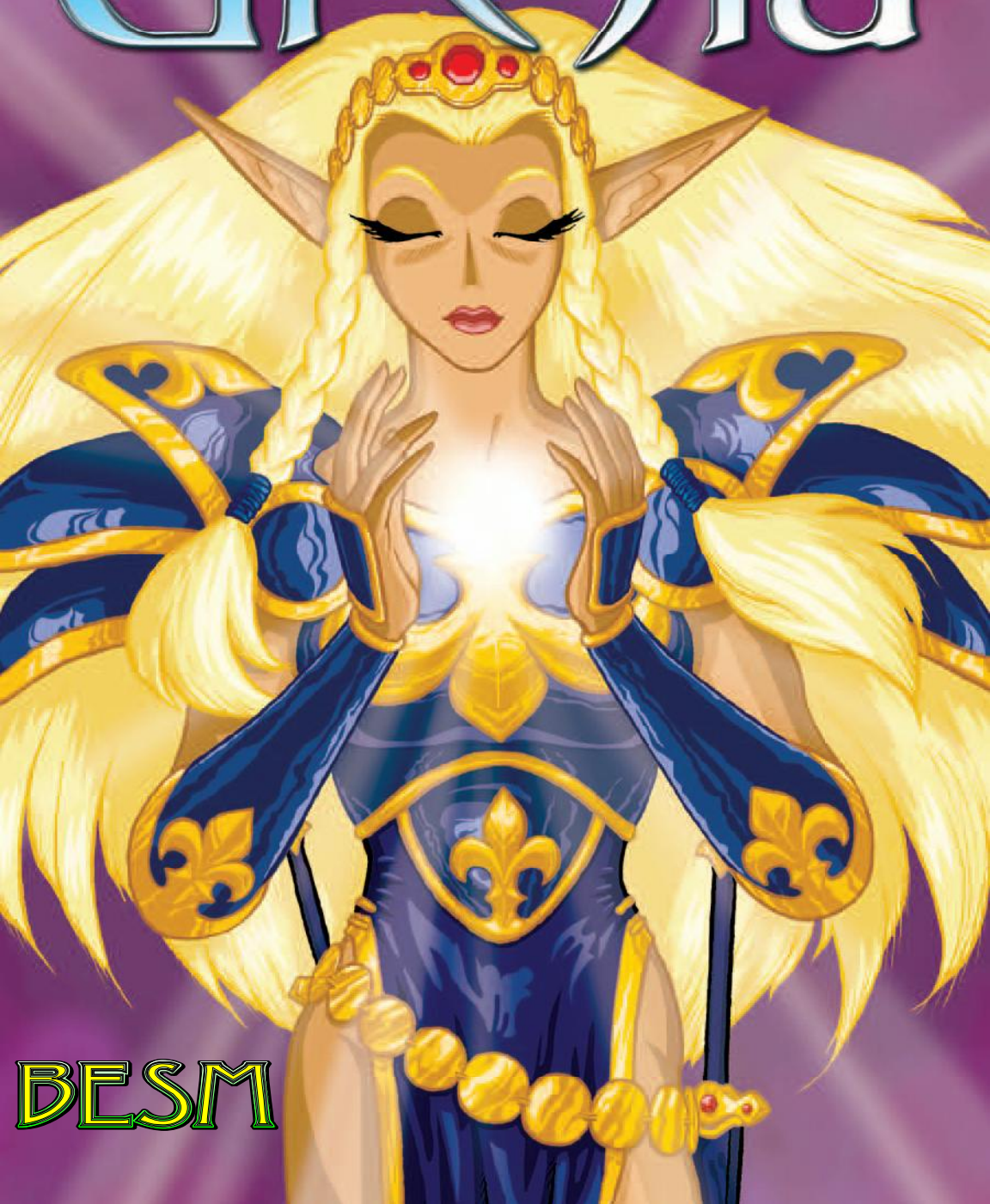


Grave of Heaven
Uresia



BESM

Grave of Heaven Uresia

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	CHAPTER 1: FRAGMENTS OF FALLING STARS
5	Myths and Legends
6	The Survivors
7	Welcome Home
10	CHAPTER 2: THE ISLANDS
12	Celar
13	Dreed
15	Elu Islands
16	Helt (and Lochria)
19	Rinden
21	Sindra
22	Winnow
23	Yem
28	Birah
30	Boru
32	Koval (Koval Empire)
33	Laöch
35	Orgalt
36	Temphis
37	The Volenwood (Anandriel)
39	CHAPTER 3: CHARACTERS AND MAGIC
41	Character Outline
43	Stats, Attributes, Defects, and Skills
43	Money!
43	Attributes
48	Selecting Attributes
48	Some Common Forms of Magic
52	Character Race
58	Occupational Templates
62	Sample Characters of Uresia
63	Campaign Tone
64	CHAPTER 4: WONDERS OF URESIA
65	Magic Items
67	Mecha
69	Beasts and Monsters
71	Wondrous Lands: The Troll Lands of the Outer Ring
74	Other Wondrous Places and Legends
78	CHAPTER 5: ROGAN'S HEATH
79	Life in Rogan's Heath
81	Locations on the Map of Rogan's Heath
86	CHAPTER 6: SHADOW RIVER
87	Shadow River at a Glance
88	"The Bells"
89	The Beacon District
90	The Citadel/The Market
91	East Corner
95	Logantown
98	New Town
99	Pork Hill District
101	The Old City
104	West Gate District

CHAPTER 1: FRAGMENTS OF FALLING STARS



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

A young boy, eager to prove himself, prepares to undertake a quest. He grips a tiny magical container and aims it at a nearby monster twice his size. The monster is sucked in, stored neatly and safely. He collects another, and another, and stores them in his pocket. Later on, he'll release them to fight on his behalf.

It's years before *Pokémon* will be released. It's 1992, and it's one of the many incarnations of *DragonQuest*, a high point for swords-and-sorcery anime in Japan.

Like most of the early "Western-style fantasy" in anime, *DragonQuest* was based on a computer game. Pencil-and-paper gaming had landed a real beachhead across the Pacific, but the impact of electronic quest-style games inspired by them was far greater. *DragonQuest* had created a national obsession that threatened work productivity, much as *DOOM* would in the United States a little later. In Japan, however, the natural response to that kind of phenomenon was a popular anime!

DragonQuest was simple, heroic stuff — a game of Villains and Villages, with princesses, magic potions, and the usual elements of Western RPGs. Since those elements had passed through several lenses, however — differences in language and culture being only the first, before the even more bizarre lens of computer game adaptation came into play — they were subtly altered and augmented. The designers of the computer game were just working to make a good time, and, free of the expectations and baggage of growing up with Western fairy tales, they assembled their story the way they saw fit, in a mad kind of Talosian Frankenstein fashion.

The results were both familiar and original, and included the onion-shaped slimes that would become nearly ubiquitous in the genre for years. Unlike the wall-clinging deadly oozes of RPGs, anime slimes were happy, bouncy little creatures with big eyes and no mouths at all (they're slimes), who lived in cheery slime villages. They were still dangerous in combat, but the Japanese preferred to make a deadly thing cute.

While *DragonQuest* created the first real public wave of Japanese interest in the genre, anime had been playing tentatively in the swords-and-sorcery arena for a few years, and with more traditional "fairy tale" elements and settings since the earliest days of anime (*Mahostukai Sally*, 1966 and *Ribbon No Kishi*, 1967, for example). Prior to *DragonQuest*, however, anime's central occupation with science-fiction themes reigned supreme, and anime devoted to fantasy was typically inspired, directly or loosely, by feudal Japan or ancient China (*Yotoden*, *Dragonball*, etc), with only occasional jaunts into Arabian-Nights style subgenera, or pseudo-historical tales set in ancient Egypt or Greece. *Chiiisana Viking Vicke* was an early series for young children following the adventures of a little Viking, *Entaku No Kishi Monogatari Moero Arthur* (1979-80) followed King Arthur and his knights (complete with blue tattoos), and a number of Toei Doga productions were drawn from the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen. For the most part though, fantasy was a series of quiet footnotes.

DragonQuest made swords-and-sorcery something larger, something more concrete. While *Bastard!*, for example does not resemble *DragonQuest* at all, it has more in common with it than with anything produced in the United States or Europe (right down to the slimes). After *DragonQuest*, adventure fantasy had become a genuine anime genre, complete with stock elements and working conventions.

The curious lineage from Western RPGs would take a side-path with *Record of Lodoss War*, an anime based on manga and novels based on pencil-and-paper gaming sessions. *Lodoss* popularized more than long, pointy ears on elves; by bypassing the computer games, it created a new set of styles that would blend with the *DragonQuest* elements to finalize the few "ground rules" such as they are of fantasy anime. *Lodoss* featured a much more serious tone, a diverse

cast of heroes, and something previous fantasy anime had lacked: a setting and backstory that had been given as much consideration as the plot. *Lodoss* was a serious fantasy world, with nations and politics and even cultures, not just a series of identical villages with weapons shops and wandering slime encounters, or a half-realized backdrop for the quest.

What were the ground rules? From this side of the Pacific, they read more like a fantastic list of playful exceptions to what North Americans were familiar. Anachronism is welcome without any need for explanation, from Polaroid cameras to streetlights to modern architecture. Even more than in Western fantasy, being a monster is never a sure indicator of being monstrous, with dragons as likely as sidekicks as they are as opponents. Quests are paramount, but this is anime, so characters motivated by simple avarice, ridiculous levels of lechery, or an obsessive desire for a hot meal, are just as frequent as those motivated by a thirst for justice or a code of honour. Also, the Japanese discovered that part of the fun of fantasy is that any genre can be re-told with a sword and a suit of chainmail thrown in and find a whole new audience. They produced fantasy mecha (*Aura Battler Dunbine*, *Escafloune*), fantasy pocket monsters (*Monster Rancher*), and (of course) fantasy naughtiness like *Dragon Pink* and *Elven Bride*, alongside the grim heroics of things like *Berserk* or romantic fantasy like *Windaria*.

Modern anime like *Ruin Explorers* or *Slayers* takes all these elements and boils them into a stew, where the quests are serious and the villains are deadly, but the characters are drawn more from the stock of traditional humour-action anime traditions than anything to do with swords or sorcery, specifically. In short, it has become a genre perfect for gaming with *Big Eyes, Small Mouth!*

Uresia: Grave of Heaven, then, is the bastard son of the bastard daughter of the illegitimate child of an unholy union, with cheeky cat-girls and panty-mad Satyrs thrown in. *Uresia* uses a "shameless stew" approach, providing a world with any number of potentially serious stories (and quite a few silly ones), and a broad canvas waiting for your own, rather than focusing on a grand epic quest that dwarfs all other concerns.

Uresia is a world in which you can be a thrill seeker; here, thrill seekers are just as important as grim, sober heroes. A lecherous teenager can become king, a savvy chef can command a navy, and entire cities of the gods lie in ruin. Everything is up for grabs. It is an incredibly fun time to be alive, sail the enchanted seas, and carry a sword.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

In an age before history, mortals ruled the land, and the gods ruled the heavens. It was enough to keep both groups busy.

As the gods grew numerous and vain, they began walking among men, dictating their lives. They also squabbled amongst themselves, and when gods go to war, men are ants to be trampled underfoot.

One day, the wars reached such a pitch that there would be no more peace until the gods destroyed everything, even the heavens. Even themselves.

The hymns teach that the final war began with a sudden silence, as all the gods abandoned their meddling to ascend to heaven and take sides. For a few hours, there was only gentle rain and distant thunder. Men held their breath, all eyes skyward.

The rain stopped. The clouds parted. The stars were bright. No gods appeared to gloat about winning.

Men cheered! They were free at last.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Then the stars rippled, and space ruptured, and there was a hideous, swollen light. Balls of fire began to tumble forth, bright stars of unimaginable brilliance. Heaven had been destroyed, and the sky fell.

In retrospect, men appreciate that it was a colourful apocalypse. The falling stars were the remnants of the heavens, fragments of the realms of gods and demons. Mighty halls fell, great flaming pits fell, impossibly beautiful cities fell, the dark realm of death fell, and the holy forests fell. They cracked the lands of man into fragments, plunging much of it forever into the boiling foam of the oceans.

A few living things survived on the remnants of the shattered land — a broken ring of islands scorched by lava and washed clean by storms.

In the middle of that ring, the wreckage of heaven cooled into green and inviting lands, in the new sea where there had once been a mighty continent. They were empty, waiting. Men would later name these new islands Uresia — the grave of the gods.

That was a long time ago.

THE SURVIVORS

Cities, kingdoms, nations, and entire races perished, as did thousands of gods. The hymns do not mention it, but probably lots of animals did, too. When your hometown is ripped in half by a gout of lava screaming half a league upwards, it's easy to forget that the cows are having a bad day. A few things survived, however.

MEN

Uresians call all civilized mortals “Men” — Humans, Elves, Cat-Men, Minotaur, Dwarves, Satyrs, etc. A handful of each survived, clinging to the broken outer lands for life ... but feeling a pull, an irresistible longing, to sail inward. It is said that they saw Uresia in dreams, and the dreams would not let them rest. They found a way across, and claimed the ruins of heaven as the new domain of Man.

TROLLS

Uresians label any “uncivilized” mortals who are still clearly more than beasts “false Men” or “debased Men” or, most commonly, Trolls. There are ogrimish Trolls, reptilian Trolls, and others. They are all big, strong, and smarter than assumed. Additionally, they share one thing in common beyond the arbitrary bigotry applied to them: they feel no urge to leave the outer ring, and thus do not. Rather, they just want to get back to living as best they could. When the Men sailed off toward the inner islands; they claimed the ruins of man's realms as the domain of Trolls.

GODS

Four gods are now known to have survived the Skyfall. There may be others, too, but there has been no sign of them in over a thousand years. The surviving gods are an odd mix of “unimportant” gods — morally ambiguous and largely unapproachable.

THE PRIMAL ONE

The god of animal urges — want, hunger, instinct, and lust. Some mistake her/him/it for “evil,” but it's both above and beneath such things. It's the shadowy essence of the Id, and of

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

unthinking motive impulse. It cares only for its native worshippers, the wild animals. Paradoxically, it's the secret ruler of a mortal kingdom.

THE SEA DRAGON

The serpentine goddess of wind and storm at sea, and the protector of the secrets of the deep. A fickle and destructive god, driven by alien motives and fond of drowning anything weak enough to require air to breathe. Villains who attempt to get on her good side end up just as drowned as anyone else. She commands a tiny secret cult of children.

THE ARBITERS

Their genders and personalities vary according to which culture you ask, but their area of concern is straightforward. They like any contest, as long as it is fair. They have no preference between violence and peace, or between right and wrong, so long as men are competing and striving for a judgement of victory. These cosmic referees inspire most Uresian kingdoms with an obsession for some kind of sport or contest.

THE WINE GOD

In Helt, he is called Tom Beer, a laughing party-animal. In the Volenwood, she is Nysha, Goddess of the Vine, and the patron of the vintners' art. In Sindra, they call it Golu: The Shadow of Drunkards, a semi-sinister spectre of alcoholism, the dark image that the drunkard can only escape by plunging into darkness. Each representation of a facet of the whole truth, but that the Wine God makes more personal appearances in Helt than anywhere else tells Man something, even if it is only how he prefers to be seen.

Not a single god of "good" or "evil" survived, not a god of being nice or a god of being naughty. No death gods or healing gods. As far as most are concerned, no gods at all. Of course, many men (and many kings) like the idea of gods, so there are still churches and clergymen, honouring those long lost, and vigorously denying their demise. In addition, it is true that the death of gods may be a half-reality, since some seem to have left ghosts behind.

OTHERS

And then, there are things neither man, troll, nor god. Maybe they survived the Skyfall; maybe the Skyfall made them, but they are here: vampires, dragons, forest-spirits, elementals, even demons (some evil, some not). Uresia is richly populated with others. Most just do their best to make a living; some become heroes.

WELCOME HOME

It has been centuries since the Skyfall. Some kingdoms do not even keep the legends of it alive, much less actively believe it happened. For a thousand years and change, men have been busy building cities, kingdoms, and lives again. It is the most delicate moment in history, a generation after a wicked empire fell. A few decades after sorcerers uncovered forgotten truths, and after a god with no interest in mortals began ruling them.

Uresia is a world of a thousand stories, but none dominate the canvas yet. The lines of possibility are numerous, chaotic, and free for the taking. Uresia has matured, and it's time for heroes, villains, fortune-seekers, or ordinary men, to determine what happens next.

There are three principal regions of Uresia: the inner islands, the Troll Lands (the ring of island remnants of the old continents, inhabited by Trolls), and the watery divide — the magic-dead sea between the two groups of lands. The sea beyond the broken outer ring is of importance to Uresia as well.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The outer sea is a virtual unknown; very few ships have ventured even to look at it, much less explore it. At the outer edge of the Troll Lands, the magic begins to die completely, and the Uresian “addiction” to home becomes so acute, it is potentially deadly. The Trolls might be able to explore beyond the edge safely, but with 95% of the Troll Lands uninhabited, there is no great incentive to try. Besides, there’s a good chance it is exactly what it appears: an empty expanse of grey water and skies.

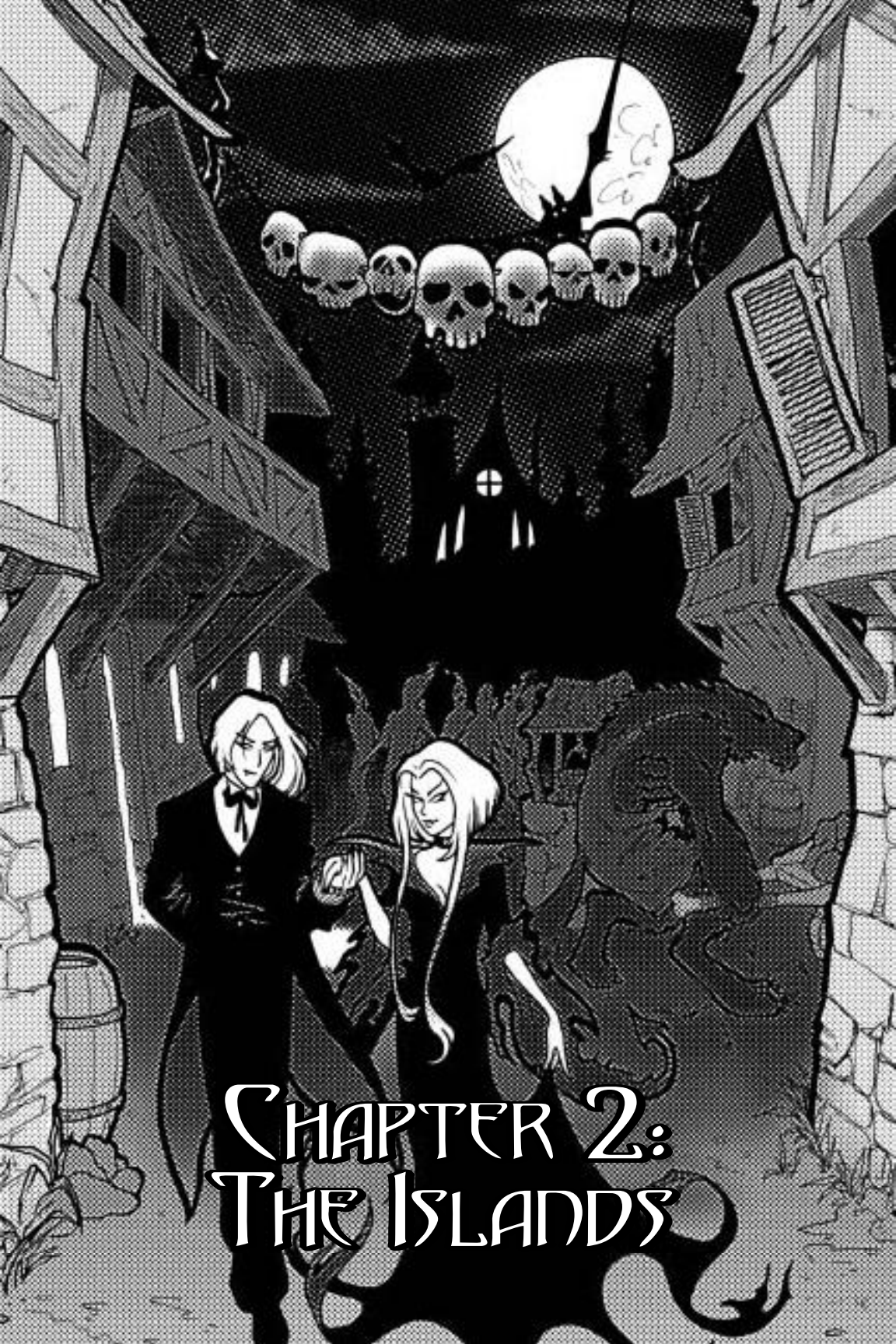
The other seas are the realms of the Sea Dragon, and possibly much more. Tales of mermaids and their cities abound, but it’s an untouched frontier.

URESIAN HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- 0: Date set by Sindran scholars as the probable time of the Skyfall. The events prior to the Sindran “scholarly revolution” circa 500 are matters of speculation; the early kingdoms were struggling for survival, and made little use of writing.
- 300: The rise of the Dreed Republic.
- 450: Sindra establishes itself as a nation; Laöch begins to overshadow Orgalt.
- 481: King Voghard of Skalsa dies; Heltish neighbours conquer Skalsa shortly thereafter, ending the last human-dominated realm in Helt (This date is Heltish tradition; early Dreed and Sindran scrolls acknowledge the existence of Skalsa but nothing survives that can confirm the date of Voghard’s demise).
- 500: The modern calendar developed by Nonathor of Sindra, the “father of history.” Many now believe that his estimate of the Skyfall as “five hundred years gone” was fanciful, and possibly inaccurate by more than a thousand years.
- 524: The Dreed Republic formally colonizes Temphis. Prior to this, Temphis is believed to have served as a wilderness haven for runaway criminals for many years.
- 531: Temphisian colonists send their Dreed governors home in small casks (three casks per governor), setting the tone for the spirit of independence that defines Temphis to this day.
- 649: Earliest written reference to Shadow River recorded in the logs of the Dark Opal, a Sindran vessel that discovered the “robust village” while following one of the flying islands at sea.
- 714: The Dungeons of Vasalt discovered beneath ruins on hills overlooking Lake Rund, in Helt. While dozens of such “heaven-tombs” are known, the Vasalt dungeons are still the largest intact cluster yet discovered. New networks of tunnels have been discovered in the Vasalt ruins as recently as 1301.
- 821: Elsa Dondertys “invents” the Vaussburg sport of waterfall climbing.
- 903: The Fogport Treaties: Diplomats from Dreed, Rinden, Winnow, Boru, Sindra, Laöch, and Koval gather in Temphis for the first recorded summit dedicated to international trade.
- 1024: Shadow River declared “a pit of evil” by the Sisters of Tela.
- 1044: The barons of Celar are united under King Ordellewiss.
- 1109: Tiny, the Copper Metal Slime, becomes the first known slime noble, in Winnow.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

- 1147: Duke Urleg becomes Lord Governor of Shadow River.
- 1165: Duke Urleg dies.
- 1184: Gallkor of Koval proves the principles of what will become modern naval navigation.
- 1190: Duke Orgo abolishes trial-by-combat in Shadow River, turning the arena over to non-lethal sporting events.
- 1202: Grail Park is constructed in Shadow River.
- 1210: The trapped bodies of Ondro and Beshek are discovered, secretly, in the Volenwood (on the future site of the town of Delerain).
- 1214: The Moon Stones, the key to the Lenthian Gates, are first discovered.
- 1221: Duke Orgo dies; Lord Governor Quain reinstates trial-by-combat in Shadow River.
- 1261: Laöch begins building new railroads.
- 1277: Lady Ephemeran of Winnow begins taking demon lovers.
- 1291: Sindra recognizes Boru as a place of High Magic.
- 1294: Village of Mullinham granted recognition by the Lyrian church of Eagan (will later become Rogan's Heath).
- 1299: Shadow River's "Vine Bridge Project" begins.
- 1308: Madwoman Voriis ascends to the Koval throne.
- 1322: King Timberfell IV of Dreed is born on another world.
- 1325: Koval begins a war of expansion.
- 1332: King Bellhammer of Laöch adopts Blind Owl city as the new Laöchrian capitol.
- 1336: The Monster Conquering Heroes break up; Deana and Verna settle in the Rindenland.
- 1337: Timberfell IV marries into the Dreed royal family, named as Timberfell III's only successor.
- 1341: The Shadow River Citadel is completed.
- 1345: Timberfell III dies in a bizarre pudding accident.
- 1350: Birah gains independence from Koval, taking advantage of its thinned-out home defenses.
- 1351: Burle's father, Daniel, murders a priest in Rogan's Heath.
- 1352: Koval retreats entirely, a ruined shell of a wicked kingdom. Molandi royal family ascends to rule.
- 1353: Black Skull builds the Skull's Hatch tavern in Shadow River, as well as a secret network of tunnels.
- 1355: Lord Hoggart is granted Rogan's Heath.
- 1373: Quakes in Lochria awaken a flight of dragons, resulting in the siege of Coatestown.
- 1374: Burle's father dies of old age in Rogan's Heath.
- 1380: Current day.



CHAPTER 2: THE ISLANDS

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

"There are some places in the world which, when you get to, your first thought is — how shall I get away again; and of those Celar is one."

— From the diary of Edward Ducey of Sindra, 1204

There are more than 250 charted islands in Uresia, most too small to appear on the maps (pages 26-27). The "watery divide" surrounds them — a stretch of sea where magic fades to a minimum, and ships lose sight of land. This proves treacherous for the caravels of Uresia, navigated by land-sightings and rigged with enchanted sails!

This chapter explores the most important lands — the dozen or so kingdoms large enough to form an international community of sorts. These include kingdoms ruled by secret forces; kingdoms ruled by greed, kingdoms ruled by fiat, and a good many ruled by actual kings.

Communities of "invisible" (for the purposes of this book) lesser realms surround each of these, or thrive on islands difficult to reach with ordinary navigation. These lands can be ignored or explored at need, including in character creation: if none of the kingdoms here appeal to a player as a choice of homelands, the ideal is out there, somewhere, waiting to be defined. These lands are not yet important, but one day they might be, once one of their own makes a mark on the world!

The cities in each realm are listed by name, largest first; these are towns with populations of 10,000 or more men. Most realms have dozens of smaller towns scattered between the cities, and hundreds or thousands of villages and hamlets scattered between those. In later chapters, you will explore village and city life in two detailed examples.

