and internal policy, the Council handles weightier affairs of state. Matters of diplomacy, war and international trade fall under their purview, as do emergency measures should some sort of disaster strike. Debate can be fierce, especially as tensions between the Laryskova and Navolok ranelles play out and the others fall in with one or the other. However, the Princes have so far been able to put aside their rivalries to fulfil their duty to Shosara.

There are also groups who send representatives in an advisory role: the questors of Jasprey, the Free Companies, Khistova, and the scholars of the Great Lighthouse. Of these the representatives of the Free Companies and Khistova are most active as advisors, even using their clout to influence decisions to

their benefit. The questors are sparing with their guidance, but out of respect for the founders of Shosara, and for the power the questors wield, their words are seriously considered by the Princes. It is out of this same respect that the Council chose to appoint the questor Jorealla as Shosara's ambassador to the Blood Wood, one of few unanimous, speedy decisions undertaken by the Council.

Adventure Idea

The characters are approached by an agent of an up-and-coming merchant family who stand to lose money from a coming vote on taxation. The family's plan is to send groups of adventurers to delay key delegates from outlying settlements that stand to gain from the proposal, making sure the vote will go in their favor.

Option 1

The adventurers travel to a small cluster of settlements on the frontier to stop multiple delegates from boarding a ship scheduled to arrive at the capital the day of the vote, skewing the vote in favor of their employer. These settlements are dealing with local threats of their own and would welcome the help of adepts, giving the adventurers a taste of some of the hardships the frontier delegates are trying to alleviate for their people.

Option 2

The group is approached with a counteroffer before leaving the city and tasked with delaying enough delegates from around Shosara to prevent a quorum, delaying the vote entirely. They race around the shores of the Gwyn Sea finding ways to stop or slow down delegates making their way to the capital.

THE LARYSKOVA RANELLE

To many Namegivers, the Laryskova Ranelle and the city-state of Shosara are one and the same. The families that make up the ranelle hold significant political and economic influence in the region. Laryskova traders, courtiers or captains are often the first elves an outsider will encounter.

While their hold on the region is far from total, the ranelle is widely considered the largest single power in the region. The Laryskova prefer diplomacy and trade to keep their rivals from putting up meaningful opposition and tend to avoid using force despite their sizable household guard. Some call them ruthless, others call them inspired, but most agree they will leverage all of their considerable resources if it means making Shosara the new seat of the Elven Court.

History

The Laryskova Ranelle is a curious mix of tradition and innovation. They can trace their line back to a questor of Jasprey who led a determined band to follow in the footsteps of the Passion of the Wilds, as their legends state. Long before Shosara's separation, the Laryskova wielded considerable power in both Shosara and Wyrms Wood. Yet they've also spent a long time among the humans of Khistova and other Namegivers in the region.

The ranelle has incorporated ideas from all, though they have done so carefully, in a framework of adapting elven nature to the changing world around them. The Laryskova are careful to avoid any implication they have actually drawn from the traditions of other Namegivers, but in practice they've guided considerable cultural exchange in Shosara.

This issue of cultural exchange was the catalyst for Shosara's estrangement from the Elven Court. In adapting their ship designs to be seaworthy, the Shosarans were accused of incorporating designs from their Khistovan neighbors, though the elves still maintain this was not the case. While the Laryskova were pioneers of the fusion of designs, they were also among the first ranelles to renounce their ties to Shosara after the kingdom was Separated. While some remained in the city, the majority of the ranelle's families moved to Wyrms Wood, looking to retain and grow their wealth and status.

In the years after the split, the Laryskova fell out of favor with the Queen of the Wyrms Wood. They plotted a coup and were instead outmaneuvered by the Queen's successor. Cast out of the Wood, they returned to their homeland with a few allies and reasserted their power, taking advantage of the power vacuum in the Separated city to seize power for themselves once more.

They fully rejected the Elven Court, painting pictures of a corrupt, rigid, and out-of-touch aristocracy. This deep-seated distrust of the Wyrms Wood became a central element of Shosara's political climate, and the events of the Scourge only confirmed suspicions that Blood Wood had fallen from the true path.

The Laryskova Today

The Separation and the shared community of Shosara during the Scourge have had a profound effect. The leaders of Shosara throw themselves into ventures with more speed and ambition than one would expect of an elven kingdom, showing the notable influence of their human neighbors. The Laryskova harness this energy to fund exploratory and prospecting expeditions for new veins of True elements, a chief source of their wealth.

They also take great care to rein in the most extreme changes, such as those that would overthrow established elven culture entirely. This leads to a delicate balance of innovation and tradition, one the ranelle invests considerable energy to maintain. Shosarans claim a long tradition of flexibility while retaining their essential elvish nature, but the Laryskova leadership regularly engage in practices similar to those that cast Shosara out of the Elven Court in the first place.

The Laryskova are natural merchants and explorers, and many of their adepts engage in one or both of these pursuits. The family owns a fleet of seafaring ships and even a small number of airships that ply trade routes around the Gwyn Sea. The ranelle is well-represented among the adepts and adventurers ranging far from the city.

It is a testament to their perseverance and ruthlessness that even after their failed bid for power in Wyrn Wood and being stripped of everything, they quickly reclaimed their wealth and power after returning to Shosara. Their sympathies with Thera also led to early adoption of the Rites of Protection and Passage. While Shosara is not the only elven community to trade with Thera, it was among the first to do so, opening the door for others that disagreed with Wyrn Wood's pronouncements.

The ranelle also spends a portion of its considerable wealth funding a diverse array of scholarly and magical efforts. Much of this is concentrated in the Great Lighthouse, where academics and adepts gather to exchange knowledge, perform experiments, and debate new theories. Scholarship supported by Laryskova nobles ranges from magical theory, to new farming practices, to the ecology of creatures like the vila.

The arts are another common pursuit of the Laryskova. Aside from local artisans they support the efforts of a small cadre of resident artists from the Blood Wood, part of a cultural exchange brokered by the Daevenar ranelle. It remains to be seen whether this diplomatic gesture leads to more cordial relations between the kingdoms or is overshadowed by competition elsewhere.

In many ways, the families that make up the Laryskova ranelle are similar to those of the other elven nations. While a majority are descended from the earliest settlers of the region, others trace their ancestry back to elves sympathetic to Shosara, cast out by Queen Liara along with Arianne after the power struggle with Queen Failla.

The Laryskova are close-knit and clannish. The banishment from Wyrn Wood and the harsh journey to Shosara have bound the different elements of the family tightly together through adversity, and family loyalty is a key virtue among them. One would be hard-pressed to find a scion of the Laryskova criticizing their ranelle openly, even in a society as open to debate and discussion as Shosara considers itself to be.

One difference between the Laryskova and similar ranelles in Wyrn Wood looms large. Among their number are human nobles of the Khistova family, descended from the old tribal settlement Shosara's early settlers forged close ties with. To more conservative outlooks, such access to the inner circle of a leading ranelle is unthinkable. Several diplomatic incidents have erupted from traditionalist-minded elven diplomats witnessing this relationship. But the Laryskova take great care in the way they bestow titles and positions, actively cultivating the appearance of elves as the sole decision-making member of their alliance with the human city. While it may not fool all elves, it does placate most.

Even when the Khistovan Prince speaks in Council meetings, he does so as an advisor and guest of the Laryskova. This is in line with a tradition dating back to the Council's pre-Separation days, when non-elves could only speak as guests of an elven court. Yet change looms for the Laryskova here as well. During the Scourge, the region's population lived together in a single citadel, and Khistovans found themselves closer to the halls of power than ever. Now that humans are resettling their city and the wealthy lands around it, they and their Prince agitate for more of a voice in Shosara's rule.

Grand Prince Beranis Laryskova

Beranis is an elf Swordmaster in his early 50s who has made the competition to secure the Elven Court in Shosara his chief focus. Because of his zeal, he was elected Grand Prince not long after gaining his seat on the Council. The new Prince's policies are more aggressive and confrontational with Shosara's rivals than those of his predecessors. Under his guidance, the Laryskova have begun mobilizing their wealth and expertise toward diplomacy, espionage and exploration to gather resources and amass support in their bid for Oak Heart's future.

Beranis wasn't a particularly spiritual or patriotic youth. In fact, he was considered something of a fop until a chance meeting with Shosara's ambassador to the Blood Wood, Jorealla. What was discussed is unknown, but shortly thereafter Beranis renewed his devotions to the Passion Jaspree and his family's affairs. He quickly climbed the ranks until becoming Grand Prince, winning the rest of the Council over with his ambitious vision of Shosara as Oak Heart's home, and thus the center of elven culture.

The Grand Prince presides over a Council as first among equals, though in practice his pronouncements carry more weight than those of the other Princes due to his family name. He finds himself playing a delicate game with the rest of the Council, however. On one hand, he must maintain his image as a proper elven monarch to potential allies outside Shosara. On the other, he continues to support reforms to placate his rivals within the nation.

So far, he's been able to leverage the Laryskova wealth and trade network to keep the Council happy, but as the political struggle between the elven



nations continues and Shosara spreads its resources, this will be a considerable challenge. While he's captured the support of many Shosarans, some wonder if such a young ruler is up to this test.

Attributes

DEX: 8 STR: 7 TOU: 6

PER: 6 WIL: 5 CHA: 7

THE NAVOLOK RANELLE

To say the Navolok Ranelle has a chip on its shoulder is a bit facetious, but it's not inaccurate. The families and retainers of the Navolok possess strong egalitarian ideals but can be prickly whenever the Laryskova are brought up. The two families have a long and tense history. The Navolok may not trace their lineage as far back as the Grand Prince's ranelle, but they have a history of their own stretching back to the Separation, when their ancestors helped stabilize the nation during a precarious time.

Like Shosara, the Navolok have endured hardships, and adapted to them. What makes them shock more conservative elf ambassadors is also one of their great strengths: their acceptance of and reliance on other Namegivers, even beyond the forward-thinking norms in Shosara. For centuries they have advocated for non-elves and reward them with trade patents, land and even titles, all to the quiet consternation of more traditional elves.

History

The roots of the Navolok Ranelle reach back to the Separation. As the pronouncement came down many of the established families packed up, renounced their ties, and left the nation for kingdoms that remained loyal to the Elven Court. In the resulting chaos, a few families forged lasting ties and even developed a new interpretation of the disaster. If the Elven Court had abandoned them over matters of survival in their homeland, the sin was not with Shosara, but the disconnected nobles of Wyrn Wood. As a show of defiance, they chose a Khistovan word Navolok for the new ranelle and began the work of saving their nation.

The city of Shosara already had a large population who had flocked to the safety and prosperity the elves offered. Despite cordial relations, they had only limited access to the inner circles of power. To build a coalition and retain stability in the aftermath of the Separation, the Navolok offered wealth and titles to Namegivers they considered trustworthy. They solidified the Grand Assembly as an institution to allow citizens more input in their laws, and to allow them to vote on city officials. The Navolok even began hiring mercenaries from among local warriors to repel bandits and monsters that threatened the far-flung settlements on the shores of the Gwyn Sea. Though the early years were difficult, the Navolok made difficult decisions and began the slow process of rebuilding along a new, untested path.

All of this changed, of course, with the return of the Laryskova and their allies. The ranelle and its leader, Arianne, came with stories of the Elven Court's decadence and corruption. They had the manpower to bring new life to the city, and their name still carried weight, tied as it was to Shosara's founders.

They insinuated themselves into local affairs and their canny leader climbed the ranks of power, often stepping over Navolok nobles to do so. All the while, they reined in the extremes of what the Navolok had supported, even as they encouraged and co-opted their less radical plans. In time, Arianne re-established the stability of old, with herself as Grand Prince. The Navolok became regarded as secondary in prestige and power. Feelings of envy and betrayal grew among the Navolok Ranelle, feelings that linger among its more ideological members.

These tensions smoldered even as the Navolok helped fund and construct Shosara's citadel. As they weathered the Scourge in the city's tight confines, the ranelle's representatives got to work exchanging influence and trade rights for support among well-to-do landowners and merchants unaffiliated with the city's leading families.

When Shosara emerged from the Scourge and its people were ready to rebuild the far-flung settlements, the Navolok put their plans in motion and secured exclusive rights to several key trade resources. Their portfolio may not be as great as the Laryskova's, but the Navolok are powerful enough to be a thorn in the side of the Grand Prince's kin. They use their influence to oppose measures they see as leading to stagnation or regression among their people, and advocate strongly for more non-elves to be in positions of power.

The Navolok Today

The Navolok Ranelle does not share the hesitation more traditional ranelles have about the status of other Namegivers in its ranks. Two-thirds of the ranelle's members are non-elf Namegivers, a number unheard of among other leading families. The Navolok resemble a loose political coalition as much as they do a ranelle, and membership is open to those who impress its leaders. Namegivers who can achieve great things, elf or not, are rewarded with wealth and titles. Humans, dwarfs, orks and even the occasional t'skrang are in charge of Navolok operations throughout the region and openly provide counsel for its future ventures.

The Navolok tend toward more radical views than their fellow Shosarans, to a degree more devout elves find borderline offensive. The ranelle came into its own during the chaos after the Separation and the shockwaves the censure sent through their nation. As a result, they often look on more traditional families with disdain, and are seen as extremists in return. Many whisper the Navolok wish to abandon elven traditions entirely, fully embracing the unique conventions developed by the Shosaran people.