TRAVEL TIMES

Under normal circumstances, assume that an adventuring party (with gear) can travel 25 kilometres per day over hilly, unfamiliar terrain, or 50 kilometres per day over flat, easy terrain, on foot or horseback. A typical caravel will travel 150 kilometres per average day, but it will vary a good deal with the weather and the skill of the skipper (on some days, a sailing ship makes little real progress at all). Most Uresian ships navigate mostly by land sighting, staying within 7-8 kilometres of the coast in clear weather (the exact distance of the horizon depends on how heavily loaded the ship is).

If your players enjoy gaming out the hazards of sail-travel, use this rule: for every game-day the ship is at sea, the Game Master should make a Mind-based Navigation (Sea) Skill check on behalf of the ship's captain (or dedicated navigator), modified for heavy or favourable weather or a particularly good ship (see the Caravel template on page 67), keeping the results vague or even secret.

If the roll succeeds, the vessel travels 100 kilometres in the desired direction, and the same character may immediately roll again to travel an additional 100 kilometres, and again (if that one succeeds) for a third and final 100 kilometres. Any failed roll stops the process. Any roll that fails particularly badly still results in travel, but in a random direction: the ship drifts off-course. Depending on what sort of land the ship keeps in sight (and, perhaps, on another Navigation check), they could travel in the wrong waters for days without realizing the error!

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

CELAR

POPULATION: 3.2 million

COMPOSITION: Largely Human, with scattered Dwarvish and Beastmen communities

CLIMATE: Cold and windy, with frequent snowfall high in the mountains

CITIES: Vurndenburg; Strassfein; Brach Vorn; Elksdraven; Kreuzinger; Vaussburg

SOCIETY: A squabbling pack of duchies and baronies united as a single kingdom (since 1044) by the Ordelweiss family; the current monarch is His Robust Majesty, King Sigurd IV

Celar is a kingdom where honour isn't honour unless there are scars to show for it, and where the beer is stronger and darker than any other land in Uresia. It is a burly kingdom, a place of green mountain slopes and grey, rocky peaks, where crossbows and clockwork are valued equally. People wear a good deal of leather.

Outsiders are seldom comfortable in Celar, where expectations are extreme and the geography is perilous. The kingdom is robustly and proudly sexist, for starters: any man without leather shorts and duelling scars — and who cannot down his own weight in beer and still wrestle a horse to the ground — is considered weak, and the Celari are not shy about mocking the weak.

Women, by contrast, must be either buxom or willowy, must be cheerful with rosy cheeks when the men are sober, and must change to responsible and alert when they are not. When a man or his horse is too drunk to wrestle, his woman must be able to carry them home.

Celar's ridiculously macho culture may derive from a kind of victory envy, since Celar has never won a war against its neighbours. The result has been a terrible spiral: each barony's army is trained to be arrogant and certain of their superiority, making each new attempt to organize the troops on a national level more difficult than the last. Celar has even lost a few major battles before they began, when competing units knocked themselves out the previous night with drinking contests.

SPORT

While other Rindenlanders would probably insist that consuming alcohol is Celar's "national sport," fencing and brawling are the Celari obsessions, and Celari men never hesitate to organize a tournament, or to empty pockets to fuel a wager.

In addition, the city of Vaussburg loves waterfall climbing. Vaussburg is built across a rock ridge, with a high cliff separating the nobles and wealthy merchants from the common craftsmen and marketplaces. The Vaussen River cuts across that line toward the sea, and the result is the Vaussenstrom — a violent, magnificent waterfall at the heart of the city. Over the centuries, the town has framed the falls in ornate bridges, balconies, and pools, but the native cliff face beneath is unchanged. In 821 (so the story goes) a brawny heroine named Elsa Dondertys ascended that cliff, in the full blast of the Vaussenstrom, while in pursuit of a particularly plump pigeon for her dinner. Thus was the sport of Celari waterfall climbing born, and here it lives on, in the only place that wants it.

The regular competitions are popular, but simply running through the streets declaring intent to make the 20-metre ascent is enough to draw attention. Failure can be disastrous: although the falls are not high, the water is cold and fast, and the rocks at the bottom are as hard and sharp as any. Streetside vendors descend on the place selling beer, ices, and full-body casts at a hideous mark-up.

CELARI MAGIC

Celari mages tend to be jacks of many trades, combining crude, heavy-handed elemental magic with harebrained mechanical engineering and dangerous forms of alchemy. In their way, they are just as loud and macho as Celari warriors, building clockwork golems and thunderstorm-powered gunboats to compensate for their less impressive brawn (they still bench press large dogs to impress passing women, though — Celar has no patience for milksops). Their affection for alchemy makes their drinking contests a hazard to civilian safety.

DREED

POPULATION: 1.8 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Humans

CLIMATE: Cool to temperate, lush

CITIES: Vanity; Indulgence; Passion; Jubilation

SOCIETY: Largely anarchic city-states held together by a glue of prosperity and mellow apathy; “The Dreed Republic” is technically a kingdom ruled by King Timberfell, but he exerts little authority, and the city-states (each driven by a complex bureaucracy answering to the local electorate) wouldn’t notice if he tried.

Dreed is a large, mountainous island on the western end of the inner sea, enjoying an enviable position between Temphis, the Rindenland, Sindra, and Elu/Helt trade lanes. It is the wealthiest land in Uresia, and the most peaceful.

His Right Majesty, Timberfell the Lusty, rules Dreed with an iron stomach. Provided the provincial governors send chefs and samples of Dreed’s ever-changing food culture, Timberfell couldn’t care less about obedience and order. It is rumoured that the castle north of Vanity houses more cooks than soldiers.

Dreed is bisected by the lofty crags of the Trurog mountain range, and the Trurogs are the reason Dreed can prosper in apathy while other islands struggle even in vigilance: they are the richest source of emeralds, the most precious object in Uresia.

The emeralds keep Dreed rich, peaceful, and happy beyond the limits of common sense. Sindran sorcerers need them, desperately, for magical experiments. Rinden artificers need them to power the armour of Emerald Knights. Temphis stockpiles them, greedily, in case they ever need anything from Sindra or the Rindenland. They are the preferred coin of international commerce.

Dreed takes government casually, but it takes emerald mining seriously. Dreed emerald miners are well paid, celebrated, and admired. Dreed sells emeralds to the highest bidder, but does not gouge or make ridiculous demands. The wealth generated by fair sales supports four robust cities, and related trade traffic guarantees good markets for everyone, down to the lowliest root farmer. Since Dreed both maintains a monopoly on giant-sized emeralds and maintains it professionally, the neighbouring states make no attempt at conquest, and actively discourage one another from considering it. They would rather have a healthy, predictable market with a known provider than let a rival upset the balance.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

THE FOUR CITIES

The governors of Vanity, Indulgence, Passion, and Jubilance (Timberfell renamed the Cities ten years ago when a rare fit of authority mixed with a more usual fit of inebriation) are the real rulers of Dreed. Unlike the royal family, the Governors are elected officials, but they find it useful to remain loyal to Timberfell. Timberfell is, after all, both pliant and likeable, and centralized rulership insures that the cities can relax and compete with one another without bothersome larger concerns. In essence, the republican city-states keep the crown handy as either referee, scapegoat or distraction, depending on the needs of the day.

COOKING FOR SPORT

One way the cities compete is for favour in the royal kitchens. Each city sponsors a master chef who takes residence in the royal palace, representing their home (and, by extension, the local cuisine) in Timberfell's frequent cooking competitions — mad, rowdy affairs of gustatory delights and towering egos. The contests are not limited to the four masters, though — any cook who kneels at the palace gates insisting that he is worthy will be admitted, to test his skills in the heat of the Dreed royal kitchens.

“Good cooks are never lonely” is a universal axiom, but in Dreed it's a comical understatement. Anyone willing to raise a wooden spoon to declare his skill can live a life of comfort and celebrity in Dreed, either at the castle, or at any of the Governor's abodes. All the Governors maintain elaborate versions of the King's contests, in a constant quest for new talent. Rural towns hold local contests, in turn, in hopes of impressing the governors with talent they find.

The highest civilian honour in Dreed is the title “food god” bestowed by Timberfell himself. Each person so honoured is declared “god” of a single type of cookery, and the title is usually lifelong. Most of the gods are granted choice jobs in the bureaucracy. The God of Pork Noodles is Admiral of the Dreed navy, while the Goddess of Dumplings is the King's mistress.

THE BOY KING

Timberfell is not from Uresia. He came here as a teenage boy, through a magical gateway his girlfriend's rival paramour activated as a trap. He wandered Dreed (then a much grimmer, but no less wealthy land) confused for nearly a year, led only by hunger and a lecherous passion for young girls. The combination of both vaulted him unexpectedly into the throne.

The birthday feast of the old King's youngest daughter, a massive party that also celebrated trade alliances with Celar, drew the boy like a moth to flame, putting him in just the right place, at just the right time, to rescue the entire kingdom from an evil usurper.

Timberfell (he took the name of his royal father-in-law at the court's insistence) has no intention of going home, no intention of growing up (even though he's nearly 60, now), and no intention of ever admitting that, back when he knocked the evil usurper to the ground and spilled incriminating scrolls all over the royal hall, he was just running for his life with a pair of stolen panties and a chicken leg.

RATS

The rats of Dreed are the smartest (and best-fed) rats in Uresia, and possibly the smartest beings of any kind of the world. Above all, they're smart enough to keep their sophisticated intelligence a secret from most Humans, preferring to live as they please, with minimal responsibility (they are rats, after all). They're careful to nudge societal opinion of rats to suit them, though: in Dreed, it's considered terrible luck to harm a rat.

ELU ISLANDS

POPULATION: 750,000

COMPOSITION: An even mix of Beastmen and Humans

CLIMATE: Cold, with some variation between islands; dangerous ice is common in the waters near many of them

CITIES: Thorny Cove; Longport

SOCIETY: No unified society; see below

The Elu are a cluster of dozens of islands (several of them very large) in the waters between the Beastmen-dominated Heltish lands and central Uresia. There are no nations or kingdoms here, but two large port cities (Thorny Cove and Longport) qualify as powerful, and rival, city-states. Most of the islands exist in anarchy: they are havens for pirates, thugs, and others that thrive on the open sea or in a secluded, ice-bound coastal cave. A sampling of the region's locales, personalities, and mysteries, are included herein.

LORD FHARIO

The islands have their share of "Pirate Kings" — charismatic captains who inspire the loyalty of a small fleet or port-town instead of just a single vessel. The most unusual of these is Lord Fhario, a well-spoken, urbane, witty young dragon, two long tons of swashbuckling charm, complete with an eyepatch that many insist is an affectation. It wasn't difficult for Lord Fhario to inspire the respect of his cohorts and attract more followers. His new town, Fhario's Hope, supports a population of nearly three thousand, including a fleet of thieving ships that pay Fhario a heavy tax in booty in exchange for safe port and protection from foreign navies. Fhario rules from a massive tent on the hill overlooking his town, attended by scandalously clad cat-girls and a pack of grizzled, scarred lieutenants.

THE FLOTILLA

The flotilla is an annual gathering of more than a hundred pirate ships, lashed together to form an artificial island. A floating city of sport and revelry, the flotilla forms on the eve of the summer solstice, as a "neutral ground" where rival pirates can let their hair (or fur) down. It hosts a "Sailor's Olympics," where they compete for the honour of ship or species in events such as knife fights, cannon loading, and rigging duels (sword fights fought "to the deck" instead of to the death).

There is a disaster or tragedy of some kind every year, but the event is too popular, and too spectacular, to die. The truce has broken several times, for example, and there is always at least one fire. Last year, a high wind set ablaze the sails of 30 vessels, and hundreds of hands were lost in the mad rush to break the surviving ships out of harm's way.

THE CIVILIZED TOWNS

Longport and Thorny Cove each grew from the kind of rowdy pirate towns that dot the coasts of many Elu shores, but with growth came a kind of forced maturity. Older seamen took brides and settled here, temples sprouted, and a bustling mercantile economy began attracting citizens of all kinds to the snowy pirate frontier, including those eager to develop the untapped resources of the larger islands. Today, these thriving city-states are still rowdy, and dangerous, but ruled and governed, and becoming civilized by inches.

Inevitable as this may be, it stirs rumblings in the bones of the islands ... literally. Three years ago, small tremors and an avalanche near Longport heralded the reawakening of the

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

nearby volcano. Priests and sorcerers conferred, and concurred: the spirit of Elu flows from dead gods of rebellion, thievery, and wanderlust. Dead or dreaming they may be, but these gods do not like governors and laws and peaceful ex-pirate florists. Pirate kings in nearby cities are now looking on Thorny Cove and Longport as prizes to be conquered, inspired by dreams bubbling up from beneath the soil and sea.

HELT (AND LOCHRIA)

POPULATION: 8.6 million

COMPOSITION: Almost entirely Beastmen, including many varieties rare elsewhere

CLIMATE: Cold, rainy, icy, snowy, wet

CITIES: Vasalt; Foxgravel; Kahlstone; Truma; Jabroch; Pelea

SOCIETY: A collection of individual kingdoms organized along racial lines; Lochria is a large but poor principality dominated by the Satyrs, with a large Centaur minority

Helt is the homeland of those races built of both men and beast, from the feline Creesh to the dog-headed Kobolds (or Adlet). Heltish Society is a chaotic menagerie that Human scholars regard with shocked confusion. Men call them all Beastmen, with no offense intended, but it is frequently taken by those offended at connotations of "beastliness."

There is no unified form of Heltish government; each species (except the Satyrs and Aracor, who live everywhere) form small clusters of kingdoms, principalities, city-states, and collectives, as suits them. The Heltish "nations" share a language, a trader's league, and several common concerns, but not a leader.

Helt, particularly northern Helt, is known for a stubbornly independent spirit, and a pride that puts even Temphisians to shame. "If you survive here," the saying goes, "you've earned the right to live exactly as you please." In remote fishing villages along frozen shores, the Beastmen do exactly that. Many men from other lands travel here to disappear; anyone willing to work hard is accepted, fur, feathers, or skin.

Helt is a dangerous land. Villages of metre-high talking ducks go rogue and plague the Dolma River as pirates, while Serpentman sorcerers work devilry on unwary travellers. Wars are common, but seldom last long. Heltish Beastmen are playfully racist, engaging in arguments and brawls to prove once and for all which is superior: horns or claws? wings or arms? hooves or feet?

THE MINOTAUR COAST

The western slopes of the Drandai Mountains, and the foothills and meadows leading down to the rocky shore there, are the lands of the Tauroids — the Minotaur. There over a quarter million of them, organized into tribes, clans, and bands of nomads. They farm the land and mine the hills, trading silver with the rest of Helt. They maintain fort towns along their southern border for trading, but they do not build cities. The Minotaur are the "gentle giants" of the Beastmen, even more so than the Ursoids (below). They heft a mean axe, though, and can out-stubborn their weight in Dwarves. When war is a necessity, a clan of 200 axe-wielding Minotaur is often the last sight an enemy will ever see.

THE GEDRIAN FORESTS

Most of Helt's Ursoids, or Bear People, dwell in the forested hills of Gedria, northwest of Lake Rund. The Bears answer to a single King, Goor Ironfur, and they are even more inclined to rural life than the Minotaur. They do build fine castles, though, and practice

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

several forms of magic. Bears are renowned for their pacifistic lifestyle, easygoing nature, and strong loyalty to both blood relatives and “extended family” — even including non-Bears. Many are surprisingly quick and agile, and travellers from across Uresia travel to the Gedrian Hills to learn “Bear-Fu” or listen to the haunting melodies of the bear flute chorus.

THE CREESH

Only the Satyrs are more numerous, and no race is more varied than the Creesh, the Cat People. Some are covered in fur, with the unmistakable features of tigers, lions, Siamese, cheetahs, panthers, tabbies, and others. Some are less bestial, blending feline qualities with more Human or Elvish features. Only the distinctive ears and expressive tails are universal. While some Creesh communities are purely of a single type (the Gehm-Kholar monastery, West of Kahlstone, is exclusively leonine), most are mixed. Ordinary, non-Humanoid talking cats are also common element in Creesh society. The stereotypical Creesh is smart, proud, and a little vain. Individuals vary, but most Creesh take delight in the racial reputation, even if they contradict it.

ADLET

The wool and grain produced in southern Helt are the principal industries of the canoids — those who Humans call “Kobolds.” They call themselves the Adlet, the Dog Men, and they are nearly as varied as the Creesh, with subraces resembling any canine from jackal to sheepdog. Despite inevitable Human stereotypes, they have no animosity towards Creesh. The Adlet vary in height from the taller end of Human norms down to just under a metre. A typical Adlet (if there is such a thing) is just a few centimetres shorter than an average Human. They are earthy, humble, and spiritual people who chase their own tails.

AVIANS

The Aracor are the bird-people. Like most beast-folk, they are Humanoid, with bestial faces. Most are covered from head to talon with feathers, but only half of them have wings.



THE ISLANDS

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Avian communities are less focused on a single Heltish region than most. Just as many prefer the forest as prefer mountains; just as many prefer the coast as prefer inlands. Most of Aracor society is very family-oriented. Small clans called “flights” are as complex as avian politics get. Their reputation is that of a no-nonsense, even humourless, people, but that may be an unfair reaction to their striking visages: whether owl-like or eagle-like or sparrow-like, their eyes are piercing and their beaks are fearsome.

THE PENINSULA OF RARE BEASTS

There are isolated Heltish communities (even entire small kingdoms), populated by man-beast hybrids seldom seen beyond Heltish lands. Sphinxes live high in the mountains, Rhinomen build forts along the northeast shores, etc.

TALL TAILS AND SHAGGY DOG JOSES

The city of Vasalt, on the southern edge of Lake Rund, is the “Heltish Jewel,” the city where no race dominates, built on the obvious ruins of a colossal pre-Skyfall city. In the shadow of ancient statues of Beastmen gods, the Heltish Lie-Crafters gather to tell outrageous falsehoods for the amusement of listeners, and for the title of Supreme Trickster.

Storytelling is the most celebrated skill in Helt, and the competition is continuous. The Supreme Trickster sits in a shaded place of honour, showered with food, attention, and challenges. Anyone may compete, and listeners vote by casting smooth stones onto one side of a large iron scale. No one has held the title for more than a week in living memory, except for Gundel Horad, an Owlman from the Minotaur Coast, who, seventy years ago, beat 600 challengers with tales told visually, simply by posing his wings. At least, that’s what some of the tale-tellers claim; there is no real proof Gundel ever existed.

COATESTOWN

The Lochrian capitol was, until recently, what anyone might expect from a port city built by Satyrs: a place devoted as passionately to the pursuit of pleasure as the pursuit of commerce. Despite Lochria’s relative insignificance in large-scale trade, it had one prosperous port’s worth of potential, and Coatestown filled that role. It is a city of wine and music and stories and what Satyrs insist was romance.

The high Lochrian mountains are riddled with the caves of dragons, however. Most sleep for decades without stirring, waking only to devour a centaur or bear or two, and then sleep again. Normally, Heltish dragons are a hazard only to those foolish enough to venture directly into their lair.

In the winter of 1373, though, an unexpected earthquake hit the southern reaches of Lochria, and four dozen dragons found their beauty sleep disturbed. They stretched their wings, yawned, and took flight, hungry and upset.

A band of heroic Centaurs defeated seven of the beasts as they cut a swath of angry destruction down through the foothills. While seven dragons down was a miracle, it was still too little, and the flight descended on Coatestown in the midst of a blizzard. Fire spouted in snowy darkness, and the dragons slaughtered hundreds, nesting in the streets, parks, and rubble they’d created. They demanded tribute and food from the survivors, and took flight to herd would-be refugees back into the city. Very few managed to escape.

They conversed with one another in “dragon song,” horrible, hissing screams that echoed in the harbour. “Let’s stay for a while,” the song said, “let’s be sated, and worshipped, and have fun killing small things.”

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Outsiders arrived to challenge the dragons, and more arrived as opportunists, eager to loot or profit from misery. The dragons killed them all without prejudice, and lost very few of their own number. They occupied the city for a full year, before finally taking wing and returning to their caves.

Now, Coatestown is hesitating, hovering over the line between recovery and confession of defeat. The city's spirit is damaged, and trade along the coast has been diffused among other, smaller ports. One of them may soon rise to take Coatestown's place, leaving the old port to die slowly of shock. In the meantime, the city is a stew of potential, and of wounds in need of healing. Many of the citizens are crying for vengeance as the only way to set things right. Someone must be sent to the caves of the dragons, to let them know once and for all that Coatestown is still alive.

RINDEN

POPULATION: 17.1 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Humans

CLIMATE: Temperate

CITIES: New Hope; Queig Harbour; Isaacsburg; Brossendam; Angel's Ford; Lukesport; Hevel; Reed Hill

SOCIETY: A complex feudal state ruled by His Majesty, King Argot I

In 1325, when the Koval Empire went mad with lust for expansion, all eyes turned to the Rindenland for salvation, despite the large distance between the two lands. Rinden, then as now, was known as a land of knights and heroes, and as a kingdom of understated prosperity. Rinden answered the call with pleasure, and when the war was over, Rinden had even more friends, more trade, and more prosperity. One of the reasons their wealth is so "understated" though, is because it is poured, steadily, onto the battlefield. Rinden — a feudal state covering thousands of leagues of green and buckling country — is a land of knightly adventure, courtly romance, and merry, lusty war.

King Argot, like every monarch of the Rindenland before, keeps his royal hall warm with the heat of argument and debate. His dukes, barons, and a shocking number of princes are encouraged to compete for royal favour. The King loves strong leaders, brave knights, unfaithful duchesses, warm ale, and dragon hunts (he has slain only two wyrms so far, but Rindenlanders agree that it's because dragons go into hiding when he is on the prowl).

Wool, war, and grain form the three pillars of the Rinden economy, though most foreign lands also favour their well-made weapons and sturdy (if somewhat slow) sailing ships. Humans find Rinden comfortably traditional, and non-Humans find it almost excessively Human. The nobles tend toward the gruff and blustery, while the wizards and princesses each favour conical hats. The halls are decked in sconces and tapestries and the dragons are usually green.

RELIGIOUS DIVIDE

Rindenland nobles are faithful to the memory of the gods, and support a powerful clergy; the pontiff stands nearly equal to the King in influence. At the lower rungs, though, most farmers and simple folk look to the guidance of village witches and wandering hermit wizards, who take advantage of the enchanted nature of many of Rinden's native grasses, flowers, and roots.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

This tension is more vital to everyone's happiness than any are likely to admit. More than any other people in Uresia, Rindenlanders thrive on taking sides. For example, according to the King's laws, Rinden is an unpleasant land for thieves, rebels, and atheists. The law makes it clear, too, that it considers those things essentially synonymous. The peasants make a game of harbouring such men in exchange for songs and stories from other lands, and thus a rogue can live happily in Rinden, if he's a little bit of the jongleur and doesn't mind sleeping on hay! Many criminals make a point of joining the Lyric Brotherhood (see below).

THE NEW HOPE FAIRE

Twice per year, the city of New Hope hosts a huge faire, and the marketplace grows to consume every street and park. The tournaments at the harvest faire are the favourite of knights both Rinden and foreign. Even some Orgaltish warriors attend, travelling months to kick up sawdust and revel in the clang of blades. Skilled pickpockets can gather enough money at each faire to live frugally till the next one, but public thief-floggings are a popular attraction, too, so it's a risk.

THE EMERALD ORDERS

Rinden is home to every flavour of knighthood imaginable, but it's famous as the original home of the Emerald Orders — knights riding powerful suits of enchanted armour, each a metre taller and several times the strength of its wearer. While Emerald Knights have become common in other parts of Uresia since the Koval War, this is still the home of the best of them, and Rinden armouries are masters of the art of Emerald Armour building. Since the magic armour is powered by magic emeralds found only in Dreed (Laöchrian emeralds can be substituted, but they're smaller and burn out more quickly), this gives the Rindenland a strong incentive to keep its wars internal, and be at peace with the world.

Most Emerald Knights are more concerned with battling demons and monsters and evil countries than with petty local wars, but when they do appear in on the common battlefield, they can dwarf all other concerns. Only the equestrian archers of Winnow consistently hold the field when facing them.

A CONSPIRACY OF SONG

Rinden is home to the Lyric Brotherhood, an old and respected guild of musicians, wandering tale-tellers, jugglers, mimes, and artistically-minded magicians — any who live to perform. Most everyone assumes the Lyric Brotherhood is just what it looks like — a friendly order of artists. Most everyone is therefore half right.

The brotherhood harbours a secret agenda, known only to initiates of the Seventh String — the highest and secret rank of guild membership. The "string" ranks are awarded by nomination, and only those of admirable skill and impeccable community standards are invited to the highest levels. As far as most guild members know, the highest is the Sixth.

The Seventh String is working to compose a god. More accurately, a goddess: Lyrica, gentle goddess of song, art, good cheer, and health. The elders of the brotherhood believe, perhaps rightly, that there is enough free godly energy loose in the world that new deities are bound to rise eventually, guided by the needs and beliefs of mortals. Thus, they collaborate to believe and promote faith in the goddess they most want. The lower strings are told tales of the goddess as if she were a lost God, and that the order works to honour her memory. It is a lie working hard to become true.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Lyrica is a true collaborative effort — any member of the Seventh String is free to invent (“discover”) new legends and songs to develop her nature. The circle maintains a consistency of theme in broad terms: the goddess is beautiful, kind, generous, fond of merriment, and prone to bless artists with wealth, health, and gratifying sex lives. It’s not difficult to find guild members eager to believe in her.

The guild has enemies, though, and its secret, while well-guarded, leaks now and again. There are no surviving gods that can fairly be called “good” or “evil” and so if Lyrica ever springs into existence there will be considerable shift in the balance of godly power. Some believe that an evil god of some kind must then appear to provide appropriate rivalry. Some are not so sure, and others are simply sure that they do not want any good or evil gods on Uresia again.

SINDRA

POPULATION: 12 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Humans

CLIMATE: Cold but otherwise mild

CITIES: Ballicazar; Elendric; Avonir; Malbarion; Nehamkin; Sevenroad; Dunrundle; Hourgohne

SOCIETY: A federation of city-states governed by His Venerable Grace, Graff, chief of the Sindran Council

The Sindran landscape is a chaotic blend of swampland, buckling hill-country, and forests (both arboreal and fungal, with mushrooms as tall and sturdy as oaks). Magic seeps from the ground in invisible rivulets and streams, soaking the island with potentially hazardous enchantment. Little surprise that it’s a realm ruled by wizards.

In the country’s youth, neighbouring kingdoms mocked Sindra as ridiculous and doomed. “Wizards,” they insisted, “serve rulers. They are not meant to be rulers.” King Voghard of Skalsa went so far as to insist that no worthy King could be literate (let alone scholarly) and survive. As ridiculous as it seems now, it was a common sentiment. The common wisdom was (is, in some places) that rulers should be warlords, and that too much thinking spoils the process. King Voghard, as it happens, died at the age of 49 when he failed to understand the instructions on a potion prepared by his court alchemist.

Sindran sport is competitive sorcery, emphasizing resourcefulness. In addition to duels of pure showmanship (where flashy illusions, noisy battle magic, and dramatic weather spells dominate), Sindra regulates the Thuriad, a kind of “Sorcerer’s Olympics” where wizards compete in the face of challenges devised by the ruling council. Every wizard must accept the same challenges as the others, but the nature of the sport varies each year. Past tasks have included: extinguishing a forest fire; crossing a deadly chasm; retrieving an orb of clear crystal from the bottom of a deep lake, and subduing an enraged bear. The council sits in judgement, awarding points for style, showmanship, originality, and efficiency (some win their events by using no magic at all, which the council regards as the ideal goal of a truly resourceful wizard).

The Thuriad runs in three rounds. In the first two, competitors face the council’s challenges individually, with the top 10 performers allowed in the second round, and only the top five graduating to the third. In the third round, the five premier wizards face a single challenge together, and may work in concert, or competitively, as they choose (they are still

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

judged individually). One year, the final five were tasked with rescuing a cargo of 700 rare books from a burning, sinking ship surrounded by monsters. In another, they were asked to resolve an emotional family conflict damaging the royal court of Dreed! Last year's winners worked together so well they formed a band of Loreseekers, currently delving into the mysteries of the Troll Lands.

Ballicazar, Sindra's capital city, is a "model city" of broad avenues decorated with trees, painted houses, and dozens of competing centres of scholarship. There are few places on Uresia with as much collected magical wisdom in one place, and none so organized or safe. Fewer than a dozen apprentices die each year, split roughly between alchemical explosions and demonic assault (in some cases, "split roughly" is the literal cause of death).

"Black" and "white" magic are equally welcome in Sindra, where the distinction is regarded as artificial. Sindra's laws are as strict as any involving murder and other unsavoury practices, but any study or practice that crosses no such lines is encouraged, and the summoning of demons is a daily occurrence.

THE LORESEEKERS

Sindran coffers sponsor this solemn order of scholarly knights, but the Loreseekers owe their ultimate loyalty to knowledge. Many are wizards, but not all. Each is a scholar and a master at arms, travelling the world working to assemble the truth from what pieces may be found. Many retire to one of Sindra's hundreds of monasteries, to spend their declining years recording their exploits and sifting through what they have learned.

WINNOW

POPULATION: 5.1 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Humans with a large demon or demon-kin population

CLIMATE: Temperate/Cool

CITIES: Localona; Medra

SOCIETY: Independent feudal state of the Rindenland, ruled by His Majesty, King Slanc

Outwardly, Winnow seems a friendly part of the Rindenland — an old kingdom of cool meadows and pleasant hills, famed for magnificent archery, dusky wine, and good tobacco. For centuries this was so, but that soil has nurtured a seed of evil that may soon erupt into a deadly wave of darkness.

100 years ago Lady Ephemeran Ocada, wife of Duke Thundercloud Ocada, took up demonology as a hobby, and began summoning demon lovers into her boudoir while the Duke busied himself with archery drills. Her demons were very Human in appearance: handsome and dark and respectful. She never bothered learning the spell to banish them back to whence they came, and thus any demon who satisfied her (and they all did) was rewarded with freedom, left to wander among mortals and build a mortal life, or to return home, as they pleased. Many chose to stay, both manlike demons and womanlike demons, and became a part of Winnow communities with little trouble.

As Lady Ephemeran grew older, she recorded her methods and taught them to her daughters (many of whom were half Demon, with brilliant red or deep blue hair) and to other noblewomen, who were eager for distraction from the tedium of courtly life.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Over a course of years, the private practices of the witches took hold. Winnow gained an impressively large population of demons and demon-kin, with only the descendants of Lady Ephemera's "sewing circle" fully aware of it. Most of the demons were kind and honest — or at least no less so than typical Humans — but some, conjured by less careful methods than the Lady herself used, were more insidious, dark, and ambitious.

The current King, Queen, and half of the royal court (the half that runs things) are demons or demonspawn of the less kindly sort, and the other half is beginning to catch on. It is a delicate and pivotal time, complicated by the demonic heritage of many of the good citizens of Winnow. If King Slanc and his kind can turn the Human nobles' growing fear of him into a fear of all demonkind, he can divide and conquer his own kingdom, turning it on itself. If the Humans are wise enough to see through the tricks of Slanc and ally with Ephemera's nicer progeny, Slanc will be in trouble.

Right now, however, Slanc is one of the few beings entirely aware of the situation, and working to have things his way. Meanwhile, the Human nobles are just beginning to realize that they live in a divided nation. The good demons are still afraid to reveal themselves. Some do not even know their demonic heritage.

SLINGS AND ARROWS

Winnow is the renowned home of the Yellow Maple Bow — a composite longbow made of bonded wood from the native Yellow Maple Tree. In a master's hands, the bow can skewer an eagle from half a league away in a stiff breeze. Winnow's competition of choice is, of course, archery tournaments — both traditional target-shoots and more elaborate duels of trick-shot prowess (characters engaging in the latter should provide both inventive descriptions and the Skills to back them up!)

YEM

POPULATION: 2.8 million (living, with extras)

COMPOSITION: Mostly Humans

CLIMATE: Cold, damp, icy

CITIES: The Royal Necropolis; Snow Harbour

SOCIETY: A dozen quarrelling Necromancers rule Yem, each jealously attending to their own lands and working to undermine one another; their "king" is the embodied mortal avatar of Death itself, the sad and gentle Dread Prince

Yem is a narrow, rocky kingdom at the remote northern edge of Uresia, a twisted strip of basalt mountains painted in evergreen forests and deep drifts of snow. No one in Yem regards the Skyfall as a myth, because here, the piece of the godly realm that fell to earth is very obvious. In the Age of Gods, Yem was the realm of the dead. Very little has changed.

A LOVE STORY

62 years ago, a young and beautiful prince lived in Yem. His name was Orlist, and he was the son of the Necromancer, Desarak. Though Desarak was as cruel as any of the Necromancers, the villagers adored his son, who came into town often to drink and sing at the tavern. His hair was long and white, and every girl in the village dreamed about him.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Desarak considered his son's affection for commoners a disgusting fancy of youth, but assumed it would pass in time. When Orlist came to him and explained that he was in love with Lan, a delicate commoner-girl who worked as a seamstress in his mother's house, Desarak was less inclined to dismiss it as a phase. He demanded that Orlist begin behaving as the son of a Necromancer should, and Orlist declined with a silent exit from the room.

The tension between Desarak and Prince Orlist shook ugly ripples on the calm pool of Desarak's household. After a month of it, Lan contracted a wasting disease that would certainly take her life. Orlist confronted his father, who claimed innocence and feigned sympathy, since (after all) he was certain that his son's "vulgar distraction" would be as cold as snow come wintertime. Orlist left his father's house in tears, and took Lan into the mountains with him to live alone.

No one realized they were pawns (not innocent pawns, but pawns still) in a play repeating itself from centuries past. Malor, Yem's shadowy Dread King, was pulling all the strings, nudging events this way and that from the Throne of Skulls at the centre of the kingdom. He had ruled for 400 years, and craved release. He had chosen young Orlist to succeed him, and the rite of passage for the avatar of death is a simple one: he must share intimately in the death of one he loves.

Poems and songs describing Lan's death are ubiquitous in modern Yem, but most are fanciful. Only a few truths are known for certain: they were alone in the mountains for weeks; Lan made shrouds for both of them to keep warm, and when she finally expired, Orlist screamed for nearly a day. The echoes ran down into the valley and chilled the soul of the villagers. Even Desarak was terrified.

The next morning, the beautiful young prince arrived in his village, draped in his shroud, carrying the body of Lan. Malor, the Dread King, was waiting for him, as was Thalon, the ancient ice-dragon that serves as the royal mount. When Thalon let Orlist climb on his back, the news spread immediately: Orlist was the new ruler. The Dread King had passed his throne to the Dread Prince. Desarak, who had spent years plotting a path into the good graces of Malor, poisoned himself in frustrated grief, and Orlist was there to reap his soul.

THE RULING CLASS

In warm, smoky halls and high, sinister towers, the Necromancers bicker and plot and hate. Each Necromancer rules from a large town (only Snow Harbour is large enough to be called a "city") and controls a region of 500-700 square leagues via a network of governor-priests and taxmen. The largest city in Yem is the Royal Necropolis, an independent city ruled solely by the Dread Prince.

The sorcerer-dukes of Yem are not the thin, sour men so frequently depicted in Temphisian tavern-tales. Those are mostly distorted tales of the Dread Prince himself, or of Urax, a sorcerer who died decades ago while seeking a treasure rumoured to lie in Orgalt. Most Yemite necromancers are fat, bellowing, vital men, literally bloated with life force as a side effect of their sinister arts; they are siphons of living energy. Bogho, the master of Snow Harbour, is so large that he carries his apprentice on his shoulder, and he once laughed so hard he split the hull of a caravel.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

LIFE AMONG THE DEAD

The hamlets and villages of Yem are normal, or at least much more normal than foreign visitors expect. Yemites tend their goats, grow their roots, chop firewood, and try to ignore the excesses of the Necromancers, while dodging the fallout of their power struggles. Most of the people who die in Uresia do not travel to Yem in spirit afterward, but some do. Just as many living pilgrims make the journey every year, in hopes of locating the ghost of a dead wife, or parent, or lover, or child. Those quests are typically failures. No one can guess why some spirits migrate here and others do not, but the ghosts of Yem wander the deep woods and mountains, and keep to themselves unless summoned. The Necromancers harvest them as fuel for their wicked magical machines. Some of the spirits in Yem are absorbed into sculptures of ice and snow.

SNOWMEN

Thalon, the royal guardian of Yem (page 23), is literally an ice dragon — a dragon-shaped sculpture carved from snow and hardened by years of cold into semi-opaque, blue-white ice. Thalon's claws and teeth are crystal clear, and he glows with a soft inner light. Thalon is a ghost, summoned to occupy an icy form.

The technique of providing a "sympathetic" vessel to summon a ghost is such a simple art that it has been outlawed. Even the Necromancers (especially the Necromancers) are forbidden to toy with it, lest they pridefully attempt to create a rival to Thalon. The Yemites who violate this law every winter are young children, who run into the woods when their parents are not watching, and build snowmen. This seems to be a talent peculiar to Yemites, who can achieve the same effect in foreign lands as well.



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

URESIA

The Grave of Heaven

Days by Caravel

Days by Road



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN



URÉSIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

URÉSIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

THE ISLANDS

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

BIRAH

POPULATION: 5.4 million

COMPOSITION: Dominated by Elves, with a few Humans, Beastmen and others

CLIMATE: Temperate/Cool, prone to fog and rain

CITIES: Danion's Path; Harpertown; Laughingwater; Disera; Lan

SOCIETY: Single Elvish kingdom, ruled secretly by the bestial agents of the Primal One

Birah is an Elvish land, cool and foggy, past the northern borders of the Koval Empire. It is the only kingdom ever to free itself from imperial rule, but it did so at a heavy price.

If not for Koval, Birah and the Volenwood would be nearly identical — kingdoms of deep forests and few cities, where Elves play at harping and live in harmony with the world. Instead, they are stark opposites. Birah is unmistakably Elvish — the cities smell of woodsmoke and wine, and it's difficult to tell the trees and buildings apart. It is, though, a kingdom as urban as any human land, and the Elves here do not live in harmony with nature; they are slaves to it.

Decades of harsh slavery under the boot of Koval put a hard edge on the Elves of Birah. They are serious, dangerous, and proud. Despite their delicate appearance, they include among them the masters of the world's deadliest forms of open-hand fighting. They are accustomed to killing, and to being killed.

Human poets are in love with Birah. They write sonnets praising her gnarled oaks and foggy riverbanks. Behind the trees, though, and deep within the rivers, monsters lurk. In Birah, the monsters also rule.

Intelligent animals are common in Uresia, though not everyone knows it. In places like Birah, where wild magic is thick in the air, they are almost the norm, and the Elves and beasts have been friends since before recorded history. Much of Elf-lore is really beast-lore: secret healing herbs; the sorcery inherent in music; the secrets beneath the roots of trees.

These skills brought Birah respect in the eyes of the Koval Emperors, but Birah was still a slave state. As the years wore on and Koval grew old and bitter, conditions in Birah grew worse. In 1308, Madwoman Voriis ascended to the Koval throne, and her insatiable appetite for glory consumed lives by the thousands. She sent armies into the Elvish woods with torches and blades, to insure that Birah would kneel at her command. Cities were gutted and burned. The Elves begged their rulers, a council of noble elders, to rescue them.

The elders went into the forest to confer with the most secret beings that dwell there: ancient demons of lust and hunger and rage, avatars of one of the surviving gods (see page 6). They begged for aid, knowing that the beast-demons could teach them the secrets of animal deadliness in combat, if only they could convince them that the beasts, too, were now in danger.

The primal forces were unmoved by Elvish sentiment, but proposed an exchange. From that day forward, the beasts of the forest would command Birah as their own, and monsters would roam free, feeding and sporting as they pleased without hindrance. If a monster felt an urge for the taste of maiden flesh, for example, it would be greeted in the town with fearful respect, not fiery magic and clouds of arrows. In exchange, the demons said, they would protect the Elves fiercely as their subjects, and teach them the secret truths of monsters, including the magic fighting-styles of the deadliest beasts, both living and long lost.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The elders were shocked, but without the power to resist Koval, millions of Elves might die that summer. When the beast-demons made it plain that they intended to feast on the elders themselves to seal the bargain, the Elf rulers quietly accepted their fate. The “Wild Pact” was signed with a rake of claws into noble flesh, and a howl of liberty rose in the throat of the forest.

No common Elves were eaten that year. The beasts busied themselves gorging on nobles, and then on Koval soldiers. The deeper shadows of the woods spilled forth more fur and tooth and ire than any Elf had ever suspected hid there. The Koval war machine was driven out of Birah in a wave of humiliation and blood.

The primal demons spared the lives of just a few dozen elves of royal blood, and chose a young girl to be their figurehead — the princess who would speak for Birah to the world.

SPORT

Birah is one of the few Uresian kingdoms without any kind of “national sport.” The Arbiters have little interest in a realm dominated by the Primal One, so they are not present to inspire the same level of competitive spirit as elsewhere. The Birah zeal for combat is entirely due to the years of servitude to Koval.

UNUSUAL SIGHTS

The city of Laughingwater is a foggy maze of great oaks and natural waterfalls, lit by thousands of hanging lanterns.

BIRAH MAGIC

Birah sorcery focuses on the martial, both flashy battlefield spells and magic-enhanced personal combat. The Duandralin are Birah’s elite warriors, masters of the “monster styles” — the enchanted open-hand fighting techniques taught to Birah by their primal masters. Some Duandralin can even change shape.



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

UNUSUAL DANGERS

Beyond Birah's borders, the Wild Pact is unknown. Consequently, foreign heroes can make the mistake of being too heroic, rushing off to do battle when a beast wanders into town to feed. This is a dangerous mistake; the Hidden Court deals harshly with any trespass on the Pact. Recently, an entire village was savaged, their bones left to mould in the mists, because they harboured a Human warrior who dared to rescue a young girl from a ravenous demon-wolf. The Human, a Temphisian treasure-hunter named Glarn, escaped the carnage with a few villagers in tow, but they have not been heard from since. It is likely they never left the forest alive.

RUINS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Along the southern border of the kingdom, there are the burned remains of several outposts destroyed in the war with Koval. They are vine-choked and difficult to see, now, being rapidly reclaimed by the forest. No significant ruins of the Skyfall have been discovered in Birah.

BORU

POPULATION: 3.2 million

COMPOSITION: Roughly two-thirds Human, with large minority populations of Elves and others, including many Satyrs and Minotaur, and Troll villages in the Gandi uplands.

CLIMATE: Warm/Temperate, with short but intense seasons of rainstorms

CITIES: Borumaga; Synsa; Toshish; Votus

SOCIETY: A tightly knit confederation of principalities, bound to the rule of Shah Mezaan, the High Dreamer

The Boru principalities cover two large islands at the southern edge of Uresia — Noitan (the larger of the two) and Gandi. Their major ports are each within two days' sail of Koval, its closest neighbour. Koval used to invade here regularly in the days of the Great Empire, but never with any long-term success. Boru has a strong navy and even stronger magic, and the Shah is careful to make no enemies. Most non-Boru think of Boru as exotic and distant — a place of silk banners and shining minarets, where luxuries and fine rarities come from. They are correct.

In summertime, the Boru breezes smell like spices, and tremble with the music of gongs. In winter, dancers gather in the snow to weave spells with their bodies. The Boru value truth, so long as it is dramatic. They look for it in clouds of incense and they celebrate it in atonal chants. The Koval regard the Boru as self-justifying hedonists; the Boru regard themselves as the only truly civilized kingdom, and as bold seekers of truth and beauty.

Boru society is stratified, but with many alternate paths from rags to riches. Sorcery and scholarship are encouraged even among slaves. Everyone is expected to better themselves, and those who do not "deserve their lot" and justify their low standing, according to Boru law. Beneath the Shah there are viziers, princes, royal consorts, saint-sages, ennobled wizards, and dozens of others with powers temporal and otherwise. While a Boru lawyer could explain which title is technically above each other, those laws are observed most often in the breach. In Boru, influence is an open game, and the fickle Shah is the Game Master.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

SPORT

Young Boru work to master exotic, sensual, magical dances, crisply snapping ankle-bells and subtly swaying torsos to inspire, titillate, and hypnotize. Sindra gave Boru special recognition in 1291 for the development of these arts, which the Sindran Council proclaimed true “high magic,” since it blurs so perfectly the perceived divide between inspired skill and sorcery. There are four Great Contests each year; each are judged by Mezaan himself. It’s dangerous to win too dramatically, though — some winners (both young men and women) receive an invitation to the Shah’s harem. To refuse such an honour is an insult worthy of a public execution.

The elderly Boru have their own sport: philosophical debate. The Great Contest happens once every five years, in accordance with complex lunar cycles. Learned heads gather by the hundreds, a murmuring sea of wispy grey hair and shining bald pates. Prior victors judge the arguments, which must combine passion, reason, and new insights. Losers are shamed, and often set sail for other lands, or commit suicide. The winners are the most revered men and women in Boru, and want for nothing.

UNUSUAL SIGHTS

Not far from Toshish is the Hangdesh River Gorge, a deep chasm that is home to warring flocks of mini-dragons — dog-sized creatures with wingspans of just over four metres. During the late summer, the gorge fills with smoke as the creatures battle for mates; a red haze colours the sky for several days afterward.

BORU MAGIC

Boru sorcery is the magic of the senses. They practice subtle arts of illusion and experience, for trickery, education, and for thrills. As the Sindrans recognized, Boru magic is a broad set of disciplines emphasizing real skill, not just crude manipulation of magical energies. If a man can be hypnotized with a sway of a woman’s hips, they reason, it is much more sensible (and appealing) to get a woman to sway than to spin a shining coin or pump a room full of drugged smoke. On the other hand, the Boru love to overdo things, so a woman, a coin, and a roomful of drugged smoke is the most likely path they will take if the resources are available.

UNUSUAL DANGERS

The warm southern waters of the divide wet Boru’s shores, and they’re brimming with creatures that coil around ships to crush them, and even a few that can crawl onto land. The late spring storms, though, kill more sailors, without the help of any monsters save the rain-sprites — tiny demons that ride thunderstorms and profit from the misery of mortals. Most travellers are cautious in the rural hills of Gandi, but the Trolls there are peaceful, and some even read. Anyone with a purse of gold should beware in Boru’s cities — the merchants are as wily as the ones in Dreed, and they work in clouds of intoxicating smoke, too.

RUINS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Travellers go to Boru for the exotic atmosphere, the rare spices and drugs, the unusual alchemy, and the intoxicating dances. Delves go there seeking the particular ruins of the gods of lust and sensuality, and rumours about a gateway to the ruins of Baltaan (a godly city-state described in the scrolls as one big happy orgy) that revealed itself last year somewhere in southern Noitan.

KOVAL (KOVAL EMPIRE)

POPULATION: 18 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Humans

CLIMATE: Temperate/Warm

CITIES: Drova Nor; Stokai; Celis Zora; Natra; Reva; Nivari; Centala; Lemna; Kle Vosta

SOCIETY: A single large kingdom ruled by His Majesty, King Molandi II

Some villains are obvious about their nature. For example, an evil woman may be tall, sharply dressed, and carry herself with a haughty demeanour. She may laugh in a high pitch, with zeal. In Koval, it is not uncommon to be handed a fresh apple pie by a woman uncomfortable in her apron, stooping to appear shorter, and barely suppressing that same cackle. It's not a trick; the pie is safe, and probably very tasty. Koval is a land of villains, trying to quit.

At its height, the Koval Empire included modern Birah, Boru, the eastern edge of Temphis, and every small island within two days' sail of Koval lands. The first emperors built Koval from a slurry of inspired leadership, clever management of valuable resources, and military might. It was an era of corruption and cruelty, driven by the madness of many of the rulers.

Mercifully, those days are gone. The Koval fleets and armies are still the largest in Uresia, but the days of the mighty empire — and the horrors it brought to the world — are in the past. What is left is a vast kingdom trying to repair its reputation, lest it collapse into poverty (or worse, resist poverty by resorting to violent expansion).

After the collapse of broad Imperial rule in 1352, Koval avoided further damage by executing their mad Empress, burning her to ashes, and adopting a traditional monarchy, led by a popular royal family. This had the desired effect: it calmed both the distressed and war-weary populace and the kingdoms abroad, who had been very near the point where only Koval's extinction would satisfy them.

The new royal family has ruled for nearly thirty years without dire incident, and Koval works to regain its former respect and admiration, if not its dominance.

Even in decline, Koval is the largest of the kingdoms of Uresia, and the most urbanized. Every point west and most points north of Drova Nor are well-settled land, a network of over 200 sizeable towns, nine cities, and countless villages.

EAST OF DROVA NOR

Beyond the urban tangles of mainstream Koval, into the hills and mountains, the cultures of old Edar and Celembria (two kingdoms absorbed in centuries past) still leave their mark, and the country is much sparser and more rural. The Celembrian battlefields are where Koval lost Birah entirely (see page 28).

The eastern countryside feels a lot more like Rinden or Dreed than Koval. There are no twisted citadels being rededicated as museums, and no magical superweapons being dismantled for spare parts ... just roads and streams and chimney-smoke and blue skies.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

If Koval is saved from its past, salvation will likely begin here, with the people Koval conquered, but never really converted. Population is on the rise here, especially in the southern counties of Edar. Many Kovali are migrating here in hopes that the clear air and change of scenery will put them in touch with a better way of life. The results have been mixed; it's hard for some of the families here to extend their traditional hospitality to those who treated them so miserably for generations, and a career as a mad wizard's crony does little to prepare one for a new life milking cows. Still, everyone is doing their best to make it work.

EMPTY GRAVES

As more sorcerers begin to accept the Sindrans' theory that Uresia is built on the ruins of Heaven (see page 5), Koval is grasping the opportunity to appeal for sympathy. Yem is gloomy because it's built on death, Koval sorcerers reason, and thus Koval was a greedy, corrupt superpower because it's built on the graves of a veritable pantheon of conquest, madness, and abuse-the-servants gods. They even went so far as to name them, write histories about them, and hold annual "funeral parades" beseeching the ghosts to lie down, rest, and let Koval be the sweet, loveable kingdom of fairytale joy it's destined to be. Eager for a new holiday, thousand attended and cheered, but nobody believed.

While Koval almost certainly has some ruined elements of heaven beneath it, and the Primal One itself claims the north end of the island, no clear evidence of active god-ghosts has been found. Many secretly suspect the horrible truth: Koval was the way it was because it was run by power-hungry, immoral villains — and its long road to redemption will depend on a comparable record of charity, honesty and fairness. There seems to be no scapegoat.

LAÖCH

POPULATION: 7.8 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Dwarves

CLIMATE: Bitter Cold, Damp

CITIES: Blind Owl City; Dingrade; Driev; Nauzen; Becker's Forge; Valt; Manner Rook; Anvil

SOCIETY: A unified feudal state, ruled by His Majesty, King Verin Bellhammer IV

The ancient Dwarves were railroad builders; the ancestral homelands reunited and strengthened by carefully engineered networks of iron, wood, and polished brass. The twisted ruins of the old railways rest among weeds and snowdrifts in the Troll Lands, now, but in 1261, the Bongdurum Clan of Becker's Forge decided the time was right to revive the old art. It was a prosperous time, and the sentiment flared into a rail-building frenzy that transformed the face of Laöchrian travel. Within twelve years, a handful of competing "rail barons" had restored what was lost, and the Dwarves were once again shipping goods by the trainload, and pampering themselves in luxury overland passages.

Dwarvish trains are squat, brassy, ornate and loud. They belch thick clouds of smoke and rattle and scream along at terrific speeds. Dwarves love them, and engine drivers are often regarded as heroes — maniacal, laughing heroes with bellowing voices, sooty faces and dangerous addiction to speed.

Laöch's trains create the traveller's first (and only, if the weather is bad and the engineer drunk) impression of Laöch. The second impression comes from the mountains they connect.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The sooty, greasy windows of a Dwarf passenger car affords a spectacular view of Uresia's most dramatic vertical slopes, each covered by banks of snow, thick evergreen woods, or Dwarfish towns. The aboveground portions of Blind Owl City are on such a steep incline that it's possible in some places for clumsy walker to fall several blocks.

The high King, Verin Bellhammer IV, rules Laöch. Beneath him are a tangled lattice of barons, dukes, princes and clan elders. Dwarves like to be left alone to complete their work, and hold "respect for boundaries" as a high ideal. This, combined with their passion for ornate and functional craft work, makes for a government that works well at the local level, and looks good at the higher ones. Dwarves like it that way. Clan elders make most of the decisions; the King's primary duty is to make sure the army works and the rail barons' squabbles are not interrupting commerce.

THE CHARCOAL KINGS

Most Laöchrian soldiers are sturdy infantry — chainmail-suited, wielding battleaxes and wicked stone picks with arms strengthened by long hours working masonry or digging tunnels. Such warriors are fearsome enough and most Dwarf soldiers are the equal of any Troll in battle. Even more impressive are the High King's elite forces of enchanted warriors: the Rego Corunda, or "Charcoal Kings."