Spiritually, they follow an interpretation of the Paths and the Wheel that has developed among shorter-lived Namegivers. In this, the Wheel is not something to be completed in one circuit, but to conquer time and time again,

reaching higher levels of understanding with each completed journey along the Paths. The Navolok nobles claim this encourages Namegivers to strive for greater understanding of themselves and the world around them, rather than stagnating once they become Lords in the traditional manner.

Like the Laryskova, the Navolok make a point of funding artisans, scholars, and magical researchers as they unravel the secrets Jaspree's gift has placed before Shosara. It is a point of pride and a show of wealth for Navolok nobles to be seen supporting art and culture. Their patronage is targeted, however, toward Namegivers with radical ideas and fringe theories, helping feed the constant change and evolution the Navolok believe will help Shosara thrive.

Some of these result in useful inventions, which the ranelle puts to immediate use to help their operations in the region. Among these are items that are clearly non-elven in origin or concept. The ranelle makes no effort to hide this as the Laryskova might and seems to relish the resulting scandal among their more conservative kin.

Grand Prince Zinoviyy Navolok

Since Shosara's emergence from the Scourge, Prince Zinoviyy has guided the Navolok through a rapid consolidation of power, leveraging a web of alliances with non-elves in Shosara. His master stroke was negotiating multiple deals with smaller families during the Scourge, bringing them into the fold once the Shosaran people emerged and began reclaiming their home. Under his guidance the ranelle is wealthier and more influential than ever, though they are still second to the Laryskova in power and public support.

Zinoviyy is an accomplished Troubadour, canny merchant, and shrewd politician, but has a prickly personality and little patience for those who disagree with his views. If he is thwarted, he often finds more subtle alternatives to get his way. Most recently, this has involved making overtures to the Throalic delegation in Shosara. The Council Compact has given the Navolok new ideas for reform and great sympathy with Throal, who they consider natural allies. Shosara officially maintains a neutral stance in all but elven affairs, so Zinoviyy uses back channels for such diplomatic discussions.

More pressing than this, Prince Zinoviyy is in his twilight years. He has led the Navolok for a long time and stirred up his fair share of scandal. Rumors abound of a new controversy he wishes to stir by naming a human Named Ustin as his successor. This would upend centuries of tradition and might be blocked by the Council of Princes, but the elderly Zinoviyy relishes the chance



to cause one last altercation, and hopefully gain new rights and privileges for non-elves in the process.

While Zinovi and his ranelle stand in opposition to more traditional factions, he is a patriot when it comes to the nation's security. He will side with the opposition if Shosara's safety is threatened by outside forces.

Attributes

DEX: 5 STR: 5 TOU: 5
PER: 7 WIL: 7 CHA: 8

THE FREE COMPANIES

While most settlements have a militia with basic training at their disposal, these are rarely professional soldiers. To the Shosaran people, these able-bodied Namegivers are better served building the nation's wealth than leaving their homes to protect caravans or prospecting expeditions. This is where the Free Companies come in, and the vital role they fill in maintaining peace in the kingdom cannot be understated.

While many nations use mercenary forces to supplement their standing armies, Shosara's mercantile nature shows in that *all* of its soldiers are technically mercenaries. The Free Companies run with the discipline of a military order and the industriousness of a trade guild, taking bounties to protect, explore, and even craft for the people of Shosara. Rather than fielding an extensive standing army, the Free Companies have organized smaller, more mobile forces, emphasizing speedy resolution over protracted campaigns. Since most threats to Shosara are isolated, this strategy has paid off, though the mercenaries maintain static defenses around the Gwyn Sea.

History

The Free Companies trace their history back to the Separation, when chaos broke out in the land and strong arms were required to maintain stability. Shosarans trained in warfare since its earliest days as a colony, simply because the land was so harsh everyone needed to contribute to its defense. But these were citizen-soldiers, and in the wake of Separation it became clear this was not enough.

Shosara's beleaguered leadership began recruiting heavily from adepts and trained mercenaries in the region, forging them through contracts and patents into a well-trained, well-equipped fighting force that could be quickly deployed to areas that needed them. There were many such areas in the early days.

At first, the contracts sent the mercenaries against all manner of foes, from marauding beasts to magical creatures taking advantage of unprotected settlements. An unfortunate reality was that they often fought against fellow Namegivers, as some misguided souls turned to banditry and piracy in the vacuum left by the departure of so many prominent families. While the fighting was fierce, the mercenaries prevailed.

In their battles against foes on all fronts, they learned to organize and developed a command structure to help dispatch troops to where they were most needed. In the wake of the various conflicts, they emerged as a single mercenary army and began calling themselves the Free Companies. Given their services are not cheap, some believe the Name an ironic joke.

After some degree of stability was restored, the Companies found themselves with considerable wealth. Shosara's leadership had come to rely heavily on their military might and established long-term contracts that bound the mercenaries to the nation's well-being and protection. The Companies used these riches to establish a small keep and shipyard at one end of Shosara's docks, the core of what is now the Grand Arsenal. They also elected a Grand Captain, a military leader and representative to the Council of Princes.

In doing so, the Free Companies established themselves as a significant political force and sent a message to Shosara's ruling families. The Free Companies had shed blood for Shosara and are closely bound to its future through perpetual contracts. The demand was simple: they would be given a voice in Shosara's rule and its defense. The ranelles warily granted this request, and to this day one seat on the Council of Princes is held by the Grand Captain of the Free Companies.

The Companies Today

Shosaran leaders rely on their household militia for defending their homesteads, though their training and equipment reflects the relative wealth of those in charge. While a ranelle's household guard may be professional soldiers (sometimes retired officers from the Free Companies), the militia of a supply port or temporary prospecting village might just be whatever able-bodied Namegivers the local leader or merchant patron could offer. These militia stay close to home, leaving the Free Companies to fill several vital roles in the nation.

The mercenaries stand ready with a large force of troops and fleet of ships to serve as the professional core of a standing army if Shosara is ever faced with an invasion. In those circumstances, calling them "mercenaries" is debatable, as matters of national security allow the Grand Captain to suspend all contracts and bounties in favor of dealing with large-scale threats on behalf of the Council.

The Companies patrol important trade routes and the streets of the capital, with the aim of creating a safe environment for individuals to conduct business. They also accompany state-sponsored expeditions into the wilds to locate new resources or conduct research. Most interestingly, they are on retainer for any mysteries or strange phenomena the Council encounters, often working alongside agents of the ranelles or scholars from the Great Lighthouse in such ventures.

While their numbers may not compare to the forces other nations can muster, the Companies are well versed in the region's terrain, well trained,

and have a knack for efficiently allocating their resources. Adding to this organizational prowess is a large number of craftsmen and shipwrights overseen by Weaponsmith adepts, producing and maintaining all that the Free Companies need to maintain their effectiveness.

The large concentration of artisans has the side effect of producing steady income from commissioned work or surplus goods, and the work of their Weaponsmiths can fetch a high price. As they've expanded these trade activities, the Companies have enlarged the facilities around the Grand Arsenal from a small keep and shipyard to a large walled compound with numerous outbuildings. The latest of these are warehouses and counting houses to accommodate the trade they conduct with Sereatha's Trisrora Ranelle, and the wealth it brings.

The Companies have a reputation as an excellent source of work for adepts in the region, even those who aren't members. The Companies manage a complex system of bounties—of which their own members always get the first pick—but when there's more work than the Companies can handle, or their resources are required elsewhere, visiting adepts find opportunities for well-paying work. The bounty system also serves as an excellent recruiting tool for talent. Those who succeed or make a name for themselves are often sponsored for membership.

Jobs offered by the Companies include traditional mercenary or guard work, to smaller crafting jobs, to escorting trade caravans traveling to Trisrora lands. As the back-channel struggle over Oak Heart continues, another type of work has opened up: espionage. The Council of Princes seeks information on its rivals, and leverages Shosara's large pool of non-elves to do so discretely. While the ranelles have their own dedicated spies, the Companies' agents round out the nation's intelligence needs.

Grand Captain Damira Alessar

A dwarf Weaponsmith who worked her way up the ranks of the Free Companies through her craftsmanship as much as through bounties, Alessar is often derided by her detractors as a mere merchant or courtier. Her chief achievement has been forging trade links with Sereatha's Trisrora Ranelle. By taking advantage of the Companies' non-elf membership to skirt Sereatha's trade restrictions with Separated elves, she developed a lucrative market for moving goods between the elven nations. Having risen through the ranks as a craftsman, Damira regularly advocates for more non-military contracts to keep money flowing in without the risk carried by military ventures.

In the Council of Princes, she has maintained a cautious balancing act between rival factions. She has cast her support behind reformist elements, but only to a point, siding with conservative ranelles when necessary to avoid radical change. This often gives her a swing vote on the Council, a position she leverages whenever possible to get more concessions for her organization.

Alessar is fiercely dedicated to Shosara's security and organizes the Companies' business ventures with an eye toward expanding their support

network. She's convinced the conflict over Oak Heart will spill into open war, either with one of the other elven nations or a third party that will take advantage of the situation. To those close to her, this concern borders on paranoia, but recent accounts of spies or beastly threats from the west only deepen her resolve.

Attributes

DEX: 6 STR: 6 TOU: 5

PER: 7 WIL: 8 CHA: 7

OTHER SETTLEMENTS

Khistova

The home of Shosara's longtime allies, the city of Khistova was abandoned before the Scourge, its residents relocated to the grand citadel constructed in the region's capital. Over the centuries the abandoned remains were leveled by Horrors. After the Scourge, Khistova's people were determined to rebuild and take advantage of the area's bounty. Magicians and questors of Jasprea worked to purify astral space in the area, and the city was rebuilt with Shosara funding. While many Khistovans had grown used to life in Shosara, many gladly moved back to reclaim their birthright, joined by intrepid Namegivers eager to make their fortunes.

Khistova sprawls at the mouth of the wide Severyn River, separated from the harsh sea by a delta riddled with canals and estuaries. The islands formed by these support smaller settlements that help provide food to Khistova, as does the arable land along the Severyn, which stretches southeast of the city and makes up the largest area of farmland in the region. Dense forest extends inland beyond the farms, which provides a wealth of resources for the Khistovan princes to exploit.

The depth of the Severyn allows ships to sail the largest of these estuaries, though inexperienced or unfamiliar sailors do so at great risk. A system of watchtowers, signal fires and warning horns helps manage ship traffic in the waterways, ensuring larger vessels stay on course. Khistova's docks are as busy as Shosara's despite their smaller size, managing a steady flow of sea and river traffic, while the city's gates see merchants and expeditions heading into or out of the wilderness beyond.

The city's residents rebuilt in the image of their old home. Years of planning during the Scourge resulted in a number of improvements and the city is a fresh, new version of what it once was. Old wooden longhouses have been replaced with stone and brick buildings with peaked roofs. High stone walls keep the wilderness at bay in place of the old palisades, and instead of haphazardly placed wharves along the coast, orderly docks attend to both river and sea traffic.

On a low rise overlooking the river the city square looks down on the bustle of activity below. Two structures stand at opposite sides of the square, each containing a piece of Khistovan history. The first is the Assembly

Belltower, housing the original bell that called the citizens of Khistova to debate and determine its laws. The second is the prince's estate, a walled compound housing the steep-roofed Grand Hall and a few outbuildings. Since the Scourge, the Princes of Khistova have split their time between their home city and Shosara, but some members of the ruling family can always be found here.

The docks themselves are Khistova's greatest departure from its old plan. The shoreline bounded by the city walls is devoted to shipping operations managing the food and bulk goods that make their way through Khistova. Where each family once built their own dock and managed their own ship, the docks are now under the purview of a harbormaster who manages the traffic and tolls going to the Prince's coffers.

The rest of the city is organized into houses grouped around central courtyards. These resemble the extended family compounds of old, though now they mostly serve merchant associations or craft guilds. As they have since their earliest days, Khistovans choose delegates from each block to represent them at their assemblies.

These neighborhood clusters are separated by wide avenues allowing carts to travel with ease. Elven design elements have made their way into various elements of the city, including nature motifs in the architecture. The city plan, however, is devoted to getting goods to and from the docks. While it may not compare to Shosara's size, Khistova is devoted to business.

The city is rebuilt, and the surrounding lands are being resettled, but Khistova still looks to its frontier and sees room for growth. These plans for expansion require more settlers, and the city has begun aggressively recruiting Shosaran citizens and immigrants. Some believe this is to extract further resources from the land and sea around the city, while others wonder if Khistova's prince is gathering power for other purposes, or a bid for his people to have a voice on the Council.

Fort Kinala

The True element trade has been a key source of Shosara's economic strength. After the Separation, True wood had become the rarest of these, as it had mostly been imported from the Wyrn Wood. The frozen forests to the north were an exception to this scarcity, and the Council kept a tight hold on this supply through regular patrols of the Free Companies. When Shosara began rebuilding after the Scourge, they moved to secure this resource and a small fort was established on the northwest shores of the Gwyn Sea.

Once constructed, Fort Kinala served as a place where troops could recuperate from long patrols and expeditions could load vessels with True elements or other resources obtained from the land. It became a common stopping point for prospectors headed west into the wilds of Pelsaari to secure kernels of True fire, and a small town grew quickly around the fortress.