Much of Laöchrian magic is fire- and heat-oriented. The Charcoal Kings, in addition to being masters of their huge axes, are practitioners of an ancient sorcerous discipline of smoke. The Kings smear their faces with runes and sigils of soot, and bathe in fire. When they are sufficiently trained, they can become smoke, marching from mountaintop to mountaintop along the slow Laöchrian breezes, and passing into high castles at will.

THE NEW CAPITOL

King Bellhammer adopted Blind Owl City as Laöch's capitol recently, in 1332. The former seat was the smaller, more sedate city of Dingrade, near the southern coast. Bellhammer wanted his throne higher the mountains, and closer to the excitement at the heart of his realm. Blind Owl City is precisely that — the largest and busiest place in Laöch — and more than two-thirds of it is underground.

Like many Dwarf cities, Blind Owl ("Ganrodor" — the Dwarfish word for the white cave owl) is built both on and in the mountain slopes. A visitor can stroll along the sunny cobbles of Coalmarket Street, then take a turn into a shady tunnel mouth that leads to Beggar's Alley — a tunnel (one of hundreds) lined with houses, shops and stalls, just like an outdoor avenue. The tunnel streets are lit by the abundant spore-balls that drift on the warm currents of air in the caves. Since these phosphorescent oddities are free-floating, some streets are dimmer or brighter by the whim of the breezes. The spores are too fragile to trap; nets slung from the tunnel ceilings serve only to slow their migration.

The tunnels are warm, smoky, and noisy — conditions beloved by Dwarves. Consequently, most prosperous Dwarf towns spend more effort growing inward and downward than outward. At first glance, Blind Owl looks small to outsiders, but a stroll into the deep, criss-crossing undermountain lanes changes that.

ORGALT

POPULATION: 3.5 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Dwarves

CLIMATE: Icy

CITIES: Orgalt has several “town-scale” urban settlements but only one real city: Borindor

SOCIETY: Hundreds of clans owing fealty to His Majesty, King Thorvald IV; highly stratified, with a centuries-old tradition of slavery

Seven hundred years ago, Orgalt was beautiful and rich. It is still beautiful — a sub-arctic island of high, but surprisingly gentle, mountain slopes, deep conifer woods, and elevated volcanic plateaux. Orgalt is a Dwarvish kingdom — the oldest in Uresia — and much of it is primitive. The Dwarves of Orgalt are “old school” Dwarves, making sturdy homes in the sides of hidden valleys, singing in smoky meadhalls, and carving stone. The grand palaces and elaborate tunnels are ageing, now, because Orgalt’s wealth has faded. Most of Orgalt’s Dwarves think little of a world beyond their local clan concerns, and concerns means “feuds” more often than not. Much of the back country is lawless, and many regions are very poor.

Before the rise of Laöch, Orgalt was the centre of Dwarvish civilization, and ships sailed the extra days and weeks to get there to trade for emeralds, silver, fine weapons, and tools. Laöch, though, had finer emeralds still, plentiful gold as well as silver, and easier access to the shipping lanes. It wasn’t long until the colonies grew into a kingdom that eclipsed the homeland, and Orgalt began to suffer. For a long time, the whole realm slid back into a dark age, with clan wars erupting in every valley. Sparks fanned to flame by the loss of trade and compounded by a series of particularly deadly winters. Orgalt had become accustomed to luxury and splendour, and did not adjust well to lean pantries. When the weather shifted and the root crops began to grow again, the same blessed warmth cursed Orgalt by filling the northern seas with icebergs loosened from the glacial shelves of the northern Troll Lands. Trade became permanently re-routed to the Laöchrian ports, and Orgalt was left to trade indirectly, through Laöch.

Orgalt society is strictly stratified but not complex: There are ordinary dwarves, noble dwarves, and nameless dwarves (slaves). Without proof of name and heritage, slavery is assumed by law, making cross-country travel potentially hazardous, keeping clan boundaries strong and paranoid. Many a slave folktale features a hapless noble, doomed to a life of slavery when happenstance robs him of his credentials, and adventure puts calluses on his hands (“proving” that he can’t possibly be a noble).

MAD SCHEMES

Determined to regain trade-equality with the Volenwood and Laöch, Orgalt works hard to sponsor “questing scholars,” in the mould of Sindra’s Loreseekers. The questing scholars of Orgalt, however, are all Dwarves, and all owe fealty to Orgalt. It is their solemn duty to learn all they can, and to bring that learning back home. They are charged to seek out any secret, science, magic, or craft that might revitalize their homeland. They answer to King Thorvald directly.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The questing scholars are heroic souls devoted to their task, but their King is a hard Dwarf to please. Two scholars, Runi and Vungwalden, returned to the Iron Citadel after six years of wandering to deliver the message: give freedom to the slaves and they'll work to prove themselves, and Orgalt will thrive. Thorvald had them executed and given a slave's burial, sending waves of cold shock into the order. The message was clear enough, but the implications were sobering, and most questing scholars elected to put it out of their minds as if it were a bad dream. A small number quit, and a few of those joined the Loreseekers.

TEMPHIS

POPULATION: 5.4 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Humans, with some villages of monsters

CLIMATE: Cool/Temperate

CITIES: Shadow River; Fogport; Sword Mountain; Mooncove; Skull Basin; Gryphon Rock; Clawspout; Blind Deacon; Hotestown

SOCIETY: A collection of semi-independent duchies, theoretically ruled by Grand Duke Ropha IX

Even the most pristine wilderness on Temphis carries an aura of danger and sin. There are flowers in the hills with aphrodisiac perfume, and coiling vines that can trap an ox, and tear it in two. Each lagoon and forest glade has an air of inviting secrecy, but an equally pervasive air of dread.

For centuries, Temphis was left alone by civilization. Ships sailed around it, leaving it as a haven for desperate criminals and mad wizards. Over time, its reputation grew to ridiculous proportions, and it was centuries before civilized Uresia was populous enough to even consider colonizing it. The Dreed Republic finally did in 524, and seven years later, declared they had no claim on it, since their governors had been returned to them in tiny wooden casks — three per governor. The men and women of Dreed prided themselves on being fairly corrupt, and were shocked that their colonists took a turn for the worse when exposed to Temphis. The civilized world gave a collective shudder, and turned away. The notion was in the air by then that Temphis should be tamed, and the Dreed colonists did not need governors to do it.

Temphis did, eventually, decide they needed Dukes. More accurately, enough men grabbed enough land with enough force and started naming themselves "Duke" that it became the title of choice. The taming of the mad island was slow, and kept everybody busy with a healthy combination of war and supernatural adventure. When there were so many Dukes that it was troublesome, and when trade with the neighbours became a real possibility, things turned very ugly before they got organized. When the smoke cleared, the Dukes had maintained most of their sovereignty by naming a Grand Duke to handle large-scale affairs and organize the fleet and national armies. He rules from the Duchy of Keyroe.

In time, Temphis' central location was finally exploited to its full potential, and it became the hub of Uresian trade. Shadow River, on the north coast of the island, is virtually the middle of the world — a metropolitan stew of everything Uresia has to offer, in the moving shadows of the flying islands (see page 75). Meantime, the rest of Temphis is, despite the "civilized" commercial power of the coastal cities, still very much a half-tamed land of mad magic and monsters, and the Temphisians would have it no other way.

SKULL BASIN

The “hidden port” along the southern coast is the port of call for traders from Koval, and the pride of Duke Lederel, master of the Tanglewood, the forest of the banshees, one of the most treacherous regions in a treacherous land.

For years, the Tanglewood — home to no more than a few hundred brave souls, then — was, like Temphis itself in the old days: a nominal, but unexplored, portion of the Duchy of Hote. Duke Lederel’s grandfather was a heroic soldier in the Hote army, and requested that the region be given to him as his reward for a lifetime of exceptional service. The Duke was happy to be rid of it, and no one expected that would grow to be a powerful rival Duchy.

Despite rumours of demonic pacts or a secret key to the forest mysteries, Lederel simply tamed the wood by force of will and arms, over the 59 remaining years of his life. By the time Lederel II stood to take his father sword, Skull Basin was a town of five thousand people, and even the wild hills deep within the wood had well-marked trails. Today, Skull Basin is a city three times that size and the fifth largest in Temphis.

The monsters and horrors of the banshee woods were never slain by Lederel and his progeny — they were conquered. There are entire villages, here, of werewolves and of spirits, and of workaday murderous thugs. They all pay their taxes, though, and rulers across Uresia are beginning to consider Lederel’s duchy as a kind of model for future governmental perfection.

THE VOLENWOOD (ANANDRIEL)

POPULATION: 8.7 million

COMPOSITION: Mostly Elves

CLIMATE: Cool to cold, mild

CITIES: Archer’s Rest; Corinne

SOCIETY: Assorted kingdoms and principalities and others, living in peace

Anandriel was named, some say, for a princess who lived before the Skyfall. Most Elves believe that before the gods went to war, the Elves were unified race: an aristocratic people, adored by Humanity. The gods, they claim, were Elves who had achieved divinity. Legends say that Anandriel, a fair and a delicate princess, was to be accepted among the gods of beauty and love, and that the gods fought, ultimately, over who would have the honour of escorting her to her heavenly domain. The war raged, the sky fell, and the gods died. Every race has its own version of the Skyfall legend, but the Elvish tale is unique; it’s the only version that does not mention other races.

The Elves’ fondness for the legend is rooted in the melancholy beneath the surface of all things Elvish. Their wines are light and sweet; their laughter inspires some Humans to song; their forests are deep, primal, mysterious and inviting. Beneath the Elvish delicacy and love for beauty, however, lays a deep sadness resulting from the knowledge that beautiful and delicate things can easily die. Elves, ironically, are an exception, avoiding sickness and age for centuries before they expire, watching the world die, re-grow, and die again around them.

The preservation of beauty is an Elvish ideal, a racial urge to challenge their fear of the inevitable. This fear, and their determination to fight against it, drives the creative powers of Uresia’s most beautiful people.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The Elvish lands are predominantly forested hills, and both the canopy of trees and the undergrowth is thicker, greener, and seemingly more ancient than anywhere on Uresia. The Volenwood — the name the Elves give to the entire “living forest” of their land — is vital and primordial, a universe of mist, vine, thorn, and leaf. It is, as many suspect, the final resting place of many of the gods the Elves once adored: gods of growing things, gods of the hunt, gods of getting lost forever (and not minding).

The Elves have only two cities despite their great numbers. Corinne, on the shores of Blizzard Lake, is their trading door with the Dwarves of Laöch. Despite a playful racist rivalry, the Elves and Dwarves have a strong mutual respect that they express with centuries of peaceful borders, rather than explicit admission.

Archer's Rest, the larger city, is their seaport window to the rest of the world, the “face” presented to Humans and others abroad. A large, planned city of fountains, trees, temples, and broad avenues, it conveys the Elvish aesthetic well despite being a contradiction to it. Most Elves grow weary of city life after a very short time. The exceptions, out of Anandriel's millions of souls, are just numerous enough to fill two cities and handful of scattered towns.

KINGDOMS AND COMMUNITIES

Anandriel society baffles most Human visitors. There are, apparently, no peasants and no rulers. Most Humans, it seems as though the Elves are one, big, relatively humble aristocracy, which makes about as much sense to Humans as would a ship crewed entirely by officers!

Beyond the cities, the truth is closer to the opposite extreme: most Elves live in modest homes (trees and barrows in the deep woods, simple villages in some areas), and live close to the soil like most peasants, but with an elegance that Human nobles have literally fallen over one another in an effort to imitate. Elves bring the qualities of noble glamour to their huts and barrows.

But there are Elvish monarchs and Elf princes and even Elf generals. They lived down paths no Human can find without invitation, in palaces of thorns and roses, on terraces of wildflowers, by fountains of rainwater. The Elf kingdoms of the Volenwood are many, and they only occasionally squabble. Elves are typically too busy creating beauty, and pining over its loss, to stomach war.

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTERS AND MAGIC



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

All normal *BESM* character creation rules apply to Uresian adventurers. 35 or 40 Character Points is recommended for typical adventuring heroes, the likes of Emerald Knights, Charcoal Kings, and many sorcerers. With super-heroic Point levels (60 Character Points or more) concepts like Dragons and Yem's ruling Necromancers become viable Player Character possibilities. If the optional Skill rules are in play, characters start with 20 Skill Points.

Players should test their own boundaries and play something unusual. On the Grave of Heaven, magic flows hot in the air and the possibilities are endless ... subject, of course, to the scope of the campaign and the approval of the Game Master. Naturally, Uresia has its own spin on more traditional character types, as well.

WARRIORS

With monsters to be tamed and battles to be won, Uresia has its share of men and women devoted to the martial arts. Every nation has its own "signature" warriors, from the magically superpowered "Kung Fu Elves" of Birah to the thundering Rhinomen of Helt. Every weapon imaginable seems to have a cult or specialized discipline attached to it somewhere. The most important detail to establish for a fighting character is probably why he or she fights. For king and country? Against evil? To perfect and challenge skills? For thrills? For money and glory? A warrior's motive is the hook from which his or her role in the campaign must hang.

WIZARDS AND PRIESTS

After sword comes sorcery, of course. Magical style is a matter of regional and national pride in many cases. The best necromancers come from Yem; masters of smoke-and-mirror illusions are from Boru; storybook wizards with pointy hats hail from the Rindenland, etc. Virtually any kind of wizard might be from Sindra, where mages are the top of the social ladder, and the study of the occult is a national industry and obsession.

Not all occultists do flash-and-sparkle sorcery, though most know a few tricks of that sort. Some are more scholarly, peering into the mysteries of the magical "sciences" and seeking occult secrets as an end rather than a means. Some rely on summoned spirits and demonic flunkies when a bridge must be built or an enemy needs slapped around.

ROGUES AND OUTSIDERS

Beyond the fighters and spell casters, the final set of archetypes are those defined by their place outside society more than their role within it. In urban settings, these characters are usually criminals (the heart of gold is optional): con-men, pickpockets, thugs, and swashbuckling burglars. In rural settings, the outsiders are often hermits or "mountain men," conversant in natural lore such as the secrets of the deep woods, running waters, the weather, or (in the case of many dwarves) caves and mountains. Such characters can track, handle unusual terrain, find potent herbs and fungi, and befriend animals. Sometimes these characters are also effective sorcerers or warriors, too, but one can build quite a rich menu of character abilities on nature-lore alone. This category also includes wandering troubadours of the kind found prominently in the Rindenland, and peddlers and others. Such characters are more likely to be worldly and less likely to be rooted in the traditions of a particular kingdom. Roguery is universal.

CHARACTER OUTLINE

The menu of possible characters depends on the kinds of stories the GM has planned. Catacomb-crawls in the subterranean mazes? High-stakes cook-offs in the palaces of Dreed? Demon-hunts in the Sindran backwoods? Street-and-sewer brawls among the intelligent rats of Red Clay Street? Uresian campaigns can be epic, episodic, or in-between, with quests for holy causes or personal glory as suits everyone's tastes. Some broad possibilities are included below.

DELVER DOWN!

The characters are a band of treasure-hunters, eagerly poking into forbidden passageways (including "the dungeons" — the vast catacombs formed by the ruins of the Skyfall) in search of valuables. Of course, according to anime traditions, such groups often inadvertently become heroes, since ancient treasures seldom come without strings attached! But sometimes, a treasure is just a treasure.

This is the default form of campaigning in Uresia, not only because it harkens strongly to the computer games that define the genre (and in turn, the North American RPGs that inspired the computer games), but because it is cheerful, action-packed, and encourages a variety of character types and styles that demonstrate the best of *BESM*. It is not unusual for a delving party to include elements as disparate as an Emerald Knight, a cat-girl burglar, a wealthy vampire with Flunkies, a Laöchrian Charcoal King, or even something like a giant or a ghost. Some characters can be silly and others grimly focused on the job; and the tension between elements can be very entertaining. Such groups are typically good for spectacularly varied combat sequences, too.

A CALL TO ACTION

Sometimes, the rise to heroism is the idea right from the beginning, and the quest is a means to something greater: a cure for a village's curse or a weapon to defeat a nasty villain. Characters on a heroic quest can be nearly as varied as those seeking treasure, provided they all have some reason to care about the cause at hand (or some aspect of it).

Rather than water-down the variety of a delver game with deliberate heroics, though, it's often better to play a hero campaign at the other end of the spectrum, exploring the variations on a single character type. This can include: the few remnants of a broken knightly order questing to avenge the deed; a school of wizards on a "field trip" that turns dangerous; a group of small-town youngsters entrusted with a desperate task.

You can also explore themes, allowing for variety in ability without the "potluck" feel of a totally random group. For example, a band of roguish troubadours wandering the Rindenland can easily include all manner of races and types (serious Elvish musicians, boulder-juggling strongmen, salivating Satyr acrobats, etc.), but they will have several key interests, as well as their livelihood, in common.

If the campaign will include overtly heroic themes, common ground helps the story proceed without distractions. For a more comedic or action-adventure approach, those distractions are half the fun, so it's a matter of taste.

THE DISCOVERY CAMPAIGN

This is any sort of game where none of the characters are worldly. They have lived all their lives in the same village, harbour, or valley, and until the campaign begins, they have

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

never had a reason to leave. Extraordinary circumstances, a call to action, or the promise of adventure, draw them out into Uresia to experience the world for the first time.

It can be terrific fun for everyone to learn about the world this way, one locale at a time. It's less of a burden for the GM, as well.

LOCAL INTEREST

This is the opposite of a Discovery campaign. The characters might be local, or they might be from all over, but the campaign remains focused on a single kingdom, or someplace even smaller: a few cities near one another, a rural barony, an isolated island, or a single small town. This works well if the players are eager to develop relationships with NPCs and communities — things that can get lost during island-hopping.

RUMOURS OF WAR

Uresia is volatile, and war is an everyday matter in some lands. The epic danger of the Koval imperial expansion is past, but all that means is that nobody knows where the next big threat will originate. Campaigns set against a war mean never running out of “instant adventures” when the need arises. They can be a little depressing, however, if somebody's in the mood to play on the lighter side of things. The tone can vary wildly, too. Characters can be destined to heroically bring peace, or just do their best to survive a time of misery. It is important that the players know and agree on these matters before characters are created!

LOVE, NOT WAR

Not every Uresian romance is a Yemite tragedy, but they are often difficult enough, or have repercussions enough, to become the stuff of legends, anyway. Sometimes, everyone in the group has a romance plot going at the same time; sometimes, one character is fated (or doomed) to carry the romantic story line, while the skills of the rest are needed if it is to survive.

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

The universe is full of holes, it seems, and a number of them lead here from entirely different worlds. In Dreed, a teenager from Earth became king just by being a lecher and a glutton. In the Troll Lands, a starship once crashed into an ancient nest of demons, and the handful of survivors sail the inner islands now, scarred and half-mad. A “Rabbit Hole” campaign is any kind of story about somebody from another world coming to Uresia; the characters can be (or include) that somebody, or they can simply be the ones who must decide how to deal with the visitor. Sometimes, the idea is to get back home, while other times, the idea is to let go of home, and find a new life in heaven's grave.

THE DARK SIDE

The gods may be dead, but demons and monsters roam on hooves and claws, on wings and fins. Some of them are decent folks who just happen to be able to bite dwarves in half. Many of the good demons of Winnow are working hard to prevent the bad demons from taking over the Rindenland, and both sides work to keep the entire struggle a secret. A campaign focusing on a misunderstood dragon, giant, or vampire could be great fun.

STATS, ATTRIBUTES, DEFECTS, AND SKILLS

All Stats are equally useful in Uresia but, given the magical nature of the inner islands, characters that use magic should not skimp on Soul! All Attributes and Defects are at least potentially available to Uresian characters unless the GM expressly forbids them. Incredibly outré ones should be justified by the character concept, of course, but the GM is encouraged to be flexible. If the Skill rules are in play, Skills are priced according to the "Medieval Fantasy" Skill Point Costs in *BESM*.

MONEY!

The acquisition of treasure — jewels, gold, silver, enchanted baubles, forgotten tomes — is an important sword-and-sorcery tradition. There are entire cities beneath Uresia's surface, waiting to be plundered. What good is a chest of gold coins in *BESM*, however, where money is abstracted or ignored?

We prepared this book with the assumption that most campaigns will follow *BESM*'s convention of leaving detailed fiscal bookkeeping out of the game. The results of finding a treasure are largely special effects: montages of high-priced inns, tables spread with sumptuous feasts, images of dancing girls, and later, a quiet scene of pulling cobwebs out of pockets and purses as the money runs out, inspiring everybody to go delving and do it all again. Appropriate Attributes better represent dramatic leaps in personal wealth, rather than pence-and-farthing bean counting.

The GM may choose to introduce monetary detail, however, if money is very key to his vision of the campaign; Uresian currency is not complex.

Most kingdoms use a clone of the coins of the Rindenland (Rinden, Celar, and Winnow): Copper guilders are the standard money. Most rural peasants never see a guilder since villages still use barter for most things. A single guilder can buy a cheap tavern meal; ten can get a room for the night in a good city inn; 100 can buy a well-made Celari longsword. Other countries' coins have different names and shapes, but are essentially identical to these. Merchants and nobles fancy even shinier currency: Silver chains (named for the image stamped on the back) and gold omens are worth 5 and 60 guilders each, respectively.

A fair compromise between abstraction and bookkeeping is to assume everyone has all the guilders they need for trivial things in reasonable quantities. Ignore money for matters like meals and lodging and anything that might qualify as "mundane" Personal Gear. Account is kept only for silver and gold coins, and more valuable items like gems and jewellery.

ATTRIBUTES

Several key Attributes are outlined in detail in this section.

ORGANIZATIONAL TIES

The occupational templates (starting on page 58) include many examples of Organizational Ties; Uresia is a web of stratified societies, and influence is a serious matter.

That said, it's difficult to pin down the exact value for individual organizations without presuming the scope of the campaign. For example, while membership in any noble class can be astonishingly useful while in that country, it can earn little more than passing interest and

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

basic courtesy in others. Thus, if the campaign is set entirely in Rinden, being a Rinden noble would be 3 Points/Level. Even an ordinary knight can commandeer villages legally, boss around the peasants, and expect hand-and-foot service at a public inn (not to mention being legally authorized to wear heavy armour and tote around big nasty blades without being questioned). In a campaign that spans all of Uresia, however, ties to Rindenland nobility would be worth only 1 Point/Level. In the towns that globe-hopping adventurers visit, being a knight or a foreign duke will earn you respect and maybe a few easy contacts, but not a whole lot more that does not amount to simple courtesies and the ability to mix in “society.” Bossing the peasants around is not an option.

Some organizations with influence include:

DORU ROAD RATS

In a beast-level campaign set in the East Corner (page 91) this tie is worth 2 Points/Level. In a human-scale campaign set in the same neighbourhood, it's 1 Point/Level. These ties are trivial in games with a larger scope. The maximum rating is Level 4.

GANGS AND THIEVES GUILDS

In city-scale campaigns, these are often as powerful and dangerous as the normal trade guilds. The value varies entirely according to the gang; a few gangs will even have influence in the entire kingdom. The maximum rating is Level 5.

KNIGHTLY ORDERS

Knights often have ties to the nobility of their homeland as noted above, but some great knightly orders are their own tie worth cultivating, and some accept heroes of non-noble birth. A member of the Emerald Orders, or of the Knights of the Moon, or any comparable “celebrity” organizations from other nations, will find doors opened and knees dropped all over the world. The value of the Attribute is up to 2 Points/Level for particularly popular Emerald Orders, and 1 Point/Level for other famous groups.

LYRIC BROTHERHOOD

1 Point/Level for campaigns set primarily in the Rindenland (Rinden, Celar and/or Winnow).

QUESTING SCHOLARS

The Orgaltish order and the Sindran Loreseekers are each worth 1 Point/Level in any campaign.

REGO CORUNDA

Membership in the Laöchrian “Charcoal Kings” is worth 2 Points/Level in a Laöch campaign, 1 Point/Level elsewhere (where they are regarded as any other “celebrity knights”)

URBAN TRADE GUILDS

In a city-scale campaign, powerful merchant and craft guilds are often 3 Points/Level organizations, pulling strings on which even the nobles and church masters have no claim. Even in a Uresia-wide game, ties to the major “brotherhoods” (who curry favours and allegiances between the great port cities) is worth 1 Point/Level.

PERSONAL GEAR

This is a very important Attribute in a fantasy game, and most characters should have at least Level 1. The next page includes an expanded list of examples of the gear categories provided to give players ideas and make the boundaries clear for Uresia GMs:

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

MUNDANE ITEMS

- A bone tube for storing scrolls and maps
- A bottle or flask
- A cheap wooden musical instrument (like a simple flute or pan-pipe)
- A coil of rope
- A wooden or plastic (toy) wand (no special powers)
- A spatula
- A torch
- A whetstone
- Chalk
- Clothing
- Common herbs
- Incense
- Ink and paper
- Knife
- Packs and pouches

MIDOR ITEMS

- A brass censer
- A costume mask
- A dose of poison
- A full-size musical instrument (a lute or handheld harp, etc)
- A mule
- A painted deck of cards or a nice set of bone dice
- A professionally prepared map of a region
- A touchstone (for determining if gold is real)
- A weak magic potion
- A well-rounded supply of cooking utensils (or any other mundane category of items)
- An ordinary shield
- An ornately carved walking-staff
- Any single book (books are handmade and very expensive)
- Expensive cooking spices
- Full camping gear
- Hand-held video game
- Iron grappling hook
- Light body armour (cloth, leather)
- Most ordinary weapons (bows, swords, etc)
- Two dozen silver coins

MAJOR ITEMS

- A cavalry charger
- A forge
- A lab, kitchen, or workshop
- A library of books about a single subject
- A merchant's horse and cart
- A powerful potion
- A large rowboat
- Full metal armour
- Instant camera and a supply of film packs
- Two dozen gold coins

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

NEW ATTRIBUTE: GOD OF COOKERY

COST: 1 Point/Level

RELEVANT STAT: Soul (sometimes Combat Value)

The God of Cookery Attribute allows a character to perform over-the-top feats involving food and cooking equipment. Each Level gives the character one God of Cookery ability. Players can rename this ability to reflect their culinary speciality, if desired ("God of Biscuits," "Goddess of Grilled Seafood," etc). This Attribute does not guarantee the quality of the cook's creations, since some gluttons with no cooking skill have these abilities.

BUFFET DEMON

The term "all you can eat" has little objective meaning for the character, who can consume unlimited quantities of food and drink at terrifying speeds (equal to twice his or her own body weight per combat round). Given sufficient time and inclination, a Buffet Demon could drain a pond, leaving nothing but a muddy crater with a pile of clean fish skeletons at the bottom....

CONNOISSEUR

The ability to tell, with a single taste, a sniff, and a brief, eyes-closed contemplation, the precise origins of any food or drink, from the exact vintage of a wine to the distinctly north-Sindran influences on the seasonings in a bowl of otherwise east-Sindran mushroom stew. It also reveals basic ingredients if they were in question, but won't reveal "secret recipes" or exact procedures of preparation, necessarily.

CULINARY ENCYCLOPEDIA

The ability to recall the vital statistics and important quirks of practically all known spices, ingredients, and tools of cookery. This includes, but is not limited to, its compatibility with other ingredients and/or wines, as well as all vital statistics like fat and carbohydrate content, vitamins, freshest season, etc. In addition, Culinary Encyclopedia also includes knowledge on acquiring food-related materials; characters will have a -4 bonus on any Urban Tracking or Business Management Skill checks needed to locate or buy legal or illegal restaurant equipment, food, or spices.

FOOD FIGHTER

In the character's hands, any item of food (a loaf of bread, a hot bowl of soup, a candy bar) counts as a Broadsword with the Low Penetration disability, and any cooking utensil counts as a Knife. If the food is specially prepared for combat (sharpening a frozen pizza's edges, for example) the Low Penetration disability is lifted. Characters with this ability who also have the Kensei Attribute (see *BESM*) can apply their Kensei abilities to food!

GUSTATORY FOCUS

This is the ability to cook or eat under any circumstances. The character can slurp noodles in the middle of melee without incurring combat penalties, slice dainty portions of cake while falling off a cliff, and concoct omelettes while riding the wave of a volcanic explosion. This ability also allows for exotic "blind cooking" techniques (preparing food in total darkness).

JUDGE COOK

The character can judge his or her opponent's Soul Stat and cooking Skills (appropriate Artisan, Cooking, and Performing Arts Skills) from the foe's attitude and posture even without actually seeing him or her cook.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

LIGHTNING CHEF

The character can prepare a simple “one-dish” meal (soups, puddings, cakes and so on) in a single combat round, creating the food in a manic flurry of movement and appetizing smells.

PORTABLE KITCHEN

The character will always have easy access to any food-preparation gear, spices, or fresh ingredients required for a particular task, including illegal materials and fresh food not normally in season. The actual items must still be acquired via the Personal Gear Attribute (see gear lists on page 45), but remarkably, the character can access them whenever he or she needs them instead of being forced to return to where they are normally stored.

GOD OF COOKERY

- LEVEL 1 The character has one God of Cookery ability.
- LEVEL 2 The character has two God of Cookery abilities.
- LEVEL 3 The character has three God of Cookery abilities.
- LEVEL 4 The character has four God of Cookery abilities.
- LEVEL 5 The character has five God of Cookery abilities.
- LEVEL 6 The character has six God of Cookery abilities.



SELECTING ATTRIBUTES

Since the Grave of Heaven is a world of potentially extreme fantasy, any sort of Attribute is at least theoretically available to player characters. The Game Master should limit excessive dipping into powerful or supernatural Attributes without good cause, however, to preserve the unique nature of the non-human races, and the powers of wizards. Most characters are best defined by simple Attributes, and whatever specific Attributes are appropriate to their race and profession.

Also, keep in mind the power levels of the examples given in this and other chapters. For example, the magic Emerald Armour is the most powerful form of walking mecha known in Uresia, and thus any Own a Big Mecha Attributes beyond Level 1 should be rare and justified by a good story! This is not to say such aberrations should be disallowed — the game is all about the heroes, after all, and they should be encouraged to stand out — but they should not take super-powerful abilities lightly, or take them without some awareness of context.

SOME COMMON FORMS OF MAGIC

The Grave of Heaven is rich in magic, and the Uresians have had centuries to develop magical arts distinct to their cultures and individual tastes. Virtually any form of magic might exist in Uresia, with the GM's permission.

It is suggested that the normal restriction on combining Dynamic Sorcery and Magic in the same campaign be lifted, since each have their strengths and weaknesses when representing particular approaches to the occult. Boru Sorcery, a spontaneous collection of artistic forms that depend as much on interpretation and personal interaction as hard-and-fast manipulation of energy, is best represented by Dynamic Sorcery, for example. Conversely, most forms of Sindran sorcery are best represented by Magic: Sindran mages like the kind of raw, dramatic power that comes from studying specific, potent spells with important-sounding titles (they achieve versatility by carefully developing their repertoire to deal creatively with unguessable challenges, as tested in the Thuriad).

The two Special Attributes should never be allowed for the same character, naturally. Magic-using adventurers should select (or create) a single magical discipline for their character, using one or the other. Use the style outlines that follow as a guide for creating new ones. Note that these guidelines govern only the “spellcasting” parts of magic (temporary or instantaneous effects). More permanent magical traits (a loyal undead valet, for example) are Attributes, as always.

BORU SORCERY

The mages of Boru are exotic artists, working to blend the lines between magic and skill, perception and reality, feeling and fact. They employ drugs, dances, drama and seduction into their arts.

BUILDING IT

Use the Dynamic Sorcery Attribute, with a single-discipline restriction (2 Points/Level). Boru sorcery is limited to magics that manipulate feelings, emotions, and outlooks.

MAGICAL RESTRICTIONS

The Magical Restrictions Defect is uncommon among Boru sorcerers.

COMMON DEMONOLOGY

It's common in Sindra and Winnow, and rare elsewhere, but the name distinguishes it from the nastier forms of "villainous" demonology normally wielded by snarling madmen eager to bargain with their soul for wicked power. Common demonology is not "evil" by any stretch, but rather, a form of Magic where the spells do only one kind of thing: summon and bind demons and spirits to do the mage's bidding. Since demons and spirits come in many varieties, with an extraordinary range of talents, it's actually a very potent and flexible approach to sorcery.

BUILDING IT

Use the Magic Attribute. Common Demonology is "limited" to the Servant and Flunkies Attributes, but the Servants are not limited, at all; demons can have any sort of exotic abilities the GM permits. Totems and rituals are common customizing features of the summoning spells.

MAGICAL RESTRICTIONS

The Magical Restrictions Defect is rare among Common Demonologists, but some such wizards do gain their powers entirely from the ownership of enchanted items (a 1 BP Defect).

SPECIAL RULES

While Uresia has many Summonable entities that follow the normal rules for Magic-based Servants and Flunkies, those designated as "demons" are a little different. When a demon-summoning spell ends, the demon does not automatically disappear. The caster has a choice to either banish the demon (sending it back to whence it came) or simply setting it free into the world. If the caster chooses the latter, he abandons all control or claim over the demon, and may not banish it at will after that. From that point on, the demon becomes an independent NPC under the control of the Game Master. Some demons will be willing to bargain to stay on Uresia, while some would prefer to go home as soon as their work is done.

DUANDRALIN WILD MAGIC

Duandralin magic abilities allow the beast-warriors to mimic the abilities, forms, and attacks of wild woodland beasts and their demonic kin.

BUILDING IT

Use the Magic Attribute. Duandralin characters may spend their Magic Points on Elasticity, Jumping, Invisibility (normal vision only), Natural Weapons, Regeneration, Shape Change (to any sort of "beastly" forms), Special Movement, Speed, Stealth, and Super Strength, at any Levels they can afford. Other abilities may be added at the discretion of the Game Master, but note that Duandralin Sorcery never includes Flight or Water Movement, since the beast-demons of Birah run, climb, slither, and crawl, but they do not fly or swim. Duandralin magic may not use the "Focus" Magic Option.

MAGICAL RESTRICTIONS

Any Duandralin who does not use his or her powers to serve the Wild Pact (and, more specifically, the desires of the beast-lords who rule Birah) have their powers limited or held back. In extreme cases of disobedience, the Duandralin are hunted down and killed. A 1 BP Defect.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

REGO CORUNDA MAGIC

The magic of the Charcoal Kings of Laöch is highly ritualized and ancient, focusing on fire, heat and smoke.

BUILDING IT

Use the Magic Attribute. Two spells define the core of the Rego Corunda's powers. The first, "Holy Fire Skin," is the Heavy Armour Attribute, optimized for fire/heat damage (any Level). The second, "Walk As Smoke," is the Insubstantial (gaseous form) Attribute at Level 1, with a special customizing feature: for double the Energy Point cost, the Charcoal Kings may transform any non-living objects in their possession (armour and weapons, in particular) to smoke along with them. Players may design other spells with the GM's permission. Although the Charcoal Kings are warriors first and foremost, their magic is subtle and non-martial. All magic powers of the Charcoal Kings must have the "Ritual" Magic Option.

MAGICAL RESTRICTIONS

The skin of the Charcoal Kings must be adored in ancient runes, painted in soot (drawing the runes on themselves and one another is part of their elaborate "suiting up" before entering battle, and if anything washes the runes off, they cannot perform magic). The source of all their power is the Fire Cluster: a six-tonne mass of glowing orange quartz currently kept in the court at Blind Owl City and manipulated by the King. If any of the Rego Corunda disobeys the wishes of His Majesty, his or her powers are simply revoked. A 1 BP Defect.

TROLL SHAMANISM

One of the reasons that Trolls settle in Boru may be that Boru Magic and Troll Shamanism have a lot in common. Both are heavy on the ritual and the dance, light on the scientific rigor and flashy bolts of lightning. Troll Shamans have the weaker magic of the Troll Lands to work with, so they use their skills as much as their spells, and their spells are subtle.



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

BUILDING IT

Use the Dynamic Sorcery Attribute, with a single-discipline restriction (2 Points/Level). Boru sorcery is limited to magics that affect “Shokla,” a Troll-lander word that means “life-force” or “motive energy.” Troll Shamanism can heal, soothe, affect luck and fortune in subtle ways (including cryptic divination), enhance natural skills, and repel, attract, and appease spirits. It can help events that might have happened anyway happen more easily or more quickly, or it can achieve dramatic effects with the right ingredients and proper conditions. Usually, very dramatic Troll magic is just as much work as doing something without magic at all, but it can offer alternative methods that make the impossible possible. Troll magic cannot achieve blatantly supernatural feats like flight or violent energies. It cannot even magically seal a door, for example, though it can make a door get a lot more stuck than usual.

MAGICAL RESTRICTIONS

Troll shamans must regularly appease the spirits that serve their villages, and must dress in elaborate ritual clothing and use valued totems to achieve anything magical. This is a 1 BP Defect.

YEMITE NECROMANCY

The ability that all Yemites (sorcerer or otherwise) have to create Snowmen (see page 57) is largely uncontrollable and seldom beneficial. A few unscrupulous Necromancers have Snowman Servants at their command, but the practice is illegal and not commonly studied. Ironically (and, perhaps, hypocritically) other forms of undead servants (particularly ghosts) are common and never frowned upon. Yemite sorcerers can master any magics that deal directly with death, the dead, or the siphoning and channelling of spiritual energy in raw form.

BUILDING IT

Use the Magic Attribute. Almost any sort of magical power can be justified for Yemite Necromancers, some of whom are very powerful and versatile. The most common uses of the magic, however, include Servants and Flunkies (to summon up ghosts, zombies and skeletons; “Requires Appropriate Corpses” as a customizing option halves the energy cost), Astral Projection, Environmental Control (darkness, silence, cold), Exorcism, Regeneration, and Spirit Ward.

MAGICAL RESTRICTIONS

Yemite Necromancers draw their power from the spiritual resonances of the dead. Their magic is powered by the ghosts of intelligent beings, and to a limited extent by ghosts-to-be (the life force of living things). The powerful Necromancers who rule Yem draw energies from entire regions under their command, while common independent sorcerers draw power haphazardly from whatever is nearby. When a Necromancer is in an area devoid of spirits, their powers are severely curtailed (double or triple energy cost) or even temporarily nullified. The GM may assume that, under normal conditions, an area is as rich in spirits as it is in living energy (people, and to a much lesser degree animals and plants), because the dead tend to cluster near the living for “warmth” of a kind. In a stretch of desert, however, and even some abandoned and accursed woods, a Necromancer is weakened. This is a 1 BP Defect.

CHARACTER RACE

Uresia is dynamic and diverse. In the Shaporan Hills of Helt, there are remote valleys where the Rhinomen and Panthermen spar and laugh and doubt that the rest of the world exists. Humans? Everyone's heard of them, of course, but the Shaporan Hills are green with moss and black with deadly rocks, and those things are real. Conversely, in the crowded human cities of Koval, Rhinomen are dismissed as a myth.

The sample listing herein touches on a handful of the most common intelligent races, but your character choices are much broader. Somewhere, surely, there are two headed giants who can heal with songs, or there's a magic sword that flies and wisecracks and seeks a worthy wielder. Alternatively, you might prefer to play a vampire, water spirit, playful demon, or a member of a race and culture of your own devising (See the *BESM Fantasy Bestiary* for many great ideas). Pick a point on the inner sea, and you'll find up-and-coming kingdoms that nobody has heard of yet. Let your Hero put his homeland on the map.

BEASTMEN (AND BEASTS)

The kingdoms of Helt and the principality of Lochria are home to dozens of races of beastmen, hybrid races ranging from the agile and catlike Creesh to the burly Rhinomen and Minotaur. Throughout Uresia, intelligent (otherwise ordinary-seeming) animals are becoming more common, too. See the Helt/Lochria entry on page 16 for more details.

CENTAURS

2 Character Points

Most of the Beastmen races are "anthropomorphic," but the Centaurs are the most well-known exception. They and the satyrs dominate the Lochrian regions of Helt, and have villages in nearly every Uresian kingdom.

Centaurs are extremely strong, but their human-half strength is not much stronger than that of an ordinary man, so they do not have the Super Strength Attribute (they usually have high Body Stats). Their Extra Capacity, however, can be used for pulling heavy loads, tugging open doors (with the aid of a rope) etc.

ATTRIBUTES

Extra Capacity Level 1 (1 Point), Speed Level 2 (2 Points)

DEFECTS

Awkward Size (1 BP)

DWARVES

4 Character Points

Short, broad, determined. Their kingdoms in the mountains of Orgalt and Laöch are among the oldest Uresian cultures.

ATTRIBUTES

Damn Healthy! Level 2 (2 Points), Features (night vision, excellent sense of direction underground) Level 2 (2 Points)

ELVES

8 Character Points

Elves are slim, energetic, curious, cheerful, and closer to the mysteries of nature than most other mortals. They are also occasionally snooty. Everybody finds them sexy except Dwarves.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

In a particularly silly campaign, the GM may wish to add Natural Weapons (Big pointy ears, treat as horns) Level 1, for an additional 1 Character Point.

ATTRIBUTES

Animal Friendship Level 1 (1 Point), Appearance Level 3 (3 Points), Features Level 1 (Longevity, 1 Point), Heightened Senses Level 1 (Hearing, 1 Point), Jumping Level 1 (1 Point), Sixth Sense Level 1 (Magic, 1 Point), Special Movement Level 1 (Light-Footed, 1 Point)

DEFECTS

Not So Tough (1 BP)

GENERIC BEASTMAN TEMPLATE

12 Character Points

This template is for a “generic furry” — an anthropomorphic character with fur, sharp teeth, and claws. It can be used to represent a Jackal Man, a Cat Girl, or any number of other species common to Helt and the Elu Islands. With minor modifications (Flight for Birdmen, Super Strength for Rhinomen and Minotaur, etc.), it can be used as a basis for nearly any Beastman character.

ATTRIBUTES

Features (Fur, Night Vision) Level 2 (2 Points), Heightened Senses (Pick any two) Level 2 (2 Points), Jumping Level 1 (1 Point), Natural Weapons (Claws, Fangs) Level 2 (2 Points), Sixth Sense (Magic, Spirits) Level 2 (2 Points), Special Movement (Balance, Cat-Like) Level 2 (2 Points), Speed Level 1 (1 Point)

DEFECTS

Some particularly rare Beastmen may be considered **Marked (2 BP)** at the GM's discretion. This isn't included in the Template's cost above.

GHOSTS

25 Character Points

This is a generic template for spirits who roam Uresia after their body has failed them. They can make for very interesting Player Characters.

ATTRIBUTES

Features Level 2 (Longevity, Night Vision, 2 Points), Insubstantial Level 1 (Incorporeal, 4 Points), Invisibility Level 2 (10 Points), Life Support Level 2 (2 Points), Mind Shield Level 2 (2 Points) Reincarnation Level 2 (Simple Ritual, 6 Points), Sixth Sense Level 1 (Sense Spirits, 1 Point)

DEFECTS

Marked (2 BP)

EXTRAS

In addition to the above, many Ghosts have the **Cannot Talk** and **Restricted Path** Defects, and many are **Cursed** in some way (some way apart from the obvious, that is). Ghosts who wish to affect the material world must take the **Magic** Attribute. Common Magic abilities for ghosts include **Environment Control**, **Illusion**, **Telepathy**, and **Telekinesis**.

HUMANS

0 Character Points

Humanity is the most common race, but it would be a stretch to call them “dominant” except by numbers. The further north you travel, the more humans become a minority, except in Yem. Humans do not have any innate Attributes or Defects.

MUSHROOM TROLLS

10 Character Points

The fungus men of the Northern Forest of Sindra are called “Mushroom Trolls,” but they are not kin to real Trolls and feel the same tug toward the inner islands if they venture beyond the divide. The anthropomorphic mushroom people range in size from half a metre to 7 metres tall, and sport huge, colourful head caps with a variety of patterns and textures. They claim to be aboriginal natives, but if that were true, they would have to be creatures from the former realms of heaven. Mushroom Trolls are primitive agrarians and usually good citizens. All of them can separate from their bodies in a meditative state. Their favourite wines are dangerously hallucinogenic when imbibed by most other races.

ATTRIBUTES

Astral Projection Level 1 (3 Points), **Features Level 2** (Naturally Buoyant, Night Vision, 2 Points), **Light Armour Level 2** (2 Points), **Light Armour Level 1** (Optimized: Fire/Heat, 1 Point), **Sixth Sense Level 2** (Magic, Spirits, 2 Points), **Special Movement Level 1** (Light-Footed, 1 Point)

DEFECTS

Not So Tough (1 BP)

The larger “giant” Mushroom Trolls also have **Awkward Size** (1 or 2 BP) and **Super Strength Level 1** (3 Points), for a total template cost of 11 or 12 Character Points.

SLIMES

15 Character Points plus racial powers

These intelligent drops of dense goo are typically the size of a beach ball and the shape of a teardrop or onion (some unusual slimes are as small as a thimble or as large as a house). Slime sub-races are distinguished by colour, from the common green, blue, and black slimes to the rarer gold, copper, and emerald slimes. Emerald slimes are not magical batteries, but unscrupulous sorcerers continue to use them as such anyway. Slime villages have called on many a young party of heroes wandering Sindra to rescue an emerald Slime from a lawless wizard. Golds and other metal slimes are likewise not really made of what they look like: they are made of slime.

Slimes communicate with one another telepathically, adding emphasis with meaningful squeaks and tones. Although some Slimes have small wings and can fly, most are wingless and scoot merrily along the ground. Slimes are not as fluid as they seem; they can be caged, for example, as witnesses to the tragic Slime Circus of Orgalt will attest.

While some of the most notorious criminals and pirates in Uresia have been Slimes, they are generally most good-natured of Uresian races, and don't bother building kingdoms or declaring borders. The most complex unit of Slime society is the Slime town; their highest “rank” is normally Mayor. In 1109, Tiny the Copper Metal Slime (an oversized Slime the size of a peasant hut) was granted ducal lands in Winnow for saving a Prince's daughter from goblins. Tiny had no wife or children, so he bequeathed the holding back to the Prince when he grew too old to manage it. A colossal marble statue of Tiny decorates the castle yard still.

There are dozens of slime varieties, and each sub-race has a distinct magical ability according to its colour. Most slime villages and towns are composed of a monochromatic population (all purple, all red, all copper, etc.), though “polychrome” towns do exist in Sindra, Dreed, and the Rindenland.

The following Attributes and Defects (15 Character Points total) are shared by all ordinary slimes:

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

ATTRIBUTES

Appearance Level 1 (1 Point, "Cute"), **Elasticity Level 2** (2 Points), **Light Armour Level 3** (Some blows just bounce off or slosh through harmlessly, 3 Points), **Natural Weapons (Fangs) Level 1** (1 Point), **Regeneration Level 1** (4 Points), **Special Movement Level 3** (Balance, Cat-Like, Light-Footed, 3 Points), **Telepathy Level 2** (Other telepaths only, 4 Points)

DEFECTS

Cannot Talk (Can squeak meaningfully, 1 BP), **No Arms** (2 BP)

In addition to the basic "Slime package," each slime should possess a magical ability according to its colour. The powers of the most well-known slime varieties are:

BLACK SLIMES

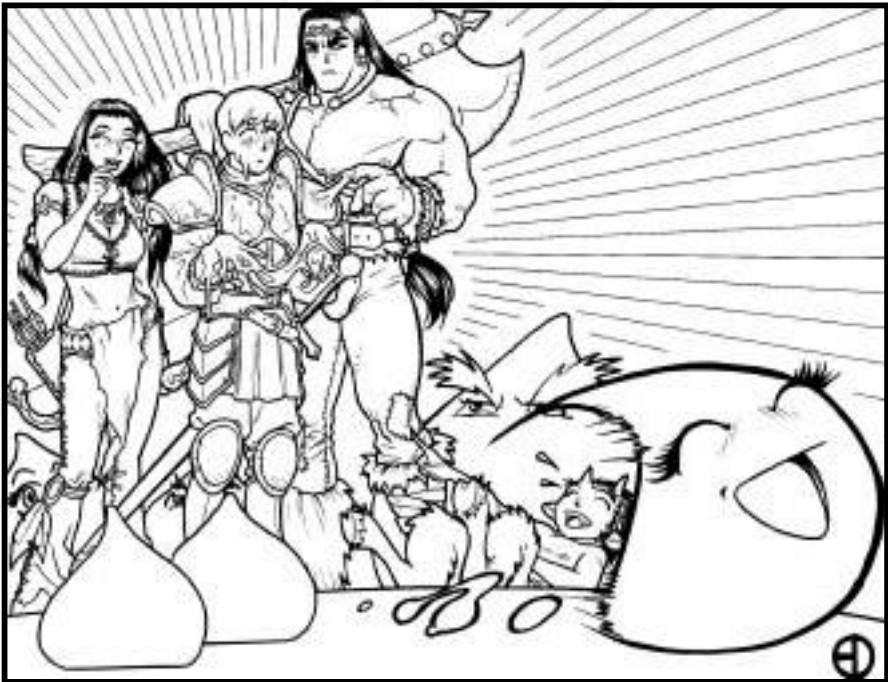
The dreaded Swarming Bandit Slime can fragment itself into a huge mass of miniatures of itself. Black slimes have the Swarm Attribute at Level 2 (Mini-Slimes, 4 Points).

WHITE SLIMES

Also known as "Savant Slimes," the White Slimes are the only non-metal slimes that are not a distinct race. Rather, any slime can be born pale white, indicating that part of it exists in the stream of eternal consciousness. Such slimes are often brilliantly intelligent (most slimes are merely smartasses). White Slimes have Precognition ("White Slime Trance") Level 2 (4 Points).

PURPLE SLIMES

The Friendly Thunder Slimes are normally a bit smaller than other slimes (about the size of a basketball), but they don't have to stay that way, especially when friends are threatened. Purple slimes have Size Change (Growth only) Level 4 (4 Points).



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

BLUE SLIMES

Blue Slimes are the gentlest and most artistic of all slimes, defined by their unique Love Magic Hug — the Healing Attribute at Level 1 (4 Points)

GREEN SLIMES

The quiet and secretive Emerald Slimes are amphibious, softly translucent, and equally comfortable in salt or freshwater. They have Water Speed (Submarine included) Level 1 (3 Points). They are the most elusive of the common slime varieties, preferring their own company or none at all. Some go off randomly on pilgrimages, perhaps inspired by the Sea Dragon.

YELLOW SLIMES

The charming and musically-inclined Winged Slimes enjoy the company of non-slimes more than most, and are the most common form of slime in Human and Elvish communities. They have Flight at Level 1 (4 Points)

ORANGE SLIMES

Mad Digger Slimes are slightly off-kilter, prone to random hooting and squeaking, and sudden unexpected leering. Most believe that they're "touched" by the magic that seeps through the crevices underground, where the power of the Grave of Heaven is stronger than on the surface. They form underground communities, and can often be encountered when exploring subterranean ruins (sometimes as foes). They have Tunnelling at Level 4 (8 Points).

RED SLIMES

Racing Slimes consider themselves the noblest of all non-metal slimes; other slimes see them as stuck-up. They are often vain, racing circles around others for the joy of it. They have Speed Level 4 (4 Points).

METAL SLIMES

Metal slimes are the rare "princely Slimes" that can be born to any of the normal Slime races. Metal slimes have the magical abilities of two slime colours, and are often the result of mixed marriages. Copper Metal Slimes, the most common of the metals, combine the traits of both Orange and Black slimes. Silver Metal Slimes, the "Holy Slimes," combine White and Blue. Gold Metal Slimes, one of the rarer varieties, combines Yellow and Green.

Slimes of unusual size may be created by adding the Diminutive or Awkward Size Defects to any of the above.

SATYRS

5 Character Points

Satyrs are often stereotyped as lecherous hedonists, but they are too busy gorging, drinking, and fornicating to object. Satyrs judge others by sexual performance in the same way some Humans judge by handshake. Satyrs understand that not everyone wants to have sex with them, but it's perceived as a challenge, not a restriction. Many extend their affections to include livestock, household pets, and large plants. Lots of them were obsessed with underwear, and there are Elu pirate ships crewed entirely by satyrs that stage full-scale panty raids on passenger caravels.

Despite their apparently focused interest, Satyrs have modern societies, produce beautiful handicrafts, and often become great heroes (tending toward more swashbuckling styles of heroism).

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

ATTRIBUTES

Animal Friendship Level 2 (2 Points), **Features** (Fur, Night Vision) **Level 2** (2 Points), **Heightened Senses** (Hearing, Smell) **Level 2** (2 Points), **Jumping Level 1** (1 Point), **Sixth Sense** (Magic, Spirits) **Level 2** (2 Points)

DEFECTS

Speciesism (Satyrs must either work to overcome their strong racial reputation, or embrace it: 1 BP), **Easily Distracted** (Wine, women, song, and nearly any other opportunities for hedonism, 2 BP), **Physically Unappealing** (1 BP).

SNOWMEN (ICE SPECTRE)

6 Character Points

These are ghosts with bodies made of snow, summoned either accidentally or maliciously by the natives of Yem.