Some of the prospectors who ventured west never returned. The fens had always been a dangerous place, so this wasn't immediately seen as a

threat. But when more disappeared, and then the patrols who went after them, the local mercenary captain, a beleaguered ork Warrior Named Rastof, prepared for the worst. The boom town outside the fort was consolidated into a more defensible position and a palisade constructed around the new town. More troops were requested and heavily-armed patrols set out to guard any explorers still brave enough to enter the fens. The Free Companies had entrenched themselves, and they would find the source of these attacks.

Eventually, enough stories from survivors came together to form a picture of the enemy: feral creatures that walked as Namegivers but twisted with the traits of animals of the forest. They possessed a low cunning, setting traps and ambushes for Shosaran Namegivers. Survivors spoke of these beastly foes dragging their victims away to unknown ends.

Grown beyond its origins as a stopover for patrols, Fort Kinala is the center of a concerted defense against these beast people. Its leadership has a siege mentality, but the lure of profit still draws the brave or foolhardy to try to make their fortune in the swampy lands of the west.

Expeditions from the fort are prohibited unless accompanied by a patrol, but some travelers land along the coast further south and chance a longer overland journey. The Free Companies have begun patrolling the western shores of the Gwyn Sea to stop would-be treasure seekers from landing in the first place. Just as often, they find themselves rescuing beleaguered prospectors. For now, they seem to have the situation in hand, but the garrison still doesn't know the scope of the threat and are preparing for the worst.

Eliban

Shosara is remote, even from Sereatha, and the journey there is a long, difficult one. A small but steady stream of brave individuals come to trade or settle, and the well-worn trails lead to the southern coast of the Gwyn Sea. In years past, Eliban was a port of entry for visitors to Shosara, and enterprising merchants re-founded it shortly after Shosara's citadel opened, eager for the business visitors brought.

Eliban is once again the gateway to Shosara, and the city's business is devoted to this purpose. A small but busy dock and airship berths help transfer cargo and passengers, while the city boasts a selection of inns, pubs, and other forms of entertainment to serve travelers. A thriving market helps provision those making the journey to points beyond. With travelers as the city's lifeblood, only a small portion of those in Eliban are permanent residents.

While the Free Companies and hired guards of the local merchant houses keep the peace, the transient population means Eliban is a bit rough around the edges. The movement of people also obscures the more surreptitious business keeping Eliban prosperous: dubiously legal trade with Sereatha's Trisrora Ranelle.

Under the Council's auspices, representatives of the Free Companies trade with the Trisrora, with a notable portion of that trade taking place here. Since the representatives aren't elves, they were never Separated and so are exempt

from the restrictions placed upon them by the Elven Court. So far there haven't been any reprisals from Sereatha, though whether this is due to ignorance or tacit approval is unclear.

Adventure Idea

The characters are hired to escort a band of down-on-their-luck settlers from Eliban to Khistova using the slower and more dangerous overland route, as the pioneers can't board a ship for unspecified reasons. The characters must guide the hapless settlers, braving harsh weather and poor roads over a period of two weeks until they reach the outskirts of Khistova. On the way, the travelers tell grandiose stories of the new life they were promised once they reach the growing city.

Option 1

The settlers aren't new to the region at all; they've been marked by a local Horror and roam the border communities looking for naïve adepts to lead to their master. The characters slowly realize something is wrong and work to defeat these wolves in sheep's' clothing or face the Horror who marked them to free the region from this threat.

Option 2

The settlers are what they appear, but a local bandit ring in the area who prey on overland travelers marks the group as easy prey. They stalk the company until an opportune moment to ambush them. The adventurers will have to outsmart their enemy or face an attack and the potential risk to their charges.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

As Queen Alachia seeks to rebuild the Elven Court in Blood Wood, Shosara has been busy building a web of diplomatic relations. It faces two major obstacles: its physical isolation and its contentious status as a Separated elven nation. By regrowing Oak Heart, Shosara hopes to fulfil its quest to impart its philosophy to all elven people and other Namegivers who would accept it.

Blood Wood

Most elves in Shosara look at Blood Wood and its people with disdain, disgust, pity, or some combination of the three. Since the Separation, Shosara has had ample time to consider what led them to that moment, and how to maintain a sense of unity in its wake. Out of pride, they chose to hold fast to the philosophy that led to the Separation, even pushing it to new limits. The Elven Court, meanwhile, is often called stagnant, corrupt, decadent, or out of touch. Upon learning of the blood ritual woven into the Wyrms Wood to spare it from the Scourge, Shosara only saw proof of all of their suspicions, and the superiority of their cause.

While they firmly believe the Queen is no longer fit to lead elven culture, Shosaran leaders have made overtures to improve relations. The Blood Wood has accepted Jorealla to the Court as Shosara's ambassador, though it is clear she and Queen Alachia bear no love for each other.

The exchange of artisans negotiated by the Daevenar Ranelle has led to more understanding between the two nations and there has even been a trickle of trade, though the distance and terrain make significant trade a difficult proposition. While both groups remain wary of each other, the relationship is a far cry from the complete cut-off of contact after the Separation.

Sereatha

The Blood Wood's agents look with satisfaction on the wedge driven between Sereatha and Shosara and the coldness of their diplomatic relations. The two were near enemies in the wake of Separation, as the staunchly traditional Sereatha followed the Queen's decree to the letter and pulled away from any association with the Separated kingdom. But as the Scourge approached, both nations rejected Queen Alachia's actions to try and keep the Elven Court safe. As Shosara decried Alachia's plan and the way it would irrevocably change the Wood, Sereatha's High Steward publicly echoed the sentiments of the Council of Princes.

With the Shosarans openly speaking of Blood Wood's departure from legitimacy, Sereatha was expected to side with their Queen, or at least ignore the charges. But many were surprised to learn Sereatha supported the Shosaran claims, and the two nations exchanged ambassadors and envoys.

As more details on Shosara's philosophy emerged, Sereatha made its own claim to become the seat of elven power, declaring Sereathan elves the inheritors of proper elven culture. This claim put a stop to any friendship between the two nations, and now Sereatha sends a bare minimum of envoys to Shosara. The post is considered by most a harsh punishment or calculated insult, ensuring ambitious peacemakers are unlikely in the role.

Like the Shosarans, the Sereathans seek to regrow Oak Heart, believing this and their adherence to tradition will establish them as the new seat of elven culture and society. Because the two have the same goal, this means Shosara and Sereatha work at cross purposes, a condition many look to exploit.

Independent Elves

Shosara has sent emissaries to urge those elves not formally aligned with a kingdom to support the northern nation's bid to become the true Elven Court. It scored an early diplomatic victory by establishing relations with lands who made common cause with Shosara, but since then results have been more mixed.

Of the lands who remained loyal subjects of the Elven Court, some still refuse to deal with Shosara, citing Queen Liara's edict of Separation as all the reason they need to ignore the northern nation. While they may no longer pay homage to the Blood Wood, Queen Alachia still views such elves as following the correct path. Others, however, have established relations with Shosara,

even going so far as to explore Shosara's philosophy. With their current efforts to expand their diplomatic reach, Shosaran emissaries are ranging farther afield to establish relations with smaller elven communities before their rivals do.

Thera

Elianar Messiah risked his reputation and his very Name to defend the Shosaran people from Separation, and Shosara has not forgotten him for the act. Though he was cast out and wandered off to a life of solitude, Messiah was a respected scholar, and the protest of such a notable individual weakened the resolve of some of the elven people to see the Separation through. To Shosara, his defense of them made him a hero, and they have looked kindlier on the Theran Empire than others might as a result of its spiritual founder's actions.

Though the Therans practice slavery and extortion on those hapless nations that treated with them, Shosara was spared this experience. This may be because they could easily pay the Therans with caches of True elements or because they bought into the Theran Rites of Protection and Passage from the beginning, but they were able to get an early start protecting their people against the dark times before the Therans made more egregious demands of other nations. Because these True elements were available in abundance, Shosara was spared the turmoil other nations felt during the Orichalcum Wars, focusing on defending its regular shipments as its leadership grew more wealthy.

Many find the cordial relationship with the Empire strange or upsetting, given Thera's bloody history with Barsaive. Since the Scourge, the Empire and Shosara have officially maintained a neutral stance. The Shosarans, for their part, hold a naive picture of Elianar Messiah as an example of Theran virtue and might, and the extreme distance between their land and the nearest Theran colony means regular contact is difficult and sparse, but the price of True elements means trade remains lucrative. The profitable nature of this relationship means the Council is reluctant to prohibit it, so they maintain a healthy distance to avoid becoming entangled in larger conflicts.

Throal

Shosara has historically had little to do with the dwarf kingdom outside of mercantile pursuits. With the Blood Wood geographically between the two nations, its merchants have typically been the intermediaries, so relations between the dwarfs and the northern elves are underdeveloped. The renewed interest in Oak Heart, however, has spurred Shosara to improve these relations. A small amount of trade now flows between the two, despite the hardships of travel (hardships that occasional merchant airships can usually get around). On the surface, there appears to be little more than this to the relationship.

Lately, however, rumors have been circulating in Shosara that the Navolok Ranelle has been making quiet overtures to the Throalic ambassador after reading copies of the Council Compact and seeing cause for cooperation. If the

two are able to find a way to ally, it could lead to a powerful voice for Throal in the Council of Princes. Or it could compel the Therans to intervene, increasing tensions between these nations as the Council works to mend their existing relationship.

Other Nations

The Council of Princes has little interest in maintaining strong relations with other nations apart from trade contracts. T'skrang traders occasionally exchange goods and information with Shosaran merchants, but no organized agreement exists between Shosara and the aropagoi. Many in Shosara would welcome such an arrangement, as they are always willing to offload more goods.

Ipos remains a mystery to the Shosaran people, though the city's recent takeover of Jerris has been met with a mixture of alarm and frustration. Jerris once acted as a stopover for far-ranging Shosaran merchants, and Shosarans feel some kinship with Jerris's people due to the long-standing positive relationship. No formal relations between Shosara and Ipos exist, though the Denairastas send a steady stream of overt and covert agents to the region.

Cara Fahd is little more than a distant rumor to the Shosaran people, though it holds a romantic place in their hearts. Troubadours in the north tell tales and sing songs about the orks freeing themselves from shackles to form their own nation. For a city that considers itself egalitarian and wronged by the Elven Court, the people of Shosara can't help but draw parallels with their own struggle to promote their philosophy. Despite the kinship they feel with Cara Fahd's self-determination, the Shosarans have yet to make any meaningful diplomatic ties with the ork kingdom.

Other Political Threats

It is no secret that with Shosara sending its agents throughout the world to assert its role and philosophy, there are those working to oppose or subvert them. Whether political rivals, those serving dark powers, or simply residents who don't agree with the ruling system, agents of the Council investigate such groups to ensure they don't succeed in their goals.

Spies

While Ambassador Jorealla wages a war of words with the Blood Wood's queen over the future of the elven people, a subtler conflict brews in the dark corners of Shosara. Queen Alachia is no stranger to intrigue, and refrains from sending blood elves to Shosara as spies. Instead, she relies on the Songbirds (p. 92), an organized cadre of unprotected elves who travel to Shosara to infiltrate the nation. Of course, Shosara's spies work to infiltrate the Blood Wood and learn more of its inner workings, hoping to gain an edge in the great contest over Oak Heart.

With neither nation's agents wishing to escalate the conflict into a diplomatic incident, an increasingly complex game of espionage has

developed. Agents from both sides guard sensitive knowledge while letting just enough slip to avoid tipping the other side off to their discovery. Of course, plenty of misinformation is mixed in to frustrate the foe's efforts.

While such efforts are taking place with Sereathan agents as well, the cooled relations between the two have reduced this game to a trickle of activity and contact largely involves restricted and hushed trade through the Trisrora Ranelle and the Free Companies. Whether this reduced spy activity between Shosara and Sereatha is a true drawing-down remains to be seen.

A recent development has been reports of other spies in Shosara, particularly those from the unfamiliar city-state of Iopos. Whether in the guise of merchants, immigrants, or potential mercenaries, Iopan agents have been joining guilds, assemblies, the Great Lighthouse, and even the Free Companies. They appear to be engaged in an effort to advance into positions of power and gain access to more sensitive information on Shosara.

Their efforts have been sophisticated and speak to a long-term project of infiltration. The Council of Princes has not yet determined their ultimate goal. Counter-efforts have been swift and decisive, but if even Shosarans struggle to identify all Iopan agents, Shosarans in power who have an inkling of the threat can only wonder how much Iopos is trying to dig up elsewhere.

Dissidents

Shosarans believe their greatest strength has always been their ability to adapt to change. Unfortunately for the proponents of this flexibility, there are elements in Shosara who oppose this way of life and agitate for a future that more resembles the systems in Sereatha, the Blood Wood, or even non-elves nations. Those in power believe their political enemies plant such ideas to destabilize the rule of the Council of Princes and Grand Assembly. Privately, however, news of these movements gaining momentum causes those in power to question whether their policies have caused undue discomfort.

The first dissident group is composed of highly traditional elves who decry the cosmopolitan and inclusive nature of Shosara, longing for a nation like the Wyrn Wood of old. They reject the idea of non-elves holding power in such a nation, or even living in it, except in servile roles. Given the role other Namegivers play in Shosara, such views alarm its leadership, and they



work to suppress any actions these groups may orchestrate to advance their agenda. Unfortunately, these ideas spring up most commonly among rising elven families in the nation.