ATTRIBUTES

Features Level 3 (Longevity, Night Vision, Can carry/conceal small objects within their bodies, 3 Points), **Life Support Level 1** (1 Point), **Regeneration Level 1** (Requires the presence of fresh snow and active moulding, 4 Points), **Sixth Sense Level 1** (Detect Spirits, 1 Point), **Special Attack Level 1: Frostbite Grip** (15 Damage, Burning: Slow, Drain Body, Penetrating: Armour, Melee, Uses Energy, 4 Points), **Special Movement Level 1** (Light-footed, 1 Point)

DEFECTS

Bane (Temperatures above freezing, 2 BP), **Cannot Talk** (2 BP), **Marked** (2 BP), **Vulnerability** (Fire and heat, 2 BP)

TROLL LANDERS

Varies

Trolls, Giants, and other monstrous humanoids thrive beyond the divide. Some make their home in Uresia proper, and might become notable heroes and villains. The following represents a standard Troll (5 Character Points):

ATTRIBUTES

Light Armour Level 2 (2 Points), **Natural Weapons Level 2** (Claws, Fangs, 2 Points), **Speed Level 1** (1 Point), **Super Strength Level 1** (3 Points)

DEFECTS

Awkward Size (1 BP), **Marked** (2 BP)

WINNOWITE DEMON

2 Character Points unless Marked

While many Winnowite Demons have supernatural powers, these are best represented by the Magic Attribute (since even the inborn abilities are spell-like, using energy and often requiring rituals). A few Winnowite Demons are Marked, but most are quite human.

ATTRIBUTES

Appearance Level 1 (1 Point), **Damn Healthy! Level 1** (1 Point), **Divine (Infernal) Relationship Level 1** (1 Point)

DEFECTS

Skeleton in the Closet (1 BP, and it comes in two flavours: an easily-kept secret, or a secret of which even the character is not aware, but that he may betray through ignorance)

OCCUPATIONAL TEMPLATES

Included here is a large handful of sample occupational templates for character professions that are particular to Uresia. You can use them as a springboard for your own character ideas.

If no Level is specified for an Attribute or Skill, any Level is sufficient. Any Level expressed as a fixed value ("Level 2" for example, as opposed to "Level 2+") should be taken as both an upper and lower limit. The children of the Sea Dragon, for example, never have Water Movement at a Level higher than 1 unless they come by it some other way (a racial ability, for example, or Magic).

BORU SORCERER

ATTRIBUTES

Art of Distraction Level 2+, Dynamic Sorcery (Boru Sorcery), Personal Gear (Supply of incense and weak narcotics, various colourful outfits)

SKILLS

Controlled Breathing, Performing Arts (Specialized in Dance), Seduction, Unarmed Defense

CHILD OF THE SEA DRAGON

Since the Sea Dragon's servants cover the gamut of skilled adventuring professions (spies, warriors, sorcerers, even priests) this template represents only the basic features shared by all who live with the god of the sea in their dreams.

Note that the Environmental Control attribute, in this case, is not the ability to control the environment, but the ability to request that it be controlled. The Sea Dragon remains in constant touch with the minds of her servants, and this is the one sort of visible "magic" she grants all of them. Since she is doing all the work, it is not purchased as the Magic Attribute; the request is a quick mental signal to the deity, who is always "listening."

ATTRIBUTES

Animal Friendship (All bonuses are doubled, but apply only to aquatic animals) Level 3, Divine Relationship, Environmental Control (Weather) Level 4+, Features (Water vision — can see through water and surface-glare as if it weren't there, though muddy waters will still be "foggy") Level 1, Water Speed (Amphibious) Level 1, Telepathy (Limited to aquatic animals and other Children) Level 3

DEFECTS

Owned by a God (2 BP), Magical Limitations (While none of the Attributes above are purchased as Magic, all of them are as fickle as the Sea God wishes them to be if her Children do not behave; 1 BP), Skeleton in the Closet (Severe, even deadly penalties for revealing the Sea Dragon's secrets, but it's very easy to hide, 1 BP)

SKILLS

Swimming Level 2+

DREED SPORTING CHEF

ATTRIBUTES

Art of Distraction (Soul is used for cooking-related attempts), **Flunkies** (Assistant chefs, hangers-on, gophers and chef-groupies), **God of Cookery**, **Personal Gear** (Cooking equipment and ingredients), **Focused Damage** (Specialized by cuisine type, works for both physical attacks and cooking competition "attacks"). Some celebrated sporting chefs have **Organizational Ties** (Dreed Royalty.)

ATTRIBUTE NOTES

Some chefs are so sublime that they can achieve magical effects with their food (the Magic attribute with the required "ritual" of food preparation and presentation applied to the spells), but such cooks are legendary masters, not ordinary sporting chefs.

DEFECTS

Easily Distracted (Food in general for 2 BP, or a specific common category of food for 1 BP).

SKILLS

Artisan (Food Presentation), **Cooking**, **Intimidation**, **Performing Arts** (Sporting Chef), **Urban Tracking** (Eateries and Markets)

DUANDRALIN (BIRAH BEAST-WARRIOR)

Duandralin must be elves.

ATTRIBUTES

Combat Mastery, **Extra Attacks Level 2+**, **Focused Damage** (Bare-handed attacks) **Level 2+**, **Heightened Awareness**, **Magic** (Duandralin Wild Magic), **Organizational Ties** (Duandralin, 2 Points/Level in a Birah-oriented campaign)

DEFECTS

Attack Restriction (Beasts and animals may not be attacked, 1 BP), **Owned by a Demon** (2 BP), **Magical Restrictions** (Powers must be used to serve the Wild Pact or they are lost or restricted, 1 BP)

SKILLS

Acrobatics, **Riding**, **Stealth**, **Swimming**, **Wilderness Survival**, **Wilderness Tracking**, **Unarmed Attack**, and **Unarmed Defense**

ELU PIRATE

ATTRIBUTES

None specifically required, though successful ones will usually have **Flunkies** and **Own a Big Mecha** (Caravel)

DEFECTS

Hunted (1 BP). Most civilized ports offer blanket (and modest) rewards for the capture of buccaneers. Some crews have special identifying tattoos that would qualify them as **Marked** (1 BP).

SKILLS

Boating, **Navigation** (Sea), **Sports**, **Swimming**, and any available combat skills.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

EMERALD KNIGHT

The orders vary a bit from kingdom to kingdom, but they are all chosen for natural leadership ability, combat prowess, and a noble nature (as opposed to noble birth, though that helps, too).

ATTRIBUTES

Aura of Command Level 2+, Combat Mastery Level 2+, Damn Healthy!, Focused Damage (Sword), Organizational Ties (Their kingdom's community of nobility, 2 Points/Level), Personal Gear (Sword, Shield), Own a Big Mecha (Emerald Armour) Level 1

SKILLS

Law, Military Sciences (Tactics), Riding (They ride their armour, normally, but they are all knights, which means they are at least trained to ride horses well), Melee Attack Level 3+, Melee Defense Level 3+

QUESTING SCHOLAR/LORESEEKER

ATTRIBUTES

Organizational Ties (1 Point/Level — members of each order can find shelter and aid in lodges in most cities, and are occasionally allowed into areas where others might not be). Also, many have some sort of magic, as appropriate to their home culture or tastes.

SKILLS

Cultural Arts Level 2+, Linguistics Level 2+, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences Level 2+, Urban Tracking (Academic), Writing (Academic)



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

REGO CORUNDA (LAÖCHRIAN “CHARCOAL KING”)

Charcoal Kings must be Dwarves.

ATTRIBUTES

Combat Mastery, Focused Damage (Pick), Magic (Rego Corunda Magic), Organizational Ties (Worth 1 or 2 Points/Level, depending on how much the campaign focuses on Laöch), Personal Gear (Pick, Full suit of metal armour)

DEFECTS

Magical Restrictions (Sooty runes and the Fire Cluster, 1 BP)

SKILLS

Stealth, Melee Attack (Pick), Melee Defense (Pick), Thrown Weapon (Pick), Unarmed Attack, Unarmed Defense

TROLL SHAMAN

The many Uresians who believe that the Troll Lands are entirely devoid of magic are wrong. The Troll Lands are, most likely, as magical as the world used to be before the sky fell. Uresia is “super-saturated” with magic bleeding from the Grave of Heaven, while the Troll Lands have more modest energies. The Troll Shaman is typical of what sorts of magic can be found in the Troll Lands.

ATTRIBUTES

Aura of Command Level 3+, Dynamic Sorcery (Troll Shamanism)

DEFECTS

Magical Restrictions (Ritual clothing and totems, Appeasement of spirits, 1 BP)

SKILLS

Controlled Breathing (Slow Heart Rate), Cultural Arts (Occultism), Medical (Homeopathy), Performing Arts, Poisons, Sleight of Hand, Social Sciences

YEMITE NECROMANCER

This template is for common Necromancers. The rulers of Yem often have much more dramatic innate abilities as side-effects of their massive intake of spiritual energy, including Super Strength, Reincarnation, permanent undead Flunkies, and even Special Attacks (like Bogho’s bellow).

ATTRIBUTES

Damn Healthy! Level 2+, Magic, Organizational Ties (Yemite upper-class, which is 1 Point/Level in a general Uresia campaign, or 3 Points/Level in a Yem-focused one), Place of Power, Sixth Sense (Spirits)

DEFECTS

Marked (Necromancers have an unshakeable aura of death and energy about them; even those who do not know what it means are uneasy around them) (2 BP)

SKILLS

Cultural Arts (Occultism)

SAMPLE CHARACTERS OF URESIA

These are examples of Uresian characters, although the GM can also use them as NPCs.

AMY COOLWEATHER, DREED SPORTING CHEF

40 Character Points

Amy, from the city of Jubilance in Dreed, is a second-generation Sporting Chef. Her father was Bandrai Coolweather, Dreed's first acknowledged God of Pork Ribs. Amy has not yet settled on a speciality; she's exploring the world with her friends, first.

Body 7 Mind 8 Soul 9

Health Points 80, Energy Points 85, Attack Combat Value 8, Defense Combat Value 6

ATTRIBUTES

Appearance Level 2 (2 Points), Art of Distraction Level 4 (4 Points), Divine Relationship Level 3 (3 Points), Flunkies Level 1 (Tina, her Chef's Assistant, 1 Point), God of Cookery Level 4 (Buffet Demon, Food Fighter, Lightning Chef, Portable Kitchen, 4 Points), Personal Gear Level 1 (1 Point), Focused Damage Level 2 (+10 damage with Meats, 2 Points)

DEFECTS

Easily Distracted (Beer and Ale, 1 BP)

EQUIPMENT

Stove/Oven rig (Major), Supply of Fresh Ingredients and Spices (Minor), Supply of Cooking Utensils (Minor), Ornately Carved Walking Staff (Minor), Full Camping Gear (Minor)

OLEG IRONHIDE, DWARF WARRIOR

40 Character Points

A squat, sturdy fighter with a good sense of humour and a crusty sense of morality. He's from Blind Owl City, the capitol of Laöch. His family has included two Rego Corunda (Laöchrian elite warriors), a position to which he one day aspires, himself. While he's still young, he's exploring the world with his friends.

Body 10 Mind 7 Soul 7

Health Points 105, Energy Points 70, Attack Combat Value 10, Defense Combat Value 8

ATTRIBUTES

Combat Mastery Level 2 (4 Points), Damn Healthy! Level 2 (2 Points), Features Level 2 (Night Vision, Excellent sense of direction underground, 2 Points), Extra Attacks Level 1 (4 Points) Focused Damage Level 2 (Miner's Pick, 2 Points), Kensei Level 1 (Lightning Draw, 1 Point), Personal Gear Level 1 (1 Point)

EQUIPMENT

A suit of plate armour (4 points of Partial armour, Major), a combat-grade miner's pick (Minor), camping gear (Minor), a sharp boot-knife (Mundane), wooden shield (15 points of armour on certain failed defense rolls, Minor), supply of Dwarvish Ale (Minor)

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

YISHA TANARA, CAT-GIRL MAGE AND SINDRAN LORESEEKER

40 Character Points

Yisha was born high in the snowy mountains of northern Helt, far from civilized kingdoms, but travelled to Sindra at a young age to bolster her native Heltish sorcery with more study, and became a Loreseeker. Yisha's mission is to explore the world to gather knowledge, to discover and document the truth behind the Skyfall legends and other mysteries — but the part she enjoys most is travelling with her friends.

Body 5 Mind 6 Soul 10

Health Points 55, Energy Points 80, Attack Combat Value 7, Defense Combat Value 5

ATTRIBUTES

Appearance Level 3 (3 Points), Dynamic Sorcery Level 4 (Perception and Dream Magic, 8 Points), Feature Level 2 (Fur, Night Vision, 2 Points), Heightened Senses Level 2 (Vision, Smell, 2 Points), Jumping Level 1 (1 Point), Natural Weapons Level 2 (Claws, Fangs, 2 Points), Organizational Ties Level 1 (Sindran Loreseeker, 1 Point), Sixth Sense Level 2 (Magic, Spirits, 2 Points), Special Movement Level 2 (Balance, Cat-Footed, 2 Points), Speed Level 1 (1 Point)

DEFECTS

Easily Distracted (Books, 1 BP), Not So Strong (2 BP), Not So Tough (2 BP)

EQUIPMENT

Common robes, writing-paper, and an ink pen (Mundane)

CAMPAIGN TONE

Uresia, like the real world, is a mixture of extremes. When a satyr swashbuckler finds a secret spell by peeking up a sorceress' dress (she thought sewing it on her panties would make a secure hiding place), that's funny. It's even funnier if the other characters refuse to listen to him because they are sick of his tales of lechery! When a family of Orgaltish slaves fights for survival and freedom against a deadly winter and a senseless clan war, that's not funny at all.

Keeping a campaign to one end or the other of the Silly/Grim axis makes things easier, but it's also a missed opportunity! Some of the best anime works as well as it does by oscillating madly between these extremes, and it's a good mix to bring to the table, too, if the GM doesn't mind a bit of juggling and the players respect one another's chosen "home ground" on that territory. Regardless, the GM must let the players know well in advance which extreme or blend he or she is establishing.



CHAPTER 4: WONDERS OF URESIA

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

This chapter describes a representative sample of the many monsters, enchanted items, magical potions, mecha, and magical places that can be found in the Grave of Heaven. Not every creature, place, or treasure mentioned in the preceding chapters has been given statistics here, both for reasons of space and to allow GMs room for creativity. Those that are not described can be easily created using the *BESM* rules by extrapolating from the information presented in this chapter.

MAGIC ITEMS

These are items whose power comes from sorcery or alchemy.

ALCHEMY

Most magic items are Items of Power, constructed using the normal *BESM* rules, but some magic is common enough in Uresia to qualify as Minor or Major gear, instead. In particular, most cities and many small villages feature a potion-seller or two (professional alchemists in urban areas, local witches and mad hermits elsewhere). Pulling out and opening a potion is a single action; drinking it is another. The effect is immediate, and usually lasts 1 minute. After that, the potion is used and gone (the character can keep the bottle, though). At the GM's discretion, some potions may have a single instantaneous effect rather than granting a minute-long ability.

A potion that grants 1-3 Character Points worth of ability is a Minor Item. A potion that grants 4-10 Character Points worth of ability is a Major Item. In all cases, a potion may be used only once. Some popular examples:

Potion of Flight	(Flight Level 2 for a minute; enough to fly a little over 3 km); Major Item
Potion of Ghosts	(Astral Projection Level 1 for a minute); Minor Item
Potion of Healing	(Regeneration Level 2 for a minute); Major Item
Potion of Invisibility	(Invisibility Level 2, normal vision only, for a minute); Major Item
Potion of Might	(Super Strength, whole-body, Level 1 for a minute); Minor Item
Potion of Radiance	(Appearance Level 6 for a minute); Major Item
Potion of Speed	(Speed Level 3 for a minute); Minor Item
Potion of the Mole	(Tunnelling Level 5 for a minute); Major Item
Potion of the Spider	(Special Movement Level 3: Balance, Light-Footed, Wall-Crawling, for a minute); Minor Item
Potion of the Warrior	(Extra Attacks Level 1 and Massive Damage Level 3 for a minute); Major Item

UNIQUE OR UNUSUAL POTIONS

Players may also request more unusual potions at character creation, those that cannot be easily defined using character Attributes. This should be encouraged! Most of the famed "pleasure potions" of Boru, for example, are narcotics with no useful game effect, and each dose would be a Minor Item. Some other unusual brews, though, will be useful in play. Use the existing examples as guidelines.

UNIQUE POTION EXAMPLE: THE TONNE VIAL

Developed accidentally by the staff of Dosravid's Unconventional Alchemy (page 93) when working on ways to make their explosives more devastating, the tonne vial is not

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

imbibed at all; it's simply opened and dropped. When the potion is exposed to air, it begins to bubble and dissipate violently, but it also increases substantially in mass. The few grams of liquid inside masses nearly one and a half tonnes as soon as it's opened, and for about fifteen seconds thereafter, until the fluid dissipates harmlessly. If the vial is shattered, the fluid dissipates instantly with no effect. A Major Item.

SUPER-POWERED POTIONS

Potions that provide more than 10 Character Points worth of Attributes (or the equivalent) exist as well, but they are unusual, and must be acquired as Items of Power. They can only be used once, which reduces the total cost of the Attribute by 4 Points. This can also be used to create magic scrolls that disappear once the spell written on them is read aloud (and cast), alchemical exploding weapons, and many other forms of "fire and forget" items. The minimum cost of an Item of Power is still 1 Point, though GMs may allow any "zero point" items to be taken as Major Items of Personal Gear (see the potion guidelines, above).

EMERALDS

Uresian emeralds store raw elemental magic; they are focal points for potentially cosmic levels of power. Small gems of the kind found on rings and necklaces can boost the energies of a sorcerer, while the rarer giant examples can supply the power needed to level a village, raise an oasis from the dust of the desert, or animate the magical "giant suits" commanded by the Emerald Knights.

The very best (and largest) emeralds are mined in Dreed, and provide that kingdom with seemingly unshakeable security and wealth. The Ironhead Mountains of Laöch are the only other major source of emeralds in Uresia, though Ironhead emeralds tend toward the minuscule. The giant emeralds, and any of fine quality, are found only in Dreed.

GAME RULES

The giant emeralds are strictly "plot devices." They provide fantastic amounts of power that can burn a sorcerer to a crisp if he or she tries to tap into it without careful preparation. Tinier emeralds, though, if mined with care and cut to perfection, are safe storehouses of energy that can be owned as Items of Power providing the Energy Bonus Attribute. The "tiny" emeralds are still conspicuously large, however; assume two carats per Level of the Attribute granted. They are prime targets for thieves, and many wizards consider them more trouble than they are worth.

LYRICAN LYRE

Level 1 Item of Power

Mages allied with the Lyric Brotherhood worked for years to perfect this enchanted lyre, made of deep-red wood and trimmed with lines of tasteful gold. The tone is hauntingly beautiful, and (so their story goes) divinely inspired by the touch of Lyrica herself (see page 20). Any member of the Seventh String (or promising musicians they favour) might carry one; they have created nearly two dozen as of 1380.

The Lyre grants the user a musical Art of Distraction Level 5, using the Soul Stat modified by appropriate levels of Performing Arts Skill.

MECHA

EMERALD ARMOUR

15 Mecha Points

This is a powerful suit of Emerald Armour of the sort constructed in the Rindenland during the Koval War. It resembles an ornate suit of plate armour a metre taller, broader, and deeper than would be expected. The plates shift and turn to allow their wearer entry. Emerald Knights use the same swords and shields on foot as they do in their suits, with damage enhanced by Super Strength in the mecha.

Each suit of Emerald Armour is hand crafted and personally decorated, and sometimes much more: suits can vary considerably in power and capabilities. The finest and most powerful suits come from the Rindenland, where both the resources and the need for powerful battle machines are great.

The Game Master may permit players to design their own suits as well, within the following guidelines: suits of Emerald Armour are built on 30 Mecha Points or less (10-20 Mecha Points typical); and none may be Summonable; and none may have an Armour value higher than 15. Some suits develop Artificial Intelligence in time, but it is never "built-in," so any A.I. suit should have an appropriate history. No Emerald Armour has yet been built with Mechanical Transformation, but it's only a matter of time until someone tries it.

MECHA SUB-ATTRIBUTES

Ground Speed Level 1 (2 MP), Jumping Level 2 (2 MP), Light Armour Level 4 (4 MP), Mecha Regeneration Level 1 (4 MP), Mind Shield Level 2 (2 MP), Special Movement (Balance, Cat-Like) Level 2 (2 MP), Super Strength Level 1 (3 MP)

MECHA DEFECTS

Awkward Size (1 MBP), Conditional Ownership (Granted to heroic, noble knights only! 1 MBP), Mutual Damage (Full, 2 MBP)

Armour: 10, Health Points: 40

ENCHANTED CARAVEL

15 Mecha Points

Caravels are small wooden cargo ships with three sails (usually a square sail on the fore and main masts). They are squat, stable ships rarely longer than 17 metres, with a 5-metre beam and loaded draft of 2 metres. Nearly 90% of the ships on the Inner Sea are caravels like this one.

The caravels require a crew of at least a half-dozen to run smoothly; the typical crew is 10. The ship holds 20 men and 100 tons of cargo in reasonable comfort.

The painted sails of Uresia's caravels are enchanted — an industry monopolized by several coastal towns of Dreed. The sails attract benign wind-sprites, granting a -1 bonus to Navigation rolls made to check travel time (see page 11). The painted sails count as a single Item of Special Equipment.

MECHA SUB-ATTRIBUTES

Extra Capacity Level 4 (4 MP), Extra Endurance Level 3 (3 MP), Light Armour Level 2 (2 MP), Special Equipment (Enchanted Sails) Level 1 (2 MP), Toughness Level 4 (16 MP), Water Speed (Surface Only) Level 1 (2 MP)

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

MECHA DEFECTS

Awkward Size (3 MBP), Crew Requirement (2 MBP), No Arms (2 MBP), Poor Manoeuvrability (2 MBP), Restricted Ground Movement (None, 2 MBP), Startup Time (1 MBP), Wind-Powered (2 MBP)

Armour: 5, Health Points: 120

FAST HULL

Another optional Special Equipment Level (not included in the design above) is "Fast Hull" — a shallow-drafted, elongated design made for short-term bursts of speed and sailing across high reefs. The pirates of the Elu Islands favour it, and if taken, it grants an additional -1 bonus to Navigation for travel-time purposes or for manoeuvring during a race or pursuit. Fast hulls are less stable hulls, though, and take a +2 penalty when dealing with the dangers of stormy winds or choppy waters.

CARAVEL'S BOAT

Minor Item of Personal Gear (0 Mecha Points)

Most caravels carry two of these — enough to serve as lifeboats if needed, and otherwise to serve for beach-landings beyond reefs. They are simple, oar-driven shells of stout wood, with benches open to the weather.

MECHA SUB-ATTRIBUTES

Extra Capacity Level 3 (Holds 11 men, 3 MP), Light Armour Level 1 (1 MP), Water Speed (surface only) Level 1 (2 MP)

MECHA DEFECTS

Awkward Size (2 MBP), Exposed Occupants (1 MBP), No Arms (2 MBP), Poor Manoeuvrability (2 MBP), Restricted Ground Movement (None, 2 MBP)

Armour: 2, Health Points: 40

LAÖCHRIAN STEAM TRAIN

15 Mecha Points

The dwarves use alchemically created "coals" that deliver tremendous, long-burning heat from a very tiny lump of material, allowing for long-term, high-speed runs through the mountains. When burning, though, the coals are vulnerable to massive shock, and can explode if hit hard enough.

MECHA SUB-ATTRIBUTES

Extra Capacity Level 5 (5 MP), Extra Endurance Level 2 (2 MP), Features or Accessories (Ornate and Luxurious, Wet Bar) Level 2 (2 MP), Ground Speed Level 2 (100 kph, 4 MP), Light Armour Level 3 (3 MP), Toughness Level 4 (16 MP)

MECHA DEFECTS

No Arms (2 MBP), Awkward Size (5 MBP), Crew Requirement (2 MBP), Noisy (2 MBP), Poor Manoeuvrability (2 MBP), Restricted Path (Laöch Rail System, 1 MBP), Startup Time (1 MBP), Volatile (2 MBP)

Armour: 7, Health Points: 120

BEASTS AND MONSTERS

Included in this section are a few examples of the creatures that roam the land, water, and skies of Uresia.

UNIVERSAL EQUINE (HORSE/MULE/UNICORN/PEGASUS)

To turn this into a Unicorn, just add Natural Weapons (Horn) Level 1 and Sixth Sense (Virginity/Purity) Level 1. To make it a Pegasus, add Flight Level 1. To make it a Mule or similar pack animal, drop Speed to Level 1, Body to 5, and bring Extra Capacity to Level 2.

Body 6, Mind 2, Soul 4

Health Points 50, Energy Points 30, Attack Combat Value 4, Defense Combat Value 2

ATTRIBUTES

Extra Capacity Level 1, Heightened Awareness Level 1, Speed Level 2

DEFECTS

Awkward Size (1 BP), No Hands (2 BP), Unskilled (2 BP)

BIRAH DEMON-BEAST

Use this template to represent any mid-sized Birah demon, from a giant wolf to a nasty mountain cat to one of the many that defy mundane classification. Add flying or other special abilities at need.

Body 7, Mind 3, Soul 4

Health Points 65, Energy Points 35, Attack Combat Value 7, Defense Combat Value 5

ATTRIBUTES

Combat Mastery Level 3, Damn Healthy! Level 1, Features (Fur, Night Vision) Level 2, Focused Damage (Fangs) Level 2, Heightened Awareness Level 2, Heightened Senses (Smell, Taste, Hearing) Level 3, Natural Weapons (Claws, Fangs) Level 2, Speed Level 3

DEFECTS

Awkward Size (1 BP), No Hands (2 BP), Marked (2 BP), Unskilled (1 BP)

SKILLS

Unarmed Attack (Strikes) Level 2 (8 points)

DRAGON

Dragons like the ones that terrorized the Heltish port of Coatestown are a deadly foe for any adventurer. Some dragons are much smarter than these, and a few are even full-blown sorcerers.

Body 8, Mind 4, Soul 6

Health Points 100, Energy Points 50, Attack Combat Value 9, Defense Combat Value 7

Armour 7 (12 against Flame/Heat attacks)

ATTRIBUTES

Combat Mastery Level 3, Damn Healthy! Level 3, Features (Night Vision), Level 1, Flight Level 1, Heightened Awareness Level 2, Light Armour Level 3, Light Armour (Optimized: Flame/Heat) Level 2, Natural Weapons (Claws, Fangs, Tail Striker) Level 3,

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Special Attack Level 5: Fire Breath (Damage 45, Area Effect, Auto-Fire, Burning, Short Range, Slow, Uses Energy), **Super Strength Level 2**

DEFECTS

Awkward Size (2 BP), Marked (2 BP), Unskilled (1 BP)

SKILLS

Thrown Weapons (Fire Breath) Level 2 (8 points)

SEA SERPENT

These monsters come into the southern edge of the Inner Sea in the warmer months, eager to coil around caravels and pluck sailors from the masts. While they are not as terrifying as dragons, sailors have few effective defenses against things coiling up from beneath the hull.