While Shosara's leaders have been able to stymie their actions and let such houses fall into obscurity, there appears to be a concerted effort to bring more conservative and powerful elves to more traditional ways of thinking, and agents of the Council remain vigilant to ensure this mindset doesn't take root.

The second movement threatening Shosara's stability presents the opposite problem. It is composed of those who wish to reject Shosara's status as an elven nation entirely. These Namegivers and sympathetic elves reject the idea of elven society as superior, merging the cultural traditions of Shosara's many peoples into a distinct culture. While most believe the ranelles have guided Shosara through its darkest, most difficult times and laid the foundation for the nation's current prosperity, radicals believe the Council of Princes should be abolished entirely.

While they officially eschew any connection to the movement, the Navolok Ranelle has occasionally expressed sympathy for certain views. Rumors persist that the Navolok may nominate a non-elf as their Prince when Zinovi passes away. The other Princes are keeping an eye on the Navolok to ensure they don't become the very radicals they offer political support to.

Unknown Foes

While Shosara has not faced any organized military threats since the Scourge, the remaining evils from that dark time linger in some of the wild corners of the Gwyn Sea and lands around it. Shosarans see these creatures as corrupting the wild perfection of what they consider Jaspre's realm.

The most dangerous threat has come from the wild lands to the west. Outlying camps and settlements in the westlands have been attacked by bestial creatures resembling twisted Namegivers with animal features. Accounts by survivors note that Namegivers have been dragged off by these creatures as often as not.

Some prospecting camps have simply disappeared, with signs of battle but no bodies left behind. A few pioneers claim to have recognized former friends in the bestial features of these foes months or even years later, and dreadful stories abound regarding the dangers of ranging too far afield in search of riches.

The Council has erected fortifications and committed more mercenaries to provide protection against these enemies, but rumors spring up of attacks even on coastal settlements. Some claim these are attacks by the prodigious beasts of the wilds, embellished by stories of the western beastmen. But every few years, the savage raids seem eerily organized, and veterans of the front reckon the frontier settlements are due another one.



T. Hanson 2019



GAME INFORMATION

BLOOD ELVES AS PLAYER CHARACTERS

Faced with our own extinction at the tentacles of the Horrors, we took the necessary steps to ensure our survival. Our faith in our Queen has met with sneers and abandonment. In our hearts beat the blood of the only true elves.

—Denilior Ni'hlagh, Blood Elf Emissary to Travar

Physically, blood elves resemble their unprotected kin. They are tall and thin, averaging over six feet in height and weighing about 150 pounds. Their facial features appear symmetrical, almost uncannily so. Their skin tends to the pale end of the elven spectrum, with the *cetharel* coloring almost common amongst the nobility. They have long, pointed ears and a preternatural grace. They reach physical maturity in their early twenties and have life spans around three hundred years, though it is believed the nobility is capable of living much longer.

All blood elves undergo the Ritual of Thorns and every new elf born to a blood elf family has the Ritual performed on them at an early age. After the Ritual, the elf is covered head to toe with thorn-like barbs that erupt from the skin. The barbs cause constant pain, rip and tear the skin, and are constantly slick with blood. This grim visage, along with the natural elven grace and beauty, causes an unsettling juxtaposition often described as haunting.

The effects of the Ritual of Thorns color the rest of a blood elf's life. Some blood elves are deeply ashamed of what they see as a blight upon their race and long it to be undone. Others embrace the pain as a symbol of their superiority over other Namegivers, knowing the Ritual protects them from the foul attention of the Horrors. The stoic majority of blood elves simply accept without question the queen's ruling that the Ritual must remain a necessary part of their lives. A rare few embrace the opinion of other Namegivers, reviling themselves for what they are and despising the queen for her decision.

Blood elves tend to be a serious and practical lot. To carry their burden of endless physical and mental anguish, they have trained themselves to control their emotions to the point of appearing aloof and cold.

Game Information

Starting Attribute Values:

DEX 11, STR 10, TOU 8, PER 11, WIL 12, CHA 11

Movement Rate: 14

Karma Modifier: 4

Racial Abilities

Elven: Blood elves have Low-Light Vision (*Player's Guide*, p. 46) and the same weapon size restrictions as elves (*Player's Guide*, p. 403).

Longing: A side effect of the Ritual of Thorns is all blood elves are afflicted with Longing (Blood Wood, 3). See pg. 254 for more details on Longing Curses.

Pain Resistance: After experiencing the Ritual of Thorns, a blood elf's life is constant agony. A blood elf adjusts to this pain or goes mad from the experience. Blood elves reduce Wound penalties by -1.

Protected: The Ritual of Thorns succeeded at making blood elves resistant and unappealing to Horrors. Intelligent Horrors that feast on negative emotions will choose Namegivers other than blood elves if available. Mindless Horrors, such as gnashers, are not affected by this protection. Intelligent Horrors suffer a -2 penalty to tests that target a blood elf's Mystic or Social Defense with a Horror Power.

Thorned: The small, barbed thorns that cover their bodies are cumbersome and painful. The constantly shifting barbs tear at their flesh, reducing their number of daily Recovery tests by -1. Additionally, the thorns cause uncomfortable chafing in any type of armor that is not living. Blood elves not wearing living armor suffer the armor's Initiative Penalty to all tests (minimum -1).

AFFLICTIONS

Longing Curse

Type: Curse

Effect Step: Special (see text)

Onset Time: Instant

Interval: Chronic/1 month

Duration: Chronic

Longing is a curse that behaves similarly to a magical disease. Longing curses always impose a desire upon their victim. The desire grows in the victim until they can be close to their desire or until they lose the will to live. Longing curses can have different targets of desire. For example, an object called the Longing Ring cursed any who wore it with the desire to see the city of Parlainth. There is also Wood Longing, which is the need for a Namegiver to visit Blood Wood.

There is always a triggering event that begins a case of Longing. Triggering events indicate the target of desire and the initial Longing Step.

At the end of every month, the Longing Step increases by +1. The victim makes a Longing test against their Mystic Defense. If the test fails, the victim has pleasant dreams about the Longing's desire and begins to frequently think fondly of it. If the test succeeds, the dreams are nightmares. The victim feels the object of their desire is in danger and has a pressing need to observe the target of their Longing. This phase is known as *wishing* or *obsession*.

If the Longing's monthly test succeeds in two consecutive months, the victim moves to *consumption*. During consumption, the victim finds it difficult to sleep, eat, or drink. If the Longing test succeeds while they are in

consumption, the victim gains a cumulative -1 penalty to all Action tests until the Longing is sated. If the penalty equals the victim's Willpower Step, the victim refuses to go on and slips into a coma, perishing before the month is out.

Longing is sated if the victim is in close proximity to the target of their desire. Every full day spent with their desire removes a point of Longing penalty. If the victim has no Longing penalty, one full day with the subject of the Longing sates the curse, but this does not make the victim immune to the same Longing in the future. If the victim is not aware what triggered the Longing in the first place, they are likely to fall victim to it again and repeat this cycle.

Varju Poisoning

Type: Debilitating (Deadly)

Effect Step: 8

Onset Time: 1 Hour

Interval: 4/1 Day

Duration: Chronic or Until Healed

The gray and gritty soot found throughout the Wastes is toxic to all Namegivers. A single handful of soot touching unprotected flesh is sufficient exposure to risk varju poisoning. Repeated exposure to the substance results in more severe poisoning.

Some Namegivers appear to be immune to severe varju poisoning. These individuals have their hair turn gray and their eyes turn dusky for the rest of their lives. These immune Namegivers are few and far between and there is no known way to predict such an immunity.

FLORA OF BLOOD WOOD

The flora of Blood Wood is unique in the known world. Magical plants naturally occur in Blood Wood with surprising regularity. These plants are equal parts life-threatening and beneficial. Many throughout Barsaive would pay a high price for a properly preserved sample of a Blood Wood species. Many plants in this section use the rules for poison described in the *Gamemaster's Guide* on page 171 or traps on page 179.

Listed costs and availabilities at the end of this section are for Barsaive as a whole. A character with access to herbalists in Blood Wood may find these specimens more easily and at a lower cost.

Acorn of Oak Heart

Hundreds if not thousands of Oak Heart's acorns exist throughout the world. These acorns can be used for many different purposes and can serve as 3 pure kernels of orichalcum or 20 pure kernels of True wood for enchanting (see *Earthdawn Companion*, p. 119). While a powerful reagent on their own, many believe these acorns will play an important role in the future of the elven people, though the exact nature of this remains a mystery.

Handling these acorns can have a profound effect. Any bare skin contact with an acorn afflicts the handler with Wood Longing (longing for the Blood

Wood). The Longing begins at Step 7 for blood elves, 5 for other elves, and 3 for any other Namegiver (see p. 254 for more information on Longing).



Assassin Vine

Many parts of Blood Wood are overgrown with thick looping coils of vines. Hidden among the harmless varieties is the assassin vine, a carnivorous plant with a talent for ambush. Assassin vines look nearly identical to the coreliander vine (see p. 257). Many Namegivers who have stopped to admire coreliander blossoms have met terrible ends.

Assassin vines function as a trap, though they may also be detected with the Wilderness Survival skill or talent.

Detection: 10

Disarm: NA

Initiative: 16/D12+D8+D6

Trigger: Passing within reach of the vine.

Effect: The vine springs forth and attempts to grab its victim. The target is Blindsided if they did not detect the vine. The assassin vine makes a Step 16 Attack test against the target, dealing Step 12 damage. An extra success on this roll allows the vine to grapple its target. A grappled target automatically takes Step 12 damage every round the assassin vine maintains its hold. Separating the strangling vine from the rest of the plant causes the vine to release its grip. Treat the vine as a barrier (*Gamemaster's Guide* p. 164) that can only be damaged with a bladed weapon. It has a Death Rating of 20 and Physical Armor of 0.

Blood Ivy

Blood ivy takes its name from the dark red sap that flows from the plant when cut. The ivy's distinctive dark-purple leaves, with light green edges marked by narrow black veins, make the plant easily identifiable. It appears primarily in the most overgrown areas of Blood Wood.

Blood ivy grows slowly but inexorably, climbing over all plants in its vicinity until it covers them. It robs them of vital sunlight and chokes the life out of them. A cluster of blood ivy may cover thousands of square yards and adventurers can traverse large patches of woodland filled with dozens of skeletal, ivy-smothered trees. There is some evidence to suggest blood ivy first appeared in the Forest's Heart. Today it appears, as if from nowhere, in regions with tainted or corrupted astral space.

Blood ivy is used in potions and salves and is highly sought after in many parts of Barsaive. The vines are dense and tough; cutting a vine follows the rules for destroying a barrier (*Gamemaster's Guide* p. 164). The vine has a Physical Armor rating of 3 and a Death Rating of 15.

Coreliander

Coreliander is a flowering vine that grows throughout Blood Wood. The scent of the blossoms is light and wholesome, making it a welcome addition to any home or garden. It is easy to care for and blooms year-round in a startling variety of colors. Of special note are the pure white blossoms, of which a vine rarely produces more than one per year.

A Namegiver who eats a fresh (or properly preserved) white blossom becomes more alert and aware, gaining +1 Step to all Awareness tests for one hour. Preserving fresh coreliander requires a successful Wilderness Survival (7) test.

Death Daisies

Easily mistaken for a normal daisy, death daisies grow in small clumps amid their innocuous cousin in Blood Wood's meadows and clearings. A black tint at the base of flower's white petals provide the only certain way to identify it, but examining death daisies at such close range is dangerous.

Death daisies release their vapor in batches and disturbing a single death daisy can see flowers from dozens of yards away releasing its vapor in a lethal chain-reaction. Death daisies function as a trap but may also be detected with the Wilderness Survival skill or talent.

Death Daisy Field Trap

Death daisies react to passing living creatures by releasing a cloud of powerful narcotic vapor that seems like a lovely scent to the plant's unfortunate targets. Victims fall unconscious and the daisies release a cloud of spores that drift toward the victim's body. The spores take root and grow with frightening speed, working their roots through the body and into the ground. This gruesome process breaks down the victim's flesh into food for the new daisy colony.

Detection: 15

Disarm: N/A

Initiative: 13/D12+D10

Trigger: Passing within 4 yards of a death daisy.

Effect: The entire death daisy field exudes its vapor and spore as one, coating the entire field and up to four yards away from the furthest daisy. Immediately there is the sickly-sweet smell of the debilitating poison. 3 rounds later, the damaging spores are released. Statistics for both are listed below.

Death Daisy Vapor

Type: Debilitating

Onset Time: 1 round

Duration: 2 hours

Effect Step: 10/2D8

Interval: 5/1 round

Death Daisy Spore

Type: Damage

Onset Time: 1 round

Duration: Until healed

Effect Step: 8/2D6

Interval: 5/1 round

Death daisies can release their debilitating vapor once per hour and always follow it by releasing spores 3 rounds later. The spores cannot survive without a living host. Death daisy vapor can be collected and distilled into a liquid that, if ingested, causes the same effects.

Trailfruit

Trailfruit ferns are the result of an early experiment by blood warders to make survival easier for blood elves during and after the Scourge. The ferns grow in tall clumps, with fruit in small bunches at the base of each plant.