Body 5, Mind 2, Soul 4

Health Points 95, Energy Points 30, Attack Combat Value 6, Defense Combat Value 4, Armour 5

ATTRIBUTES

Combat Mastery Level 3, Damn Healthy! Level 5, Elasticity (Torso) Level 1, Focused Damage (Coiling Crush) Level 5, Light Armour Level 2, Natural Weapons (Fangs, Spines) Level 2, Water Speed Level 3

DEFECTS

Awkward Size (3 BP), Cannot Talk (1 BP), Marked (2 BP), No Arms (2 BP), Restricted Ground Movement (2 BP), Unskilled (1 BP)

SKILLS

Unarmed Attack (Coiling Crush) Level 2 (8 points)



WONDROUS LANDS: THE TROLL LANDS OF THE OUTER RING

The Skyfall killed billions, and pushed whole empires beneath the sea. What fragments of those lands survived are now the Troll Lands: a ring of islands beyond Uresia proper, beyond the “watery divide” where the magic begins to fade. In the Troll Lands, Uresians are nagged by a constant compelling call to return home. When Humans and Elves explore these haunted places, the homesickness can grow to be a physical danger. This same longing to sail toward the Grave of Heaven is what apparently inspired the Skyfall survivors to abandon these lands, centuries ago. For unknown reasons, the Trolls feel no such compulsion, so most of them stay here.

The ancient Trolls were grateful to have such vast lands, even entire ruined cities, left entirely to them! The Trolls believe that their own gods started “disankt go” (the “god brawl”) to deliver the great lands to the Trolls, and get rid of the pesky minor races. No one can prove that this is not true.

The outer ring islands are vast and visibly broken. The forests stop suddenly at 40-metre cliffs of cooled magma, the edges of volcanic plains created when the world cracked open. There are deserts, and raging rivers, and swamps ... all wilderness and ruin.

The Trolls are mostly nomadic. A few settle in “squatter colonies” in the ancient urban ruins, but they do not build cities themselves. Consequently, the Troll Lands have stood unchanged for many hundreds of years.

Uresians divide the intelligent species of the world into two groups. “Men” includes Humans, Dwarves, Elves, Satyrs, etc., while “Trolls” include everything that the Uresians don’t want to imagine that they are related to. There are many species of Troll, and most of them are primitive; in their own way, however, they are just as intelligent as Men.

They are violent and simplistic, but probably much less so than Humans would be if they were as large and strong. There are Troll sorcerers (mostly shaman-style “medicine Trolls”), Troll heroes, and even Troll poets. Their music tends toward the monotonous and loud. Trolls see Men as weak because Men put their gods (dead or alive) above their Kings. Trolls do it the other way around; the gods are assumed to answer to the highest Troll leaders.

For years, as the young island kingdoms grew, no one bothered to return to the Troll Lands. As Uresia matured, a scholarly interest in the past inspired the occasional expedition, and those expeditions revealed much: the ruined cities of the Troll Lands contain the keys to the age of fable — pieces of lost mortal realms, dead races, and the truth about old religions. Only tantalizing fragments have been found, but it’s enough. Modern Uresians have a fascination with the Troll lands, and there is a mad race to unearth the best secrets first.

THE LENTHAN GATES

In 1214, a band of Temphisian explorers and Sindran wizards mounted an expedition of magical plunder to Lentha (the common name for the largest island of the eastern Troll Lands). In the process, they discovered the seven known moon stones, the destination points of an equal number of sunstones scattered around the broken ring of the Troll Lands.

The discovery was a fortunate accident. The party had been attacked by a huge Heltish Grizzly in a deadly rage. Two camp guards were killed before the beast was held safely in a binding spell, leaving the explorers to tend their wounds and puzzle over the presence of a Heltish bear in the Lenthan highlands.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The answer was nearby, resting in pools of dusty moonlight on the forest floor — a ring of thick circular stone slabs hewn from mottled blue rock and cunningly carved with sigils and images of the moon. Each moonstone pairs with a sunstone placed elsewhere. At the time of the expedition's discovery, there was a sunstone each in Lochria, Orgalt, the Volenwood, Boru, and Rinden. Another was at the opposite end of Lentha, while the seventh remains undiscovered.

At regular intervals ranging from 17 to 61 days (each pair of stones is “tuned” to a different cycle) magical windows materialize above the titles, opening a gateway between the pair. The secret locations of the six known sunstones were discovered by exploring the gates as they opened at the Lenthan end. The seventh moonstone, many believe, has never activated at all, leading to the common theory that its corresponding sunstone has been destroyed. A group of sorcerous scholars from the Volenwood and Sindra monitor the moonstone site at all times. The region's Trolls avoid it, due to a healthy blend of superstitious fear and genuine indifference.

One of the sunstones — the one leading to Lochria — has been moved. When it became plain that an evil Adlet sorcerer had designs on the stones for his own purposes, the Sindrans staged a daring raid to steal the 400-kilogram Lochrian stone and sail it to Sindra. It is currently in a well-guarded citadel near the city of Avonit, but Anandriel's princes are negotiating for ownership, since they regard the stones as Elvish treasures (the Sindrans agree; they're just haggling for suitable trade).

GAME SEEDS AND IMPLICATIONS

If the timing is right, the Sindran gate can be used to travel rapidly between Sindra and any of the five other sunstones, via the Lenthan glade. It activates every 20 days, and stays open for a little more than an hour.

Adventures could spring from the need for such a trip (perhaps with the co-operation of the Sindran sorcerers who guard it, perhaps despite them, meaning a tricky entry into their citadel). Equally rich story possibilities surround the theft of a stone, and the mystery of the seventh gate. Also, some scholars, despite the very “Elvish looking” decorations on the stone, believe that the gates are really the work of the Raansa.

MUMMY TOWNS

In 1260, an expedition to the deserts of the southern islands uncovered nine massive ruined cities, relics of a bygone age. The Trolls, preferring cooler weather, had not settled anywhere near them, so the Men began to explore freely. Even the smallest of the ruins is four times larger than any Uresian city of today, and the structures are huge and magnificent, build of glossy red stone. Unfortunately, they are also teeming with the undead — mostly very irate mummies.

Ruin-delver “boomtowns” have sprouted near each ruin, competing with one another, competing with the mummies, and rocking into the night with brawls and revelry. Since the local desert wear is a loose wrap of white linen, it is often difficult to tell the living from the dead, leading to countless amusing misunderstandings and a plenty of yelling.

THE DRETHAN POOLS

While a few expeditions have returned from the Troll Lands claiming to have located this place, none of them have been able to provide a working map to allow others to repeat the find. Thus, the Drethan Pools are still considered a legend by many.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The Pools are an ancient Elvish holy site, with waters attributed with the usual things legendary waters are supposed to have: the power to make wealth, restore youth, cure all ills, banish all curses, and act as an alchemical ingredient of unparalleled purity, depending on who's spinning the yarn.

Dretha was once a city of marble, vines and trees at the heart of a vast empire, say the Elves. The delvers who have stumbled on it found crumbling, sunbleached lumps of brick in a hot expanse of ashen desert, however. The pools, though, are apparently pristine and glorious, working their magic on themselves, whatever that magic may be. Few samples have survived the trip to Uresia with any power intact; nobody is quite sure how to store it properly. A single vial of the water once sold on Shadow River's auction blocks for a sack of gold the size of two fat dwarves. Its magic was real, but an elderly nobleman used it to cure a receding hairline, so no one knows the real limits of the water's power.

Later, that same nobleman was found wandering the streets, unable to find his own house or cite his own name, scratching a full head of hair in confusion. This may explain the well-kept secret of the pools' location. Those who have seen it also warn of an enchanting ghost or demonesse guarding the site from within the pools themselves.

LEGENDS OF THE FALL

This book presents the most popular modern theories about the Skyfall — those espoused by Sindran scholars studying what little evidence there is — and is more or less correct. The gods fought; the sky fell; most everybody died; mortals were left largely on their own. This keeps the text uncluttered by qualifiers and distracting asides, but the truth is the Sindrans are guessing, and they have simply stumbled on the guess in which most people are willing to believe.

Presumably, the truth lies deep in the dungeons — the thousands of man- or god-made catacombs snaking beneath the surface, the remnants of heaven and earth from millennia past. Maybe your campaign will reveal it, but maybe not. There are many more interesting things to do than scour tunnels for clues, after all, and the whole point is that the old world, and the old gods, are not as important as the choices made by the living.

Maybe the gods did not actually fight. Maybe they just left, either to let mankind grow, or out of spite or boredom. Perhaps a forgotten villain murdered them, or a forgotten hero chased them off, or a forgotten group of adventurers slaughtered them all accidentally by pressing the wrong button or casting the wrong spell! Maybe the sky fell to correct a colossal mistake. Some believe that there is a forgotten "first age" before the gods ever existed, and that ancient men became the gods, and upset the balance of the world. The Skyfall, according to them, corrected that balance, and put things back in place.

Then again, maybe the sky simply didn't fall. It might just be a metaphor for another kind of cataclysm. Clearly, something happened, but nobody really knows what, beyond the legends.

The Skyfall is just the backdrop that makes Uresia what it is: a fantasy world with fewer divine scapegoats, and fewer Big Overwhelming Pushy Epic Backplots, than most. A world of promise and possibility, old enough to have depth, but now young enough to be ripe for the picking, shoving, and re-inventing by your group.

You may discover it is best to keep the past in the past.

FROZEN GHOSTS

A well-preserved stone ruin forms the foundation of snow city: the colony of icy ghosts. When Yemite magic draws a departed soul back to a semblance of a physical existence (see page 51), the tortured souls often seek their way north, to stave off the eventual thaw and obtain a kind of sad immortality among their own kind.

It's a city without food or warmth, but there are marketplaces, where the frozen dead trade handicrafts, art, performances, and stories. The citizens here come in every shape, from elegant sculptures of Elvish heroines to crude piles of snow with carrots stuck in, depending on their summoner.

This would be merely a sad oddity, except for their leader: the ghost of Desarak, the father of Orliiss, the Dread Prince of Yem. His soul was summoned into a malformed, man-shaped lump just a metre high, sculpted by a drunken necromancer in Laöch. Half-melted, hardened, and carefully rebuilt, he plots vengeance on Yem and on his son, stirring false hopes of a return to real flesh in a horde of icy, restless followers.

OTHER WONDROUS PLACES AND LEGENDS

BOTTLED DIVINITY

The Elves have a handful of dark secrets. Among them is a tiny kingdom called Delerain, deep in the high southern Volenwood hills. The secret is this: two gods presumed dead are not. They are held, weak and powerless, by a miniature Elvish kingdom devoted entirely to the task of doing so, and keeping it a secret.

The pair was discovered, semi-conscious and suffering, trapped in ruins in the valley where Delerain would be founded. The explorers that found them identified them as the god and goddess of pain and fear, respectively — those known in Elf lore as Ondro and Beshek. They also realized, just in time, that the two were suspended in their state of suffering by the massive stone arches pinning them to the ground. The arches are carved of blessed stone in the shape of a holy sigil. The Elves were horrified to note that, despite deeply-held beliefs, the deities had no observably Elvish characteristics. In fact, they looked like Creesh.

That was 170 years ago. Faced with the choice of letting sleeping gods lie (and risking someone else finding them) or taking action, they elected to settle in to guard them, and founded a tiny kingdom in the process. The Elves of Delerain are loath to allow the beings to suffer forever, so they send their own kind around the world, questing for any spell, relic, or method that might be able to destroy them, instead. They acknowledge no other option; Ondro and Beshek are evil. The Delerain Elves, like most men, have no yearning for a return to cosmic war between light and dark. Any travellers who happen upon the tiny kingdom are invited very forcefully to spend the rest of their lives there, unless they earn enough trust to become questing agents.

GREENTOWN (TEMPHIS)

High in the wild hills of the Duchy of Naille, just west of Mount Gador, Greentown sits huddled in a narrow valley, so steep it's almost a ravine. At the west end is the top of a

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

waterfall, cascading 90 metres to the next shelf of rock down the mountain. The inhabitants of Greentown are all children, aged 8 to 15, and comprise a secret priesthood: a cult of the sea dragon.

They come from all over Uresia, each one born with a special bond with that ancient water god. After many visits to the cold deep in their dreams, the children become privy to great secrets of the seas, and gain knowledge of this place. The children travel here in secret as soon as they are able.

Greentown is far from the sea, but it is not meant to stay that way. Since the Skyfall plunged the ancient empires into his domain, the Sea Dragon has developed quite a taste for swimming above the ruined cities of man. If his plans come to be, one day Greentown will overlook a short cliff into a risen inward sea, instead of a high cliff over a forgotten forest ridge.

Children live here until they reach 16, at which point they must leave to wander the world, furthering the plans of the Sea Dragon with strange quests. Many are powerful sorcerers; just as many are spies and warriors. Each serve in their own way, receiving inspiration in dreams, and maintaining the secrecy of their mutual home. In Greentown, they play games (handheld computer games from a foreign world are a favourite), study, and train. Their scrolls are potentially the most valuable treasure on dry land, since they contain many clues leading to greater treasures beneath the waves.

THE RAANSA

Several “lost races of Uresia” legends are inevitable, given the apocalyptic nature of the world’s history and the large number of existing races. So far, though, only one seems to be true: the delicate-looking Raansa, the people of the wind. The Raansa built things that survived the Skyfall well enough to be identified, and they survived, mostly, on Temphis.

In the largest Raansa ruin — a half-sunken city and complex of dangerous tunnels high in the Letar Hills — there are hundreds of toppled statues carved from lead, revealing the Raansa (or at least their self-image) as very tall, thin people with angular features and unnaturally large hands (not to mention large eyes, and very small mouths).

There are only scattered clues left to describe their nature, but they seem to have worshipped wind and rain gods above all, and had a fondness for brutal-looking long axes. Modern weapons based on ancient Raansa designs are popular in Gryphon Rock, and rumours persist of genuine Raansa blades, enchanted with hafts of iron that were found in the ruins by adventurers several years ago. Most images of the Raansa indicate that they were supernaturally strong.

THE FLYING ISLANDS

Massive chunks of rock and foliage drift over the Uresian landscape like impossible, tree-covered clouds. The flying islands — 48 in all — crawl along an arcane clockwork of pathways, casting slow shadows across the meadows and water below.

Called “vernia” in the Sindran tongues of magic, the islands fly at fixed altitudes. The lowest island (“Adrin,” an oblong twist of rock about twice the size of an elephant) flies at 182 metres above sea level. The highest, a massive, five-kilometre long wedge of forested greenery called “Sprua,” soars at nearly 700 metres.

The vernia follow fixed flight-paths: double-spirals working inward toward the centre of Uresia, then outward again for a circuit of the watery divide. No island flies past the divide to the Troll Lands.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The spirals are long and lazy — most vernia fully circle the centre of Uresia six or seven times before reaching the Divide, and make the same number of circuits before passing the vertex over the Inner Sea. Most vernia crawl along at just over one kilometre a day; it takes from three to four years for an island to complete it's entire inward/outward cycle. At the points where an island's outward spiral crosses the path of it's inward one, the island can be spotted twice in a cycle (heading in a different direction each time).

Many early Uresian calendars (and some modern systems of astrology) are based on the movements of the vernia, which are absolutely predictable. They never collide with one another, but some come frighteningly close. More remarkably, they never collide with the landscape. They weave nimbly through mountain passes apparently designed to fit them (and perhaps they were). Some scholars theorize that the islands carved their own path when the islands were still cooling into shape after the Skyfall, and that any 'errant' vernia crashed centuries ago. Many an odd-shaped hill is declared a "fallen" vernia as a point of local pride, though none have been proven to be so. Others believe that the pathways are the deliberate work of the Gods, though none can attach any meaning to them.

Most of the islands are uninhabited, and too small to be worth considering for settlement, anyway (Sprua is the largest island by far). Living on the vernia remains a strong romantic image, however, and every so often, a group of adventurous souls establish a village on one, out of stubborn determination, or a desire to build a cottage on a land that no king dares claim (or tax). Exposure to high winds, isolation from any real communities beyond the island, and other factors ultimately destroy all such ventures (at least so far). During times of war, the elves of Koval tend to lob waves of magical fire at any vernia flying near, for fear that they might harbour enemy spies. None ever have ... but tales of clever thieves or raiders making creative use of the islands abound. Some of them might be true.

Despite that, most Uresians are happy to see the islands coming. While some backwater towns dread the vernia as evil omens, just as many stage festivals to herald their arrival. Some people form "island-walking" pilgrimages, hiking in the shade of the islands for days at a time.

THE LAÖCHRIAN SECRET TUNNELS

The rumour that the Dwarves have an elaborate tunnel highway connecting all of their underground settlements is only partly true. Mostly, the Dwarves prefer the very public rail system for cross-country travel (and the deep rifts and ravines in the Ironcrag Mountains make a complete tunnel highway impossible). Some cities do have secret tunnels to nearby towns, however, known only to agents of the ruling family. Furthermore, deep mining has uncovered tunnels that the Laöch Dwarves never built — intact remnants of either the pre-Skyfall continent, or of the chunk of the heavens from which Laöch is made.

LEGENDARY ISLANDS

Despite regular shipping traffic (legal and otherwise) there are still large expanses of the Elu Islands for which there are no adequate charts, and sailors legends about the islands are colourful: entire abandoned cities of gemstones, an island that's really the giant egg of a Rukh, an island where the beaches are littered with emeralds ... and with the bones of a man who dared to walk ashore to claim them. Landlubbers mock the rumours as spectres of alcoholic stupor, but some of them are true.

THE MARVO RUINS, CELAR

There is a half-ruined monastery atop the Valdencrag occupied by young women who speak only broken Celar. Their skin is deep olive, their hair black and grey, and their eyes like piercing emeralds. The Celari living in nearby mining villages accept them as friendly (if mysterious) neighbours, and few others know about them. Every year, a small group of them rides to the castle of the local Duke with a gift of silver ingots to serve as a tax. They never trade for food or tools — only occasional bolts of cloth.

The “monastery” is the remnant of Marvo, one of the few godly cities to survive the Skyfall without being buried under rock and earth. The women are divine immortals, handmaidens of the (deceased) gods of reason and trickery (sisters in the lost pantheon). The handmaidens have few powers apart from immortality and supernatural skill as seamstresses, but they are the keepers of many secrets. After centuries of observing the world, they have begun to accept they may never have a real role in it again, and that their knowledge is a danger to everyone. Last winter, 17 of them elected to destroy themselves in grief, and urged their remaining sisters to do the same.

NAUMGARD: A FOREBODING PRISON

In the centre of Sindra’s most dismal marsh, a broad castle of black stone stands on a pillar of rock erected by powerful sorcery. The spell was fiendish: it required so much power that it drained the enchantment from the swamp, probably forever, along with the powers of the self-sacrificing wizards who authored it. The result is a magically void region seven leagues across, and the base of Castle Naumgard — Sindra’s most infamous structure.

Naumgard was conceived as a monastery where powerful magic could be studied thoroughly without fear of dire consequence, but over the years it has served a secondary function as a prison for wizards, beasts, and men that the council want alive, but separated from magic.

THE UNDERSEA

The watery realms are an untouched frontier, but recent events have confirmed the legend sailors have believed forever: there are cities of Merfolk and other watery races, riding to war against one another on armies of sharks and giant squid.

The most populous “Beastmen” community in Uresia may actually be the Mermen, who seem to have communities in all the waters of the Inner Sea and perhaps even beyond it. The land-dwellers do not know much about the Mer-people, though, since contact is minimal.

Presumably, the ocean realms are populated by pre-Skyfall remnants just as Uresia is, but no one knows for certain. There may be entire cities of the fallen sky exposed beneath the sea inhabited by Merfolk who have grown privy to divine secrets. The paranoid governors of Koval used to discuss this often, seriously considering attempting a “preventative war” with the denizens of the deep, just in case.

The sea dragon, however, is a powerful god who seems determined to keep his realm of separate from the surface world. Expeditions into the deep usually turn into one-way trips into her divine gullet.

CHAPTER 5: ROGAN'S HEATH



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

The quiet hamlet of Rogan's Heath rests in the cool highlands of County Eagan, in the Rindenland. It is a hub for several smaller villages nearby, and a satellite to the town of Scott's Landing, several leagues away near the river. Merchants come here as their last stop before turning back down the hills, and villagers from towns higher along the ridge come here as their last stop before turning back home. There is a small church here, and the manor house of Rogan Hoggart, lord of the heath and surrounding villages.

Rogan's Heath is typical of the kind of setting in which most Uresians grow up, live, and die. It makes an excellent "home town" for a band of wet-behind-the-ears heroes, or a good place to rescue from a ravaging evil. Of course, like everything in Uresia, it is more than what it appears.

Rogan's Heath is in Rinden, but it could just as easily be in rural Celar, Winnow, Temphis, Dreed, or even Yem. If you redress the sets a little, turning the huts into ancient, hollowed oaks, it could be an Elvish community deep in the Volenwood. If you picture it as a small network of caves along an old mining tunnel, it can be an underground village of Laöchrian Dwarves. Village life in Uresia is universal; only the décor changes.

LIFE IN ROGAN'S HEATH

In the spring and summertime, agriculture and trade dominate life in Rogan's Heath. The orchards and fields are worked and tended, livestock is maintained, and there is a vigorous industry in crafts. Traffic along the mercantile "back road" that leads here is steady in the warmer months, insuring a constant market for handmade tools, baskets, cloth goods, preserves, etc. Since these are also the seasons when most normal people travel (adventurers are frequently stubborn exceptions), this is Rogan's Heath as most visitors see it — cheerful, alive, and hard at work.

Autumn brings cold winds and a brief dry season. The tide of hill-country trade turns outward again. Most merchants prefer to winter in distant coastal cities, whiling away the frozen months in toasty merchants-only alehouses. Thus, during the autumn, they take their last run from the hills, pack up their goods at Scott's Landing, and then recede from the high country entirely, travelling by caravan to the city before the snow begins to fall.

In the early autumn, the villagers bring in the grain harvest. The rest of the season is set aside for community labour projects: dam-building, barn-raising, repairs to houses, etc. Toward the end of the season, there is a rush to hunt (and dry) extra meat, and chop extra firewood, to lay in stores for the winter.

The arrival of winter is not something that villagers look for on a calendar; they look for it on the ground, piled up in drifted banks of white. When the snow comes, and the river crusts with ice, the sensible folk of Rogan's Heath stay inside where it's warm, drinking sour plum cider, singing hymns, and playing rattail gambit (an "advanced tic-tac-toe" from Dreed).

Provided the snows do not pile heavily enough to collapse a roof, no work is done in winter. While Father Elo does his best to keep chapel services frequent and interesting, most of the winter spent drinking and singing and passing the time. In winter, villages like Rogan's Heath can feel lonely and isolated — even the league-long hike to neighbouring villages is undertaken rarely. The men still hunt, the women still keep house, and children still play, but it's a quiet time for the community to stay close and unbothered by the outside world. In the evenings, young and old alike gather to skate on the river.

When spring comes back to Rogan's Heath, the villagers are usually stiff from sitting, sick of their own walls, and eager to stretch their legs, work outdoors again, and welcome the sight of strangers with news from abroad.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN



Rogan's
Heath
A Hamlet of the Rinderland

LOCATIONS ON THE MAP OF ROGAN'S HEATH

SITE A: STONE CHAPEL AND MODEST GARDEN

This is the heath's community church, a Chapel dedicated to the Goddess Aurela (an ancient Goddess of the Rain). Father Elo, a large, bushy moustache with a kindly priest attached, is the resident priest.

Elo spends his free time in prayer — praying for the welfare of the community, praying that the goblins in the mountains are doing well (when they're doing poorly, they compensate by raiding villages like Rogan's Heath), and praying that there will be no more wars.

Elo is the village teacher. Twice a week, by joint degree of King Argot and the church fathers, Elo and the sisters and brothers of the chapel gather the village children and teach them their letters, prayers, and whatever else there's time for — from the laws of the land to as much history as Father Elo can sneak in.

Rogan's Heath has no professional bread bakery. Rather, the chapel has a large public oven, fired up daily by the nuns. Anyone may bring loaves to bake, and each household slashes the top of their bread distinctively to avoid confusing them. The fee to use the oven is minimal (and covers up to four loaves per household) so the local families can easily recoup the investment by baking extras to sell to travelling merchants and barter for traveller's stories.

SITE B: A RUSTIC COUNTRY HOUSE

This is Rogan Hoggart's home. He lives here alone, a grizzled veteran of the great war with the Koval Empire, decades ago. He was granted this land in 1355. Prior to his arrival, the village was called Mullinham.

Rogan's house is a large structure of rough timber and pale plaster. On the inside, it resembles a miniature festhall. Hoggart enjoys receiving visitors, and he keeps his hearth and stables clean to accommodate them. The guestroom, and the furs, fire, and trestle of the common chamber, is all of the house that most ever see.

Lord Rogan's private chambers — his bedroom, his study, and his library — are private. The library is the second largest in the village (after the one in the chapel) and the study is filled with the trophies of Hoggart's career as a knight — including a magnificent sword, hanging quietly behind his stuffed-leather reading chair.

Rogan's kitchen is the responsibility of the elderly Ganburys, who live at Site D. They've been cooking here since before Rogan moved in.

SITE C: A LARGE COTTAGE, PAINTED GREEN

The Edar family lives here, in the first house most visitors to Rogan's Heath see. The Edars have five children, four of whom have left the village to seek their fortune. The eldest son, Mark, stays here, and he is working hard to take over the family's share of the orchards. He's cynical around adventurers, and he thinks his adventuring siblings have no respect for the family's needs. His parents, Goble and Mary, take the opposite approach, they are eager to talk to any travellers, in hopes of hearing news that might tell them how their boys and girls are doing.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

SITE D: A COTTAGE OVERGROWN WITH FLOWERS AND VINES

In springtime, the cottage of “grandma and grandpa” Ganbury seems to be resting on a pillowy bed of flowers. Grandma keeps the place surrounded by and covered with them, plucking fresh ones each morning to wear in her hair.