The oblong fruit is brown and wrinkled, about the size of an elf's clenched fist. The skin is chewy, but the flesh inside is smooth with no apparent seeds. Trailfruit tastes a bit like spiced figs with an earthy aftertaste.

Consuming fresh or properly preserved Trailfruit grants a +1 bonus to a character's next Recovery test. Preserving fresh Trailfruit requires a successful Wilderness Survival (7) test. The fruits are common ingredients in alchemy recipes to create healing aids.

Spectral Willow

The spectral willow is a rarity, a tree that exists almost entirely in astral space. Originally conceived as a defense against astral Horrors, the first spectral willows proved more delicate than expected and many were ill suited to the parts of the Wood where they were planted. Several died, leaving about a dozen trees scattered throughout Blood Wood. The grandest of these surviving spectral willows grows in Queen Alachia's private glade, carefully tended by hand-picked gardeners of great skill.

Spectral willows project a ghostly presence in the physical world. Their true beauty can only be seen on a moonlit night. Spectral willows gather and intensify moonbeams, scattering them in cascades of silver light that illuminate the forest. In astral space, they stand majestic and beautiful.

Unfortunately, the trees were ultimately considered a failure, being far too little far too late. The willows locate any astral entities within roughly 500

yards, unless the entity is using a specific ability to remain hidden (e.g. Astral Camouflage), when it uses Step 22 to detect the entity. Spectral willows do not detect entities which also have a presence in the physical world; it would detect a spirit in astral space, but not one that has manifested.

Upon detecting an astral entity, the tree alerts all Blood Warders and wardens within 10 miles through a tingling sensation which makes them feel like they're being watched. In practice, this is more of an annoyance than useful as spectral willows respond equally to a weak wood spirit as they do a dangerous Horror. Within 100 yards of the tree, detected entities suffer a -5 penalty to Mystic Defense as the branches stretch out to wrap the entity in filaments of light.

Each tree is unique; some have different ranges for their effects, particularly larger trees. There are rumors of wild spectral willows in Blood Wood with different effects, particularly those grown after the reNaming. The largest tree doesn't seem to notify anyone of astral entities or show any special effects, though only Queen Alachia is likely to know the truth behind this.

Tranceweed

Many varieties of tranceweed grow in Blood Wood, all recognizable by the small tassels at the top of their stalks, which contain seeds that scatter in a strong wind. Burning the seeds produces a hallucinogenic smoke said to inspire prophetic visions to those who inhale it.

Tranceweed Smoke

Type: Debilitating

Effect Step: 6/D10

Onset Time: 1 minute

Interval: 6/10 minutes

Duration: 1 hour

Inhaling the smoke causes warmth throughout the body and the hallucinations can make it difficult to determine the difference between the visions and reality. Generally, this feeling is pleasant if unhelpful. As a side effect of inhaling tranceweed, as long as the subject is afflicted he gains +1 Astral Sight rank (as described in the *Player's Guide* p. 129), even if they did not previously have that talent.

Flora Related Goods Table

<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Availability</i>
Blood Ivy	20	5	Unusual
Preserved Coreliander	100	1	Rare
Preserved Trailfruit	50	1	Unusual
Dried Tranceweed	50	1	Rare

CREATURES

Masks of Shosara

Shosara is a land deeply suffused with elemental magic. This is commonly seen in its astral auras but is also expressed in its weather and wildlife. A significant amount of Shosara's fauna develop strange elemental traits or other variations that differentiate them from "normal" animals. This not only increases the variety of animal life in the region, but also makes it significantly more dangerous, another reason explorers should be armed and ready when striking out into the Shosaran wilderness.

Gamemasters who want to explore this phenomenon in more detail and provide unique threats to players adventuring in Shosara are encouraged to use the rules for Masks starting on page 329 in the *Earthdawn Companion*. These provide templates for enhancing existing creatures with new traits and abilities around a theme and allow for flexibility in tailoring challenges to any given group.

Beetle, Kaer

Kaer beetles are dwarf-sized with grayish coloring and are unusually strong for their size. They live underground or in other regions sheltered from the elements, favoring kaers or domed citadels. They venture out into the open only to hunt and scavenge. They are particularly common in abandoned kaers in the Wastes, living in small groups of approximately 20 individuals.

The beetle produces an acidic fluid to spit at prey from a short distance. These creatures are also strong flyers and capable of lifting a human-sized creature while flying with little difficulty. They subsist primarily on carrion but are known to attack other creatures for meat, including small groups of Namegivers.

Pack tactics, harassment, and subterfuge are their preferred methods to bring down much stronger foes. A colony



on the hunt prefers to circle their intended prey at a distance. A small group then closes in, using their venomous spit and flight to enrage and lure their prey into open terrain. At this point, another beetle swoops down, grabbing the victim from behind and lifting them into the air. Shortly after, the poor soul is dropped from a great height and the whole colony feasts on the remains.

Challenge: Novice (Fourth Circle)

DEX: 7	Initiative: 8	Unconsciousness: 38
STR: 10	Physical Defense: 12	Death Rating: 44
TOU: 6	Mystic Defense: 9	Wound Threshold: 9
PER: 6	Social Defense: 10	Knockdown: 16
WIL: 6	Physical Armor: 6	Recovery Tests: 2
CHA: 5	Mystic Armor: 4	

Movement: 10 (Flying 18)

Actions: 1; Bite: 10 (14), Claws ×2: 12 (10)

Powers:

Creature Power (10, Spit Acid, Standard)

Distract (10): As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 139.

Spit Acid (12): The kaer beetle can spit acid at targets within 10 yards. It makes a Creature Power test against the target's Physical Defense. If successful, the target takes Step 12 Damage, reduced by Physical Armor.

Surprise Strike (5): As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 172.

Special Maneuvers:

Armor Cutter (Kaer Beetle, Spit Acid): The kaer beetle may spend additional successes to reduce the target's Physical Armor by 1 per success. This may not destroy thread armor.

Back Attack (Kaer Beetle, Claws): The kaer beetle may spend two additional successes from an Attack test to land on the opponent's back. The opponent must succeed at a Knockdown test with a difficulty equal to the Attack test or be knocked down.

Clip the Wing (Opponent)

Grab and Takeoff (Kaer Beetle, Claws): The kaer beetle may spend an additional success on an Attack test to grapple the target and use any remaining movement to fly away.

Pry Loose (Opponent, Close Combat)

Firbruid

Firbruid is a Sperethiel word that means "beastmen" or "wildmen." It is the name given by elven colonists to the animalistic raiders from the northern lands. Firbruid are a diverse group of humanoids whose features vary but all have a head and hide closely resembling a wild animal. Brutal and intelligent, their raiding parties are capable of constructing ships and understand battle tactics. They wield chopping and carving weapons and often carry shields made from the bones and hides of victims. Three examples are given below but others exist.

Bearform Firbruid

Bearforms are a rare but important breed of firbruid. They are the largest and most physically powerful of their kind, the size of a large troll. Their thick fur-covered hides can be any natural color, and they will wear scavenged armor if available. Unlike most firbruid, bearforms rarely wield weapons, preferring to rely on their fearsome bite and monstrous claws.

They naturally fall into leadership roles and have almost Namegiver-level intelligence on the field. They are less savage than other firbruid and lead from the rear, only entering the fray after identifying their strongest opponents. The most brutally efficient raids on Namegiver settlements are those lead by bearform firbruid.

Challenge: Journeyman (Sixth Circle)

DEX: 6	Initiative: 8	Unconsciousness: 57
STR: 9	Physical Defense: 15	Death Rating: 66
TOU: 9	Mystic Defense: 14	Wound Threshold: 13
PER: 6	Social Defense: 12	Knockdown: 11
WIL: 6	Physical Armor: 7	Recovery Tests: 3
CHA: 5	Mystic Armor: 3	

Movement: 12

Actions: 2; Bite: 15 (20), Claws: 17 (18)

Powers:

Battle Bellow (13): As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 130.

Enhanced Sense [Smell] (4)

Fury (2)

Special Maneuvers:

Enrage (Opponent)

Grab and Bite (Bearform Firbruid, Claws)

Provoke (Opponent, Close Combat)

Pry Loose (Opponent, Close Combat)

Boarform Firbruid

Boarform firbruid have the head, tusks, and thick hide of a wild boar. They are larger than many other firbruid, over seven feet tall with a muscular, heavy frame. They are fearsome opponents and embrace their bestial nature, succumbing to bloodthirsty rages in battle.

Their peers view the boarform's bloodthirst and unpredictable ferocity with awe. This also isolates them even amongst other firbruid as their unpredictable nature does not bode well for those near whether raiding a settlement or sharing a campfire.

Challenge: Journeyman (Fifth Circle)

DEX: 6	Initiative: 8	Unconsciousness: 49
STR: 7	Physical Defense: 13	Death Rating: 57
TOU: 8	Mystic Defense: 12	Wound Threshold: 12

PER: 4 Social Defense: 10 Knockdown: 9
 WIL: 6 Physical Armor: 7 Recovery Tests: 3
 CHA: 4 Mystic Armor: 2

Movement: 14

Actions: 2; Axe: 16 (16), Gore: 14 (18)

Powers:

Charge (10)

Enhanced Sense [Smell] (4)

Fury (4)

Special Maneuvers:

Enrage (Opponent)

Goring Charge (Boarform Firbruid, Charge): The boarform firbruid may spend an additional success on an Attack test to cause a Knockdown test against the target. The Difficulty Number is the Attack test result.

Provoke (Opponent, Close Combat)

Deerform Firbruid

Deerforms are the most numerous firbruid and make up the majority of raiding parties. They are ork-sized humanoids covered in a thick furry hide often tattooed with terrifying images and deer-like features and antlers.

Deerform firbruid are more social than other firbruid, though they stick to their own kind. They form small battlegroups in raiding parties, working together to slaughter their enemies. Deerforms take great pride in the size and shape of their antlers, which are used as a measure of status among their own kind. Before raids they decorate their antlers with blood and viscera to strike fear in the hearts of their victims.

Challenge: Novice (Fourth Circle)

DEX: 7 Initiative: 9 Unconsciousness: 38
 STR: 6 Physical Defense: 14 Death Rating: 44
 TOU: 6 Mystic Defense: 11 Wound Threshold: 9
 PER: 5 Social Defense: 11 Knockdown: 8
 WIL: 5 Physical Armor: 3 Recovery Tests: 2
 CHA: 4 Mystic Armor: 2

Movement: 16

Actions: 1; Antlers: 12 (15), Axe: 13 (14)

Powers:

Charge (5)

Enhanced Sense [Hearing] (2)

Enhanced Sense [Smell] (2)

Teamwork: Opponents are Harried by one less attacker if at least one other attacker has this power.

Special Maneuvers:

Goring Charge (Deerform Firbruid, Charge): The deerform firbruid may

spend an additional success on an Attack test to cause a Knockdown test against the target. The Difficulty Number is the Attack test result.

Kulomat

Kulomats are creatures only found in the deepest parts of the Western Fens. While the uninitiated might confuse this animalistic creature with the raiding firbruid, those with knowledge of the area know the truth is far worse. These creatures are difficult for outsiders to comprehend and it is debatable whether they understand their own nature.

They change their form according to their needs, though the forms they take bear little resemblance to any naturally occurring creatures. Their origins are unknown and attempts to explain this are as strange as the creature itself. Most theories relate to powerful shapeshifting Namegivers in a time long forgotten, cursed by a Horror or Passion. Those who have observed these creatures in secret tell of unusual, complex social interactions, burial rituals, and primitive art items they appear to worship.

They are not naturally aggressive, but they are carnivorous. Kulomats gather in small family groups and spend much of their time in humanoid form with them. When hunting, they assume a bestial, four-legged form. When angered or threatened, they draw on their full power and assume their war form. The transformation causes them great pain, which just serves to enrage them further in the short term but limits it long term.

Humanoid Form

Kulomats have the torso of a full-grown troll and elongated hairy arms in this form. Their bodies are covered in hair that ranges from a light golden brown to a reddish hue. Their heads are ork-like with pronounced lower canines and long beards. They can walk upright on their short, powerful legs but most use their ape-like arms to assist them in getting around.

Challenge: Novice (Second Circle)

DEX: 6	Initiative: 6	Unconsciousness: 62
STR: 7	Physical Defense: 10	Death Rating: 71
TOU: 7	Mystic Defense: 11	Wound Threshold: 13
PER: 4	Social Defense: 9	Knockdown: 9
WIL: 6	Physical Armor: 0	Recovery Tests: 3
CHA: 4	Mystic Armor: 4	

Movement: 12 (Climbing 12)

Actions: 1; Unarmed: 11 (9)

Powers:

Bestial Form (Standard): The kulomat takes its wolf-like form.

Gestalt Form (Standard): When it is a matter of life or death, the kulomat takes on their gestalt form. The transformation is painful, and they suffer a Wound every 2 minutes the form is maintained.

Great Leap (6)

Resist Pain (2)

Stealthy Stride (11): As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 170.

Special Maneuvers:

Overpower (Humanoid Form Kulomat, Close Combat): The kulomat may spend two additional successes on an Attack test to force the target to make a Knockdown test against a Difficulty Number equal to the Attack test result. If the test fails, the target is knocked down and knocked back a number of yards equal to the total number of successes on the Attack test.