The Ganburys seem to have miniaturized with age — at least vertically. Neither is more than chest-high to an ordinary man. If they are stooped by the weight of passing years, they betray no weariness of it in their twinkling eyes and smiles. They are the two friendliest people in Rogan’s Heath. Despite their declining years (or perhaps because of them), they seem determined to sleep with (or at least shamelessly flirt with) everyone in town except each other. “Grandma,” in particular, is notorious for pinching whatever cheeks she can reach.

SITE E: A BRICK COTTAGE AND PAINTED STABLE

This house is home to four generations of Tallwaters. Cal Tallwater is the man of the house, but he is just as often seen conferring with Lord Hoggart. He took over responsibility for tending the Lord’s grounds three years ago, when Dunley died, and he is still puffed up with pride about it. The rest of the Tallwaters are very likeable, though, so the village represses its collective urge to strangle Cal until he stops bragging about how Lord Hoggart is his very best friend.

SITE F: A HUMBLE COTTAGE AND SMALL COOP

The yard is full of chickens and ducks, and the house seems a little worn at the edges. This is the home of Martha Steelraven and her daughter, Edia. Martha isn’t a widow; her husband serves in the prince’s army, and he’ll be able to return home next year.

The villagers have offered to help Martha keep the house in order, but she is both proud and stubbornly determined to have a leaky roof to complain about to her husband. Young Edia is a dreamer and a poetess, escaping the house whenever possible to write on paper she steals from Lord Hoggart’s house (Lord Hoggart leaves it were she can find it, on purpose; his quiet contribution to literary culture).

SITE G: A CHEERFUL COTTAGE WITH PURPLE TRIM

Publicly, this is the home of Burle, the carpenter, and his family. Secretly, it’s the resting place of a murdered priest, killed 29 years ago by Burle’s father.

Only Burle knows that it was murder at all. The village was told that goblin raiders took the old man in a raid, carrying his body into the mountains. Burle himself thought so, too, until his father lay dying in old age, and confessed to him on his deathbed. Before expiring, the old man explained that the body of the priest is hidden beneath the heavy flagstones of the family hearth.

Burle’s father died six years ago, and he has been a very quiet, meek man since then. He is haunted in every sense except the literal (and he’s not entirely sure about that). He feels responsible for what his father did, and wants to give the priest a proper burial, and to make reparations somehow, but he wants to do it without shaming the family, without the secret getting out.

He’s getting desperate, and has decided to seek to help, and soon. He watches any new visitors to Rogan’s Heath carefully, looking for qualities that he feels might indicate honesty and discretion. Once he meets someone he thinks he can trust, he’ll beg him or her for help with his “legacy.” Till then, the ghost of the priest and the ghost of his father are growing to dominate his nightmares.

SITE H: A LARGE HOUSE AND SMITHY

DuBrow Coronet is a blacksmith who moved here seven years ago with two infant girls, and a wife sick from pneumonia. She died that winter, or so everyone believes.

In truth, Coronet's wife was not sick at all. She was summoned on a mission for the King, probing into a connection between Koval demon-cults and the royal family of Orgalt. She and DuBrow are each career spies. DuBrow is retired, though, while his wife is still young. Despite knowing that they would eventually be separated, possibly for years, they married and had twin daughters. Shortly thereafter, her mission took her away.

Someday soon, when his wife's work is done, DuBrow will pull up stakes and leave town to settle down at last with his entire family. In the meantime, he raises his daughters (they think their mother is dead), and provides excellent tools and nails to the village. On the side, he keeps tabs on local affairs, reporting any issues of importance to the offices of the King.

SITE I: A CENTAUR LONGHOUSE

This building smells pleasantly of grass and good cooking. While there are two sizeable centaur villages on the Prince's lands, Baerg and his family settled here because they are worshippers of Aurela rather than any of the Heltish/Lochrian pantheons. The village was eager to accept them — they are incredibly strong, and live outside the village's tendency to gossip. Anyone can visit them anytime and be sure of friendly company.

SITE J: A WELL-TENDED STONE HOUSE WITH AN ELABORATE PASS THROUGH AN ORNAMENTAL GARDEN

Dorinda Rova and her husband, Laughing Bob, live here with their children and Dorinda's father. Laughing Bob is as cheery as his epithet implies, but Dorinda, while friendly, is more serious. She's the self-proclaimed guardian of the village's history, and her knowledge, in truth, extends to every town and village within a day's ride of here — anything with a tangential connection to Rogan's Heath.

Her sons are the best guides in town, and will gladly hire themselves out as such. Dorinda gets visitors from as far away as the river regularly, and she spends a lot of time at the chapel, keeping the genealogy records accurate and annotated. She knows just about everyone's secrets, but regards them as a sacred trust though few of them were "entrusted" to her deliberately.

SITE K: A LARGE HOUSE WITH STABLES

The Olivette family is one of the largest in the village — 10 in all, including one living great-grandmother.

Dain, the oldest son, is a would-be hero who worships Lord Hoggart. He has been trying for two years to found "The Knights of Rogan," the village's very own order of heroic protectors. Most of his brothers laughed at him, and Lord Hoggart barely tolerates his frequent "salutes" and reports that "the perimeter is safe, my lord. I've seen to it." Dain guards the village whenever there is time between chores, wearing patchwork armour and wielding a rusty Sindran three-bladed sword. Only his youngest brother, Del Moran (age 6) has faith in him, dutifully marching at his side with a wooden sword in hand and a cooking pot on his head.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

SITE L: A SMALL COTTAGE WITH A WELL-TENDED GARDEN

Mrs. Wyana Dunley lives here, along with enough cats to pull a sled (if you could ever convince them). She is the widow of old Wrangler Dunley, who tended Hoggart's orchards until he was taken by pneumonia nearly three years ago. The village supports Wyana, and she does her best to contribute by baking, preserving, and taking on laundry from other villagers.

One of her cats — a grey longhair that wandered into town as a stray last summer — is a good deal smarter than he lets on. He's Samaref, a Heltish talking cat. He's a sneak-thief and pirate, on the run from a band of wizards intent on destroying him for crimes he scarcely remembers (not because he didn't commit them, but because he's committed so many crimes he's not entirely sure which ones angered the wizards). By staying deep in rural Rinden, he's managed to avoid their scrying thus far, and keeps mute when Mrs. Dunley is paying attention.

Mrs. Dunley has taken to bringing pies to Lord Hoggart's house a lot lately; she has a crush on him. Samaref tags along, sizing up Hoggart's home for valuables.

SITE M: TWO MATCHING COTTAGES OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE (NOT SHOWN)

Most villages have a resident witch, the local source for charms, fortune-telling, curse-removal, and medicine. Most witches make a show of providing a spiritual alternative to the church, too, but that's mainly because witches know that nothing tells company "go away" more effectively than a religious argument, and witches enjoy their time alone.

Rogan's Heath has two witches, and they're sisters: Deana and Verna. The two don't play up the traditional rivalry with the church, preferring a bitter-and-very-real rivalry with each other. Asbestos earplugs are recommended!

Visitors to Rogan's Heath might not notice the unusual witch population. Each witch is visually similar, and each provides all the standard witch-services, from cryptic foreshadowing (free of charge) to amusing and occasionally useful potions (usually expensive).

Any given reason to pry, though, may discover the truth: Years ago, Deana and Verna were two of the Monster Conquering Heroes, a trio of successful dungeon-delvers. They were taller and much slimmer, then, and their third partner — David the Blonde — was lost in action, captured by the fanatical priestesses of a Boru sex-goddess cult. He sent a message by carrier pigeon, asking not to be rescued.

Without David to mediate, the sisters were an unstable combination. They are both greedy and slightly paranoid, so they could not trust each other with money or secrets. Now, the sisters make a living as witches, staying on opposite sides of the same village for spite — each determined to outlive the other and one day locate all the hoarded treasure.

SITE N: A LARGE INN, THE "AXE AND FLAGON"

The innkeepers are Gum and Wendy Hogan, whom the gods (or at least determined effort) have blessed with seven daughters, ages 12 to 18 — an ideal arrangement for tending to a large inn.

A smoky and pleasant feasting hall, smelling perpetually of bubbling stew and frothy beer, occupies half of the ground floor. The locals gather here for any secular meetings, and simply to be social. Merchants stop here for the warm beds, and to try their luck with the oldest daughters.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

SITE O: SEVERAL COWS, CHEWING AND LOOKING SLEEPY

The pasture and the cows belong to the village (that is to say, Lord Hoggart); the cottage houses the LuMay family, who take care of the cows.

SITES P AND Q: ORCHARDS AND FIELDS

Rogan's Heath's agriculture focuses on Temphisian Sour Plums, transplanted here by a noble with a horticultural bent several generations ago. The fruit grows abundantly in the orchard areas (marked with a P). The Q areas are grain fields. The villages grow vegetables in gardens on their private plots, adjacent to their cottages.

Sour plums are a source of grief to Rogan Hoggart once a year. When he retired here after the war, he believed he'd finally escaped the horrors of combat. He had a real home at last, where he could build his library, groom his horses, take rum with his friend Prince Yoma, and never again see men in the hideous frenzy of heated conflict.

This comfortable illusion evaporated the following summer, when Father Eagan explained that, as Lord, Hoggart must judge of the annual sour plum jam contest. Hoggart was already worried, since, except for a huge cartload of sugar from Scott's Landing, no merchant had arrived in town all day. He later learned that, around "sour plum jam day," savvy merchants travel clear of the village, to avoid being accosted by packs of manic housewives wielding sticky purple spoons, demanding that they take sides.

It is a war. Each household prides itself on its mastery of the jam, and every year, it takes all of Hoggart's skill at diplomacy (something he has never enjoyed) to keep it from tearing the community along lines of jealousy and accusation. Once, an entire family of slimes from a neighbouring slime town was traumatized when Mrs. LuMay cornered them to sample each of 26 variations she'd prepared. The adult slimes were found nearly comatose, belching purple bubbles. The child-slimes were so hyperactive that it took the nuns a week to repair the church.

SITE R: A MOUND OF EARTH, OVERGROWN WITH WILDFLOWERS

Lord Hoggart does not encourage the villagers to wander at random on the forested hillside behind his manor, but a few children have spotted this mound and wondered what it was: a grave, perhaps? In a way it is.

This mound is the hiding place — or resting place — of Lord Hoggart's suit of Emerald Armour, named Cloudscreeper. That Rogan was a knight in the Koval wars is public knowledge; that he was part of an elite Emerald Order is not, so he keeps the suit buried under a thin layer of earth. Cloudscreeper can toss whole trees, so it would have no difficulty emerging from the soil in a time of need, but so far this keeps it from prying eyes. Rogan hopes he will never have need of it again, and for 25 years, he hasn't. Still, every three or four years, he suits up and takes a run up into the mountains, just to prove that he still can.

SITE S: SOGGY CREEK

The spill from a small waterfall slows down along the cow pasture, then meanders into the woods to the east, eventually joining Scott's River, several leagues away. Every summer, the stream-bed fills with "kettlefish," tasty crayfish-like animals that the villagers boil and eat by the messy handful. Behind the waterfall is a cave that every child regards as a secret camp that grownups must never visit. The grownups do their part by pretending not to remember it from their own younger years.

CHAPTER 6: SHADOW RIVER



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Shadow River (“Achla Doru”) is a beautiful city, even in the poorer quarters. War has brushed and scorched its walls and harbours, but never marred its avenues. The city has a timeless feel, a montage of the architectural styles of nearly every culture and period since the city was born, rolled submissively into the Temphisian oeuvre.

Indeed, Achla Doru is credited as a hero in the Koval Wars, despite the Koval conquerors advancing no closer than two hundred leagues of its walls. Brovor XXXII had been so obsessed with taking the city that he poured over half his resources into building up east Temphis as a staging area. Owing to the wildly magical (even cursed) nature of the kingdom, the cost was too high and the returns minimal. Without such an expensive distraction, the Rinden Knights and Sindran sorcerers might never have forced the expansion to a halt.

It’s a common joke that if the Emperor had taken Shadow River, the war would have ended immediately, with his August Magnificence robbed, rolled, stripped, and pressed into service as a Heltish cabin-boy. Then, as now, the city was a place where the timid need not apply.

Most call it the “city of adventure,” a rogue’s dream come true. Whether it’s a sweet dream or a nightmare depends in small part on how warped a dreamer one may be, and in greater part on how bold one is with a blade or spell. Shadow River is now a mighty city, the unrivalled king of the Temphisian ports, and there are few skills worth having that can’t be tested to their limits somewhere in that grimy maze of cobbles and chimney-smoke.

It’s said that every hero must walk the streets of Temphis at least once before his death. Or, optionally, during.

SHADOW RIVER AT A GLANCE

The centre of the town is the Citadel and Market areas, built over the foundations of the earliest settlements. To the east, against a green hillside, is the Old City — filled with stately merchant manors, tree-lined avenues, and the docks where much of the Temphisian Fleet comes home to rest. From there, the city grows a bit to the south (the arts-and-crafts district of Logantown) and a lot to the west, conquering the hills across Achla Doru (“The River of Shadows”) to form the Bell, Beacon, and West Gate districts, and then upwards and outwards to the less civilized neighbourhoods of Pork Hill and East Corner. New Town is the most recent addition — born and fed on the riches of wine merchants, and increased land traffic from the eastern duchies.

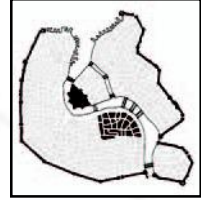
The typical street in shadow River is narrow by modern standards — six metres or so. Some minor streets are as narrow as three or four, and the Avenue of Heroes is nearly 11 metres wide!

THE CITY WALL

This is a curtain of fieldstone four and a half metres high, with five major and several minor gates. Towers stocked with arms and fresh arrows are maintained at regular intervals, and guardsmen walk the walls to keep an eye on both the hills beyond and the streets within. There are just over 200 watchmen, serving both as the city’s police force and line of defense against mundane threats.

“THE BELLS”

Outside the marketplace, the Bells is the most assimilated neighbourhood in Shadow River, where nobles and poor woodcutters rub elbows while watching giants and trolls wrestle for wagers. Small fairs crop up without warning, here, in the tiny wooded parks. If one is in Shadow River with nothing to do, follow the sound of the bells.



There are more churches here than in any other part of the city, so many that the smaller local bells drown out those of the great cathedrals on the nearby hills. Nearly every major cult and faith in Uresia has a temple here, so the bells ring at all hours, from the fresh tinkling of wind chimes to the deep sounding of gongs.

There are few dangers in the Bells, unless you count dangers to the pocketbook (there are many tempting shops for those fond of charms and talismans, in particular). It's a good neighbourhood to search for an eager would-be warrior-hero type; they congregate at the churches, praying over their swords and beseeching the gods for worthy quests.

PLAZA OF GOD/URLEG'S TEMPLE

The “plaza” amounts to little more than a wider-than-average section of street with a small fountain in the middle, fed by the nearby river. What makes it special is Urleg's Temple, one of the more unusual churches in a neighbourhood filled with them.

The church is widely regarded as the ugliest building in Temphis, and some consider it the ugliest object of any kind known to mortal man. Squat, rounded, and hideously ornate in a kind of “wedding cake gothic” taken to nightmare extremes, the temple is constructed of unsightly orange limestone shipped here at considerable expense from a remote quarry in Boru. The “god” celebrated here is Urleg, the 7th ruler of Shadow River (1147-1165).

Duke Urleg was apparently quite ugly himself, and lived in sexual frustration despite a series of wives; each marriage remained unconsummated. When Urleg's ninth bride consented to take him to bed, he was so overwhelmed with self-confidence that he declared himself a god, and designed this temple, along with the outrageous priestly costumes still worn by its caretakers, in a fit of eccentric madness.

The city has never found it in its heart to tear the hideous thing down, instead accepting it as yet another badge of identity. Men lay wagers based on successfully eating lunch while looking at it.

OLD BRIDGE ROAD

The Bells' concentration of holy places has its unrivalled centre along this street. From the bridge itself to Dim Street, there is nothing but churches: Boru, Temphisian, Heltish Weather Shrines, a small Rinden cathedral, and more (60 in all).

It's a street of rigidly-controlled madness and politely checked passions, a chaos of beliefs muted by neighbourly good manners. With the entire world's faiths on display, though, it's hard not to have a little “team spirit,” and when the manners fail, the entire city slows down to watch the train-wreck.

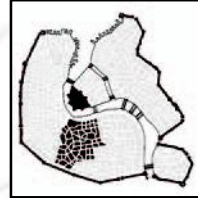
The ridiculous irony, of course, is that these miniature holy wars are fought not for gods, but for the ghosts of gods, or for gods that never lived to begin with. Except for a humble alcove in one of the Boru temples dedicated to Yuna-Do (their incarnation of the Wine God), none of the actual surviving gods are represented here at all.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Duke Faym maintains the street's unusual mix with funds from his personal treasury as the need arises. In addition to its role in Shadow River's civic identity, he considers it an excellent and visible public reminder: war is easy enough, it says, without inviting it with quarrels of faith. On most days, temples to ancient death goddesses stand cheerily adjacent to shrines of dead healing gods, with no incident more dangerous than competing baked-good sales.

THE BEACON DISTRICT

Shadow River is a city of merchants, but the neighbourhoods south of Beacon Hill are home to the largest concentration of purely Temphisian merchants. This is where the local warehousemen and buyers dwell; even those who can afford to keep separate manors in the Old City tend to lay their heads here.



This is the real heart, therefore, of the city's power. The citadel ultimately answers to the needs of the Temphisian merchants, and when a dagger gleams in the night, the skulduggery goes down on Lowbunter Street and the Avenue of Wheels — not in the posh halls of the Citadel. Competition is fierce, and a matter of survival. The local sports include blackmail and murder. In recent years, several evil cults have taken root here, playing on the insecurities and ambition of the more impressionable merchants.

THE ROYAL NECROPOLIS

A miniature city of tombs, reserved for nobles, wealthy gentry, and heroes. It's a popular spot with ghouls of all kinds, literal and otherwise, and the site of a peculiar local monument. Deep inside the Necropolis, there stands a statue of a long dead Temphisian hero, Vorn Redis. The statue, for reasons lost to living memory, has no eyes. Some historians believe that Vorn may have been blind for some or all his heroic career. Some people, at certain times, can see eyes on the face of Vorn, just as if they were sculpted there. This has proven on several occasions to be an omen of death — either the viewer's, or one close to him — so visitors to the necropolis often avoid looking at Vorn's statue, just in case.

THE SHADOW RIVER ARENA

Years ago, a trial-by-combat craze rewrote the Temphisian justice system. Grand Duke Orgo asked that it be abolished in 1190, and for 30 years the city sponsored public concerts there, instead. When Orgo died in 1221, his successor had no opinion on the matter, and Shadow River called for return of blood and claw to the Temphis arena. The blood sports are all voluntary, now, but there is no shortage of volunteers. Temphis is a city where desperate warriors of all races travel to prove their worth or attract the attention of a wealthy patron. Combatants can use the arena to make a private duel a public spectacle, too; fighting for vengeance is sweetened with the promise of lofty cash rewards! The arena holds up to 4000 spectators. It's closed on Temphisian and Sindran holy days.

SOUTH MONUMENT STREET

The back of the eastern slope of Beacon Hill is, arguably, the snobbiest street in Shadow River, exuding a palpable air of smugness and hostility toward any who are not dressed well enough to wear these exalted cobbles down. It's an air that's pleasantly absent from the Old City, despite the vastly greater wealth there. Not blessed by noble blood and determined to

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

prove themselves despite it, the “merchant princes” of the Beacon district flaunt what they’ve have like desperate peacocks.

The street is a blend of visibly expensive houses peeking out over garden walls, clubs, restaurants, and boutiques earning their keep by providing the city’s Insecure Rich with comforting reminders of their superiority. Anyone in the mood for microscopic portions of inedible exotic fish, or for fashioned designed (apparently) to cause blurred vision, need look no further than the posh end of Monument Street.

Recently, the city has begun to quietly retaliate with an unspoken declaration of war. Specifically, less wealthy folk from as far as Pork Hill come here to walk their dogs, particularly on hot summer days.

THE SHADOW CLUB

The painting on the large sign implies that the club is named for the Achla Doru — the river that names the city itself. Inside, though, there are shadows much colder than those cast by airborne highlands.

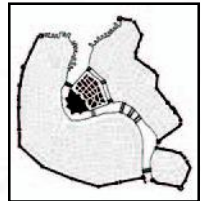
The club, outwardly an exclusive house in which the rich gather to drink and brag, is secretly a house in which to indulge in diablerie and commit hideous crimes. There are members of every race except Elves, but this policy is not public knowledge. The demons the club serves fancy Elvish suffering as a proper sacrifice (see the Grail Park entry, this section).

GRAIL PARK

The centrepiece of this placid Park is a stone fountain in the shape of a wine goblet, tilted at an angle. The Brothers of the God Rondo (a version of the Wine God) constructed it in 1202. Several times a year, it’s the final resting place of a murder victim — usually an Elf, usually maimed, dismembered, and burned with sigils of sinister import. The city guard are poor detectives — but they get a little richer on bribes from the shadow club, and publicly insist that the murders are unsolvable. The city’s Elf community is doubtful, and growing angrier with each incident.

THE CITADEL/THE MARKET

Behind walls of rough red Heltish Basalt stands the Shadow River Citadel, a reminder of the city’s history as a military target for the jealous Temphisian Dukes.



THE CITADEL

The centrepiece of the city is a cluster of white towers, golden spires and forest of green minarets. It’s the seat of the Duchy of Shadows, who usually acts as Lord Governor of Shadow River, as well (a few Dukes ignore tradition and appoint a Lord Governor to act on their behalf, but Shadow River is a plum job, so most prefer it even to the point of neglecting the rest of the small duchy).

Centuries ago, the Citadel grounds were the city entire, and much humbler. Now, it’s a miniature city again — one of splendour and wealth and comfortable insulation from the realities of the world. Beneath the citadel, Dukes and Lord Governors of every era have built and developed a series of vaults, prisons, torture chambers, libraries, and more. The rumours about these places are probably more colourful the reality, but the characters may be inspired to test that.

LYSSA'S TALISMANS

This stall sells “spirit talismans” or host magnets — a Yemite charm meant to attract the presence of the dead, for good or ill. Lyssa Prana, a cute white-haired Yemite girl and her Satyr sidekick, Nuvar, maintain the stall.

THE SLAVE PENS

In Temphis, slavery is the exclusive trade of the Church of Galon, an ancient God of Slaves (and guardian of spelt fields). The law is a relic of Temphis’ early days as a colony of Dreed, when the priests of Gallon — on the run from most other kingdoms for a series of scandals — turned over huge coffers of silver and two shiploads of slaves to help make the colony independent. Free to trade with their own silver, Temphis tasted freedom, and granted the church mastery of slaves in exchange.

BOGGS’ BALLOON RIDES

A large red-and-yellow hot air balloon moors here, tied down on a patch of muddy grass behind the stalls of casket vendors. It’s an unfortunate juxtaposition ... cries of “Bronze! Pine! Steel! Pearwood!” and the stacked rows of coffins can scare away some potential customers ... but flight is a rare treat for most, and it’s much safer than it looks.

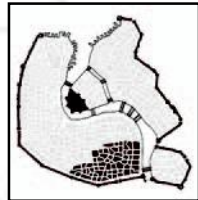
When the airborne islands cluster near the city, the line lasts all day. Even on an ordinary clear day, Vach Bogg (a Celari pilot with a loud singing voice and a massive thirst for beer) has regular customers, eager to see the city from the air. He also makes a fair amount from adventurers, of course, hiring the balloon to spy, or perform some similarly questionable trip. Boggs doesn’t mind at all; he loves taking people into the air for any reason at all, where they cannot escape his stories about his convoluted love life.

THE GALLOWIS

For years, the gallows were in a small park on Gallows Road near both the Necropolis and the headquarters of the city watch. Duke Faym had them moved to the market two years ago, since travellers were clogging traffic on the south market bridge to witness the hangings.

EAST CORNER

A large residential district, East Corner was once a lot like West Gate, serving as a minor market centre. It has always been too populated to keep up with itself, though, and when hard times hit, the city’s solution (Vine Bridge) created New Town, and made East Corner even poorer. East Corner is home to thousands of common craftsmen, traders, soldiers and others. Crime is common here, but it is the desperate-and-angry variety, not the distilled evil of the Beacon District or the rowdy, greedy Chaos of Pork Hill. East Corner is a good place to start looking for someone on the run, since there are many places to hide there. It’s also a good place to shop for cheap goods of any kind, or to hire low-grade thugs and muscle.



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

ALCHEMISTS' ROW

Stump Street contains the largest concentration of potion shops in Shadow River, burning at the nickname "alchemists' row." The smell here is frequently horrible, especially on warm summer days when the smells of Hide Street (where all the tanners are) rise and mingle.

THE CHAINMAIL BIKINI

If the idea of an all-Dwarf strip club weren't upsetting enough, Runder Gunloph's establishment is also the east corner's leading spot to hire a hit man. Rumour has it that among Gunloph's line-up of talent is an expatriate Charcoal King, employing the mystic arts of the order to commit murder for hire. A dark, noisy tavern decked out in Laöchrian style (a mine shaft/railroad motif with naked dwarf women spinning around poles), the Bikini is as deadly as it is unthinkable. Carlos B'kai, a famous Kovali cat-burglar (a human), has chosen this as his regular hangout for reasons no one dares to guess.

DORU ROAD RATS

Every part of Shadow River has at least a few sentient beasts, but in East Corner, a huge colony of Dreed Rats rule the streets from the gutters and quays.

The colony is currently splintered into feuding "gangs" vying for territory along Doru Road and adjacent streets. It's turning into a bloody war. Soon, even the people may take notice.

The possibility worries Lethik Gar, a level-headed scrounger-turned-gang-leader, very much. His band of rats consider themselves the secret protectors of the children of Indulgence House, a Dreed orphanage on Red Clay Street. He fears that his nastier rivals may decide that the children make suitable tokens for counting coup.



DOSRABID'S UNCONVENTIONAL ALCHEMY

As shadow River grows and changes, the city's engineering needs do, too. Thus, Dosrabid's unconventional alchemy: the only alchemical laboratory in Uresia specialized entirely in explosives.

Dosrabid, a chuckling Boru with a song in his heart and a fireball gleam in his eye, works his staff through the night to produce newer and more exotic magic bombs. More "serious" alchemists call at a debasement of the noble quest for spiritual betterment that is the true aim of the art. Dosrabid calls them a bunch of self-righteous wimps, yelling "BECAUSE HIS HEARING ISN'T SO GOOD."

Dosrabid gets most of his money from noble and urban excavation projects, but adventurers eager to leave the mark on the world often drop in to sample his experimental work — ice bombs, disintegrator bombs, organic-matter-only bombs, and more. Of course, since his wares are all "works in progress