Bestial Form

Kulomats most resemble large wolves in this form, but without a tail and their body is covered in hair rather than fur. Their lower canines elongate and thicken into tusks and their spinal bones form protrusions under their skin.

Challenge: Journeyman (Fifth Circle)

DEX: 8	Initiative: 10	Unconsciousness: 62
STR: 7	Physical Defense: 15	Death Rating: 71
TOU: 7	Mystic Defense: 12	Wound Threshold: 13
PER: 6	Social Defense: 10	Knockdown: 11
WIL: 5	Physical Armor: 5	Recovery Tests: 3
CHA: 4	Mystic Armor: 4	

Movement: 16

Actions: 2; Bite: 16 (14)

Powers:

Ambush (10)

Awareness (12)

Battle Shout (12): As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 131.

Enhanced Sense [Hearing] (2)

Enhanced Sense [Smell] (2)

Gestalt Form (Standard): When it is a matter of life or death, the kulomat takes on their gestalt form. The transformation is painful, and they suffer a Wound every 2 minutes the form is maintained.

Humanoid Form (Standard): The kulomat reverts to its humanoid form. This happens automatically when unconscious or dead.

Stealthy Stride (12): As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 170.

Special Maneuvers:

Hamstring (Bestial Form Kulomat, Bite)

Gestalt Form

This gestalt form is a truly terrifying sight: standing 12 feet high with the head and tusks of their bestial form and the long arms and torso of their humanoid form. Spikes erupt from their spine, piercing their skin and covering their back in blood.

Challenge: Journeyman (Seventh Circle)

DEX: 8	Initiative: 10	Unconsciousness: 62
STR: 9	Physical Defense: 15	Death Rating: 71
TOU: 9	Mystic Defense: 16	Wound Threshold: 13
PER: 4	Social Defense: 14	Knockdown: 11
WIL: 6	Physical Armor: 7	Recovery Tests: 3
CHA: 6	Mystic Armor: 4	

Movement: 14**Actions:** 3; Bite: 16 (18), Unarmed: 18 (16)**Powers:***Bestial Form (Standard):* The kulomat takes its wolf-like form.*Battle Shout (15):* As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 131.*Enhanced Sense [Hearing] (2)**Enhanced Sense [Smell] (2)**Fury (6)**Humanoid Form (Standard):* The kulomat reverts to its humanoid form.

This happens automatically when unconscious or dead.

Special Maneuvers:*Enrage (Opponent)**Grab and Bite (Gestalt Form Kulomat, Unarmed)**Provoke (Opponent, Close Combat)**Pry Loose (Opponent, Close Combat)***Liblikas**

Believed to originate from a docile species of ape native to the Roheline Wood, the astral taint of the Wastes twisted these animals into dangerous predators. Liblikas resemble hairless gorillas with oversized ears and hands. They spend most of their time underground in forgotten tunnels and the lack of exposure to sunlight turned their skin pale, making them extremely sensitive to sunlight.

They nest in groups of 10 to 30 and patrol their territory in packs of four to six. Liblikas are intelligent and known to lure unsuspecting prey into ambushes. They use surprise and confusion to incapacitate their prey and drag them back to the nest.

Liblikas are suitable as animal companions.

Challenge: Novice (Fourth Circle)

DEX: 8	Initiative: 9	Unconsciousness: 44
STR: 11	Physical Defense: 12	Death Rating: 52
TOU: 8	Mystic Defense: 11	Wound Threshold: 12
PER: 7	Social Defense: 11	Knockdown: 13
WIL: 6	Physical Armor: 4	Recovery Tests: 3
CHA: 6	Mystic Armor: 3	

Movement: 12 (Climbing 12)**Actions:** 1; Unarmed: 13 (14)

Powers:*Ambush* (5)*Enhanced Sense [Hearing]* (2),*Teamwork*: Opponents are Harried by one less attacker if at least one other attacker has this power.*Tracking* (11)*Vulnerability to Sunlight*: When exposed to direct sunlight, all attacks against the liblikas ignore any protection provided by armor.*Willful* (2)**Special Maneuvers:***Overpower (Liblikas, Close Combat)*: The liblikas may spend two additional success on an Attack test to force the target to make a Knockdown test against a Difficulty Number equal to the Attack test result. If the test fails, the target is knocked down and knocked back a number of yards equal to the total number of success on the Attack test.**Monkey, Blood**

Blood monkeys are a species of monkey found in Blood Wood, though there are rumors of them appearing elsewhere. These small simians have a thick coat of burgundy fur, but otherwise resemble more common varieties of Barsaivian monkey. A full-grown male has a body about two feet in length, double that when you include their prehensile tail.

While they may resemble other monkeys, they are significantly more vicious. Their sharp claws, needle-sharp teeth, and lightning-fast reflexes can make even a single blood monkey dangerous for an unprepared Namegiver. Making matters worse, blood monkeys group together in territorial bands up to one hundred strong. The strongest males ambush any creatures unfortunate enough to wander into their domain. Up to fifteen blood monkeys have been seen ambushing caravans in unison.

Blood monkeys prefer to leap onto their foe from above. Should their initial ambush prove successful, they let out a screech of triumph to attract others from their band. If the ambush fails, blood monkeys quickly give up the fight. They flee at top speed and hide in the underbrush, likely planning their next attack.

Blood monkeys are suitable as animal companions.

Challenge: Novice (Fourth Circle)

DEX: 8	Initiative: 10	Unconsciousness: 35
STR: 5	Physical Defense: 12	Death Rating: 40
TOU: 5	Mystic Defense: 10	Wound Threshold: 7
PER: 5	Social Defense: 9	Knockdown: 7
WIL: 6	Physical Armor: 3	Recovery Tests: 2
CHA: 3	Mystic Armor: 6	

Movement: 12 (Climbing 14)**Actions:** 2; Unarmed: 14 (12)

Powers:

Ambush (10)

Awareness (10): As the skill, *Player's Guide*, p. 129.

Enhanced Senses [Smell] (2)

Fury (4)

Great Leap (14)

Willful (2)

Special Maneuvers:

Enrage (Opponent)

Provoke (Opponent, Close Combat)

Loot: Pelt worth 100 silver pieces (worth Legend Points).

Sprite, Song

These small, delicate, beautiful creatures flit around on sparkling wings, seemingly spun of gossamer thread. Though they resemble windlings, song sprites rarely exceed six inches in height. They are a variety of will o' the wisp (*Gamemaster's Guide*, p. 353) that produce sound rather than light. By modulating the sounds they produce, these creatures can create harmonious, ethereal melodies as they fly through Blood Wood. Many song sprites are harmless, and visitors may see a few flitting around Queen Alachia's palace. Like will o' the wisps, some song sprites were driven mad by the Scourge and have since used their songs to sow death and corruption.

Song sprites are attracted to small, shiny objects such as gems and jewelry. Their small size prohibits them from carrying much, but they often take any small items their victims were carrying (up to half a pound in weight). Song sprites usually live in small groves, and each sprite adorns its nest with items it has collected.

Challenge: Novice (Third Circle)

DEX: 8 Initiative: 10 Unconsciousness: 21

STR: 1 Physical Defense: 12 Death Rating: 23

TOU: 2 Mystic Defense: 12 Wound Threshold: 3

PER: 6 Social Defense: 14 Knockdown: 3

WIL: 4 Physical Armor: 0 Recovery Tests: 1

CHA: 8 Mystic Armor: 5

Movement: 16 (Flying)

Actions: 1; Shock: 10 (4)

Powers:

Entrancing Song (12, *Standard*): A song sprite's melody can be heard up to 40 yards away, entrancing Namegivers and luring them toward the music. They use their songs to draw victims into deadly situations (natural hazards, vicious creatures, etc.). Each additional song sprite using *Entrancing Song* adds +1 to the Step. The lead sprite makes an *Entrancing Song* test against the target's Social Defense. If successful, the target moves toward the lead song sprite, heedless of nearby dangers. Each round the target may make a

Willpower test against the Entrancing Song test Step. If successful, they are no longer entranced and gain a +5 bonus to Social Defense when targeted by Entrancing Song and Willpower tests to resist Entrancing Song for the rest of the day.

Special Maneuvers:

Clip the Wing (Opponent)

Tarrack

These creatures are large, flightless birds with vicious dispositions. Tarracks are over eight feet tall and weigh over 500 pounds with long necks and stubby wings. Their coloration is mottled with black, browns, and white, with slashes of red on their heads and the edges of their wings. Between their speed, scythe-like talons, and sharp beaks, tarracks are terrifying for anything that encounters a group of them on the plains. In Barsaive, their population has been in steady decline for many reasons, including the popularity of their delicious eggs. They can still be found in abundance in the Gwydenro, however, and are something of a status symbol amongst the nobles of the region.

Once raised in the wild, it is virtually impossible to turn a tarrack into a suitable companion outside of powerful magic. Even those raised from an egg are considered “challenging” by experienced animal handlers. Despite this, they are popular with ork scorchers overly fond of hit and run tactics and rumors of an elven cavalry unit in Sereatha riding them are gaining credence.

Tarracks are suitable as mounts for elves, humans, orks, and t’skrang, and as animal companions.

Challenge: Novice (Third Circle)

DEX: 8	Initiative: 12	Unconsciousness: 36
STR: 8	Physical Defense: 11	Death Rating: 43
TOU: 7	Mystic Defense: 9	Wound Threshold: 10
PER: 6	Social Defense: 11	Knockdown: 10
WIL: 6	Physical Armor: 2	Recovery Tests: 2
CHA: 6	Mystic Armor: 3	

Movement: 22

Actions: 1; Bite: 12 (16), Claws ×2: 14 (14)

Powers:

Charge (5)

Enhanced Sense [Hearing] (2)

Enhanced Sense [Sight] (2)

Great Leap (12)

Rushing Attack: The tarrack may split its movement (*Player’s Guide*, p. 386) without penalty, and does not spend Strain.

Willful (2)

Special Maneuvers:

Pounce (Tarrack)

Provoke (Opponent, Close Combat)

Vila

Vilas are sea creatures only known to exist in the Gwyn Sea. They dwell in hidden caves and live almost all their lives in water but require air to breathe. They appear as elves or humans with a pale blue tint to their skin resembling someone suffering from hypothermia, typically submerged in the water up to their shoulders. Upon closer inspection in direct sunlight, their skin is very fine scales. Vilas are women in most stories, though men are not unheard of.

They sing mournful tunes from the water that alternate between plaintive wails and plodding dirges of hopelessness. Typically, sailors hear these songs long before noticing the figure that appears to have fallen overboard. It is said the song can drive a sailor mad.

Since vilas cannot speak any known language and their mouths hide sharp and deadly teeth, they act badly wounded and unable to communicate when pulled aboard a ship. Shivering and tearful, they attempt to persuade their rescuers to give them comfort. If given a moment alone with a crewmember, or they feel they have an appropriate opportunity, they attack, attempting to throw the victim overboard. They follow victims overboard and drag them below the waves, drowning them to eat at their leisure.

Sailors on the Gwyn Sea are cautious when rescuing those adrift and requests to inspect someone's teeth are not uncommon due to these creatures.

Challenge: Journeyman (Sixth Circle)

DEX: 8	Initiative: 10	Unconsciousness: 51
STR: 7	Physical Defense: 16	Death Rating: 58
TOU: 7	Mystic Defense: 13	Wound Threshold: 10
PER: 4	Social Defense: 15	Knockdown: 9
WIL: 5	Physical Armor: 2	Recovery Tests: 2
CHA: 8	Mystic Armor: 3	

Movement: 12 (Swimming 16)

Actions: 3; Unarmed: 18 (14), Bite: 15 (17)

Powers:

Ambush (10)

Dirge of Longing (14, Standard): If outnumbered or distant from foes, the vila sings its Dirge of Longing and targets a single creature within earshot. If successful, the target is affected with Longing (Vila, 2) which takes effect immediately with an interval of 1 minute. Additional successes increase the Longing Step by +1. See Longing, p. 254 for more information.

Semi-Aquatic: Vilas can hold their breath for 30 minutes before drowning.

Stealthy Stride (15): As the skill, Player's Guide, p. 170.

Special Maneuvers:

Death Roll (Vila, Unarmed): The vila may spend two additional successes from an Attack test to inflict Grab and Bite and force it and its opponent to make a Strength test. If the vila succeeds, it drags its prey below the water where it rolls the victim against the bottom, causing Step 7 damage; no armor

protects against this damage. This damage is in addition to continuing damage from the vila's bite.

Grab and Bite (Vila, Unarmed)

Overpower (Vila, Close Combat): The vila may spend two additional success on an Attack test to force the target to make a Knockdown test against a Difficulty Number equal to the Attack test result. If the test fails, the target is knocked down and knocked back a number of yards equal to the total number of successes on the Attack test.

Pry Loose (Opponent, Close Combat)

Stifle (Opponent): A character may spend two additional successes on an attack to prevent a vila from using Dirge of Longing until the end of the next round. If the damage causes a Wound, the vila may not use Dirge of Longing until the Wound is healed.

Whirlclaw



Whirlclaws are small, exceptionally quick and nimble bipeds who live in shallow burrows along the forest's edge and other thinly wooded parts of Blood Wood. The shaggy creatures rarely exceed two feet in height, but possess long, spindly arms that end in sharp, wickedly curved claws. Whirlclaws rely on speed and multiple claw attacks to overcome their prey, often leaping from target to target to cause chaos and confusion.

Challenge: Novice (Third Circle)

DEX: 9	Initiative: 13	Unconsciousness: 30
STR: 4	Physical Defense: 13	Death Rating: 35
TOU: 5	Mystic Defense: 10	Wound Threshold: 7
PER: 5	Social Defense: 10	Knockdown: 6
WIL: 4	Physical Armor: 3	Recovery Tests: 2
CHA: 4	Mystic Armor: 4	

Movement: 14 (Climbing 8)

Actions: 2; Claws ×2: 14 (8)

Powers:

Enhanced Sense [Smell] (2)

Flashing Claws (5): The whirlclaw gains +5 to Attack tests against opponents with a lower Initiative result.

Great Leap (13)

Special Maneuvers:

Darting Claws (Whirlclaw, Claws): The whirlclaw may spend two additional successes on an Attack test to make an additional attack against

their opponent. This maneuver may only be used twice per round.

Dazed (Opponent): An opponent may spend an additional success on an Attack test to prevent the whirlclaw from using Darting Claws on its next turn.

MAGICAL TREASURE



Arrows of the Thundercloud

Maximum Threads: 2 **Mystic Defense:** 14

Tier: Journeyman (Warden)

Arrows of the Thundercloud are actually magical quivers for elven warbow arrows. The quivers are made of dark blue leather edged in silver. Unlike standard quivers, they only hold (and empower) eight arrows at a time. They were common in Wyrms Wood before the Scourge and are still issued to the Swords of Justice in Sereatha.

If the owner does not have a thread woven to the quiver, it is nothing more than a small but ornate quiver. Any arrows within appear to be standard elven warbow arrows. Once a thread is woven, arrows stored in the quiver gradually change. The fletching turns pure white and the heads into crystal. From time to time, streaks of silvery light flare within the tips.

Some quivers are more powerful than others. These are Warden tier and have eight ranks instead of the six ranks Journeyman quivers possess.

Thread Rank One

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the Name of the quiver.

Effect: 24 hours after being placed in the quiver, a standard elven warbow arrow transforms into an **Arrow of the Thundercloud** and the owner gains +1 to Attack tests when they fire it.

Thread Rank Two

Effect: The owner gains +1 to Damage tests made with an Arrow of the Thundercloud.

Thread Rank Three

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the Name of the quiver's creator.

Effect: The owner gains +2 to Attack tests made with an Arrow of the Thundercloud.

Thread Rank Four

Effect: The owner gains +2 to Damage tests made with an Arrow of the Thundercloud.

Thread Rank Five

Key Knowledge: The owner must know where the True air used to create the quiver was harvested.

Effect: The owner gains the *Thunderclap* special maneuver:

Thunderclap (Adept, Arrow of the Thundercloud): The adept can spend additional successes on an Attack test to inflict a -1 penalty per success to all of the target's Action tests for Thread Rank rounds

Thread Rank Six

Effect: The owner gains +3 to Attack tests made with an Arrow of the Thundercloud.

Thread Rank Seven

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn where the silver and animal leather making up the quiver came from.

Deed: The owner must use silver from the same source and leather from the same kind of animal to enhance the quiver in some way, then use one kernel of True air from the same source as the original True air in a ritual to re-enchant the quiver.

Effect: The owner gains the *Lightning Bolt* special maneuver:

Lightning Bolt (Adept, Arrow of the Thundercloud): Once per round for 2 Strain, the owner can spend two additional successes on an Attack test to turn the arrow into a lightning bolt, destroying it, and attacking an additional target within 20 yards of the initial target. This is resolved as a separate attack with its own Attack and Damage tests.

Thread Rank Eight

Effect: *Thunderclap* now affects all adjacent targets as well.

Bloodthorn Shield

Maximum Threads: 2 **Mystic Defense:** 12

Tier: Journeyman

This ferndask shield is made from seeds of the Iothan tree which grows deep in the heart of Blood Wood. It is deep brown with dark violet leaves and small crimson flowers blossom around the rim when a thread is attached. Blood drips from the stems for a few moments when these are picked until a new flower grows to replace it.

These shields are boons granted by the Court in Blood Wood to those of distinguished military service. Unlike typical ferndask shields, the shield does not need to be watered. Instead, the owner places a single drop of Namegiver blood in the center of the shield once a week. Otherwise the enchantment goes dormant. If the owner has a thread woven to the shield, the blood is not required.

Thread Rank One**Key Knowledge:** The owner must learn the shield's Name.**Effect:** The owner gains +1 Physical Defense.**Thread Rank Two****Effect:** The owner gains +1 Mystic Defense.**Thread Rank Three****Key Knowledge:** The owner must learn the Name of the first owner.**Effect:** The owner gains the *Blood Fortify* ability. On command, the shield sprouts painful thorns into the wielder's forearm, drawing blood. This blood is absorbed by the shield, causing the plants upon it to engorge and emit a faint scarlet light. As a Simple action for 2 Strain, the owner gains +1 to Physical and Mystic Defense until the end of the next round. This is in addition to the bonuses normally provided by the shield.**Thread Rank Four****Effect:** The owner gains +2 Physical Defense.**Thread Rank Five****Key Knowledge:** The owner must learn the Name of the shield's creator.**Effect:** The owner gains +2 Mystic Defense.**Thread Rank Six****Effect:** *Blood Fortify* now provides +2 Physical and Mystic Defense.**Wurm Wood Blade****Maximum Threads:** 2 **Mystic Defense:** 12**Tier:** Journeyman (Warden)

These elegant broadswords are rumored to originate in Wurm Wood, but no records exist of who made them. The True wood incorporated into the blade gives it a green tint, and the hilt is made of dark wood inlaid with spiral motifs, but hard as steel. The blades were thought incredibly rare but are increasingly appearing among those who wish to purify Blood Wood, most notably the Seekers of the Heart.

Those who know of these weapons believe the originals were created with wood from Oak Heart, and the creation of Blood Wood affected them due to this connection, changing their pattern. If such swords exist, they are Warden tier instead of Journeyman, with a Mystic Defense of 15.

Thread Rank One

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the sword's Name.

Effect: The sword is Damage Step 7.

Thread Rank Two

Effect: The owner gains +1 to Initiative tests when wielding the sword.

Thread Rank Three

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the Name of the sword's creator.

Effect: The sword is Damage Step 8.

Thread Rank Four

Effect: The owner gains +1 to Attack tests with the sword.

Thread Rank Five

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn where the wood and True wood used to craft the sword were harvested.

Effect: The owner gains the *Woodland Sentinel* ability. As a Standard action for 2 Strain, the owner gains a connection to a natural, wooded location for up to Thread Rank minutes. The owner gains a +3 bonus to tests related to finding things in the affected location.

Thread Rank Six

Effect: The sword is Damage Step 9.

Thread Rank Seven

Deed: The owner must go to the trees that provided the wood and True wood to craft the sword and pledge to either protect or heal Blood Wood.

Effect: If the owner pledged to protect Blood Wood, the blade turns a ruddy hue and gains the *Thirsty Thorns* ability. As a Simple action for 2 Strain, thorns erupt from the blade for Thread Rank rounds. The next time the blade causes a Wound during this time, the target loses a Recovery test and the owner makes a Recovery test as though they were the target with all appropriate bonuses and penalties (e.g. booster potions and Wounds). If the target does not have any Recovery Tests, they take an additional Wound and the owner still makes a Recovery test as described.

If the owner pledged to heal Blood Wood, the sword gains the *Forest's Life* ability. As a Standard action, the owner can spend a Recovery test to heal themselves or an adjacent target. The Recovery test uses the owner's Step and gains a bonus equal to the Thread Rank, in addition to all appropriate bonuses and penalties from the owner (e.g. booster potions and Wounds). The owner may target the earth with this ability, affecting it as if with the Elementalist spells Purify Earth (*Player's Guide*, p. 273) and Purify Water (*Player's Guide*, p. 274) in a Thread Rank × 10 yard radius, using the owner's PER + Thread Rank to make the test. *Forest's Life* can be used once per day.

Thread Rank Eight

Effect: If the owner pledged to protect Blood Wood, the sword is Damage Step 10 and gains +2 to Attack tests with the sword. If the owner pledged to heal Blood Wood, they gain +1 Recovery test and +2 to Initiative tests when wielding the sword.

Crimson Mail

Maximum Threads: 1 **Mystic Defense:** 13

Tier: Warden

This ring mail is made of black metal and deep crimson hell hound leather. It is infused with True fire and repels dirt. It keeps the wearer comfortable even at extreme temperatures.

They are often gifted to long-standing Knights of the Crimson Spire and designed to aid the owner's transition from the Path of the Warrior to the Path of the Sage. Without a thread attached, the armor is standard ring mail with Mystic Armor 1. An adept may only weave a thread to the armor if they follow the Path of the Warrior.

Thread Rank One

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the armor's Name.

Deed: The owner must be on the Path of the Warrior.

Effect: The armor is Mystic Armor 2.

Thread Rank Two

Effect: The armor is Physical Armor 7

Thread Rank Three

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the first owner's Name.

Effect: The owner gains the *Crimson Resistance* ability. As a Free action for 1 Strain, the owner may gain +3 Physical and Mystic Armor against a single cold-based attack

Thread Rank Four

Effect: The owner gains +1 Wood Skin rank.

Thread Rank Five

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the Name of the armor's creator.

Effect: The armor is Mystic Armor 3.

Thread Rank Six

Effect: The owner gains +1 Fireblood rank.

Thread Rank Seven

Deed: The owner must commit to the Path of the Sage.

Effect: The owner gains +2 Wood Skin ranks and the armor is Physical Armor 8.

Thread Rank Eight

Effect: The owner gains +2 Fireblood ranks and the armor is Mystic Armor 4.

Stormward Staff

Maximum Threads: 2 **Mystic Defense:** 12

Tier: Journeyman

The Free Companies created this staff to help their Elementalists endure Shosara's fierce and mercurial weather. Stormward staves are frequently carried on Shosaran expeditions into the wild and many were lost over the centuries; some quite distant from the isle where they were crafted.

The staves are made from driftwood infused with True water harvested from the Gwyn Sea. The weathered wood takes on a variety of shapes but is typically five to six feet long with a small crook at one end and always appears waterlogged as though just plucked from the ocean.

Thread Rank One

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the staff's Name.

Effect: The owner gains the *Storm Shelter* ability. As a Sustained action (1 minute) for 2 Strain, the staff turns into a willow tree. One Namegiver can take cover under the tree for each thread rank. Those taking cover under the tree gain a bonus to all tests to resist the natural effects of weather equal to the thread rank. This effect can be used once per day, lasts up to 24 hours, and can be canceled at any time by the owner

Thread Rank Two

Effect: The owner gains +1 Spellcasting rank.

Thread Rank Three

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn the Name of the staff's creator.

Effect: The owner gains +1 to Thread Weaving tests.

Thread Rank Four

Effect: The staff holds a Standard Matrix of rank equal to the Thread rank.

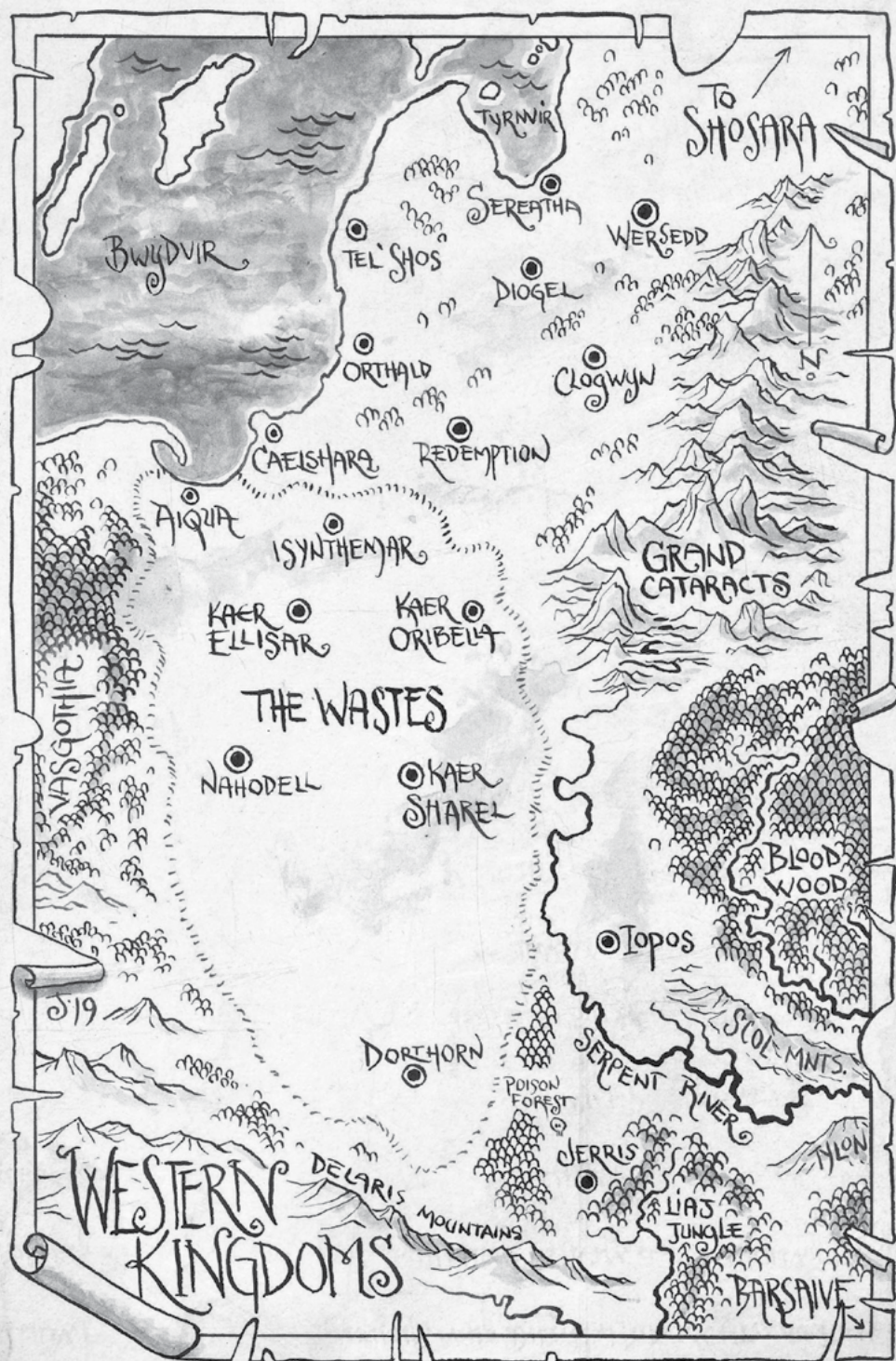
Thread Rank Five

Key Knowledge: The owner must learn where the driftwood was harvested to create the staff.

Effect: The owner gains +2 Spellcasting ranks.

Thread Rank Six

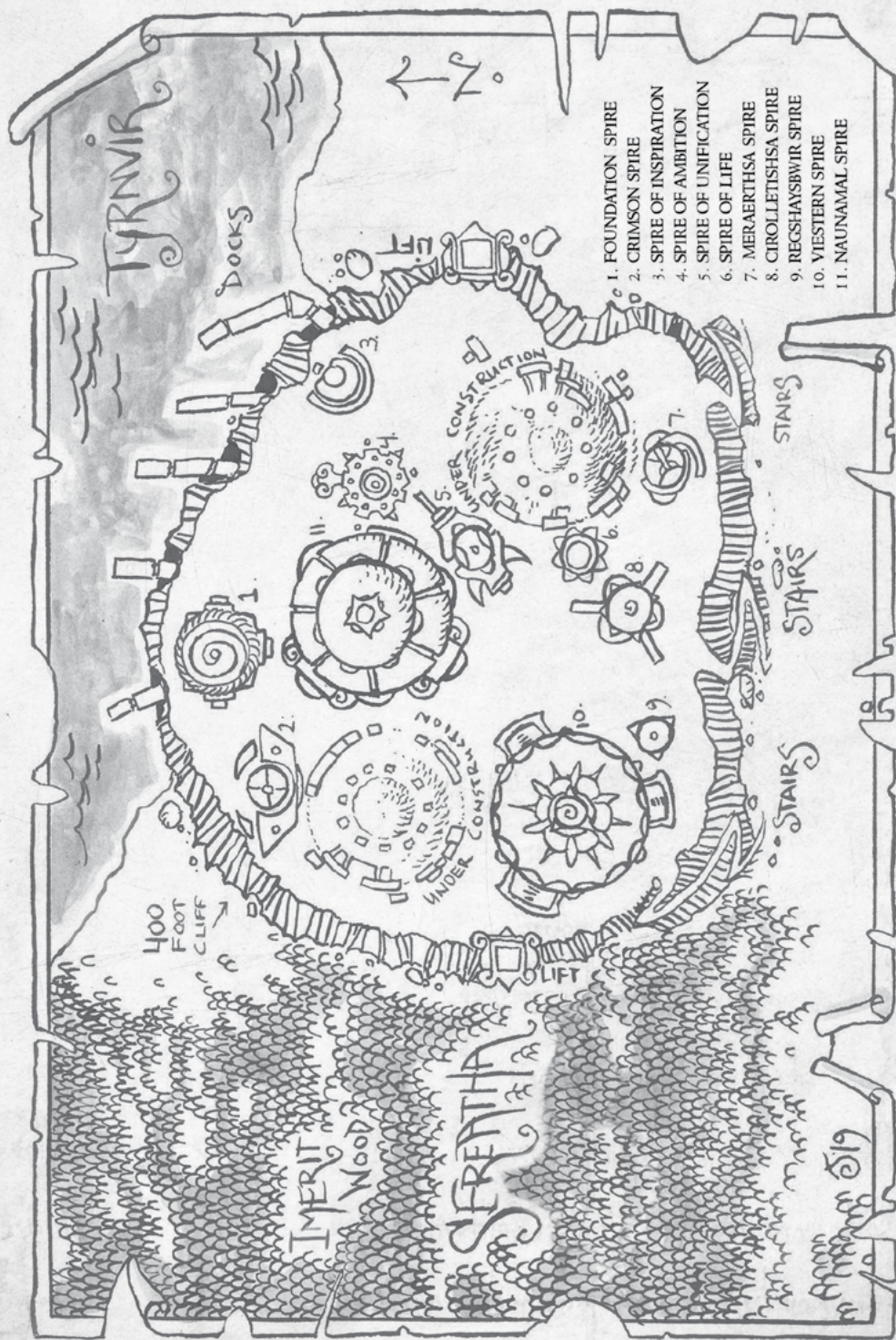
Effect: The owner gains +2 to Thread Weaving tests.

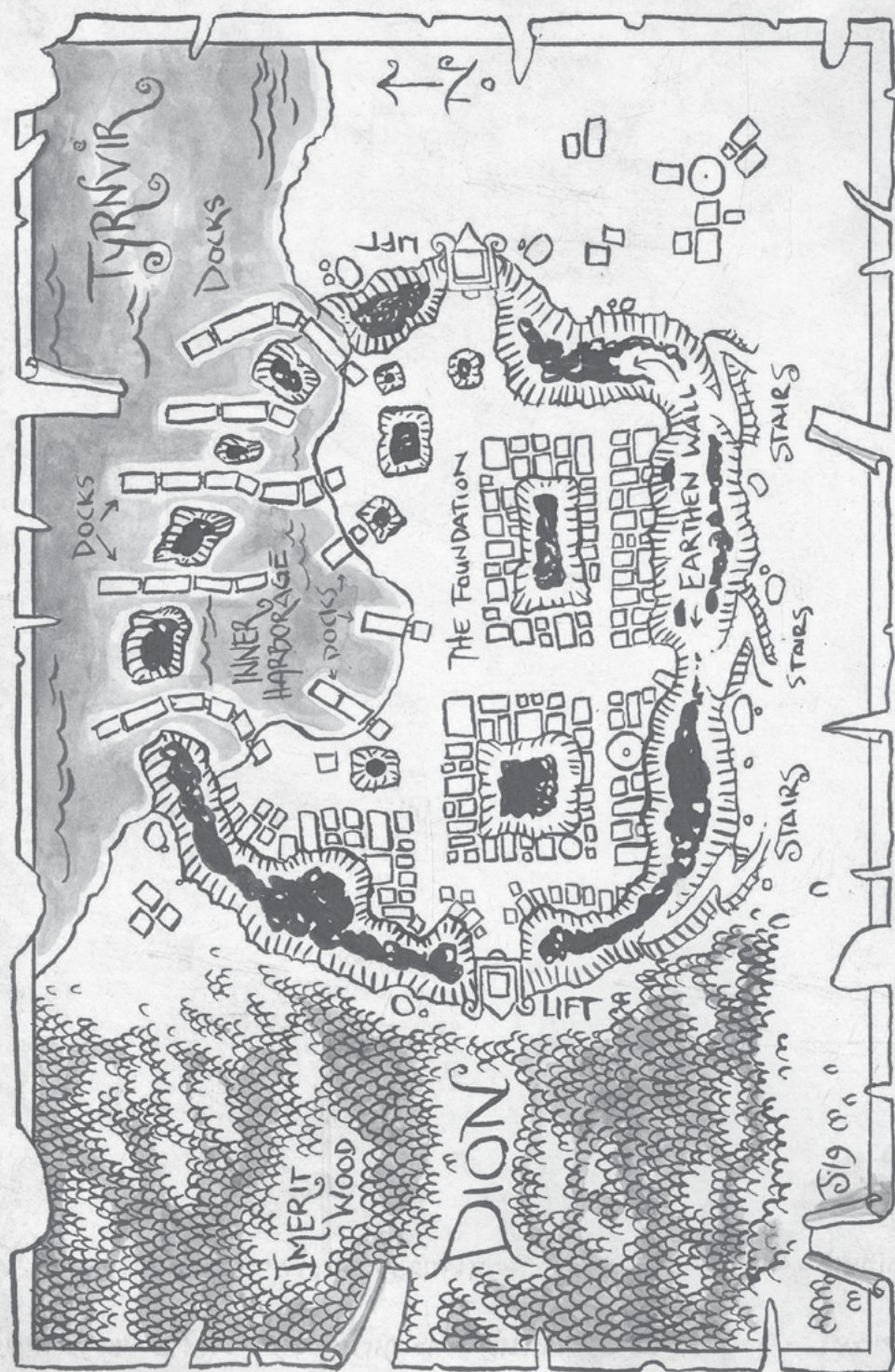


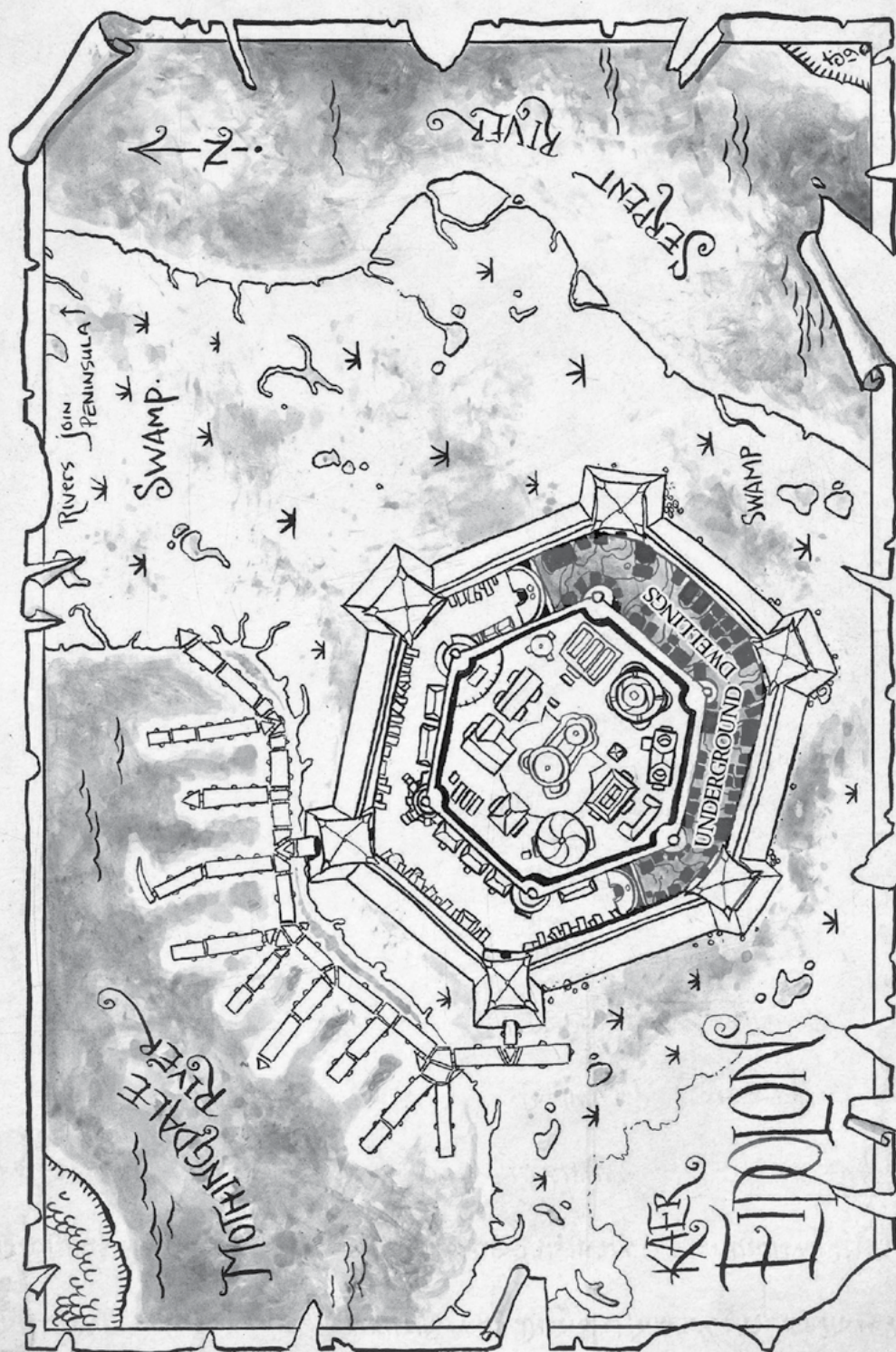














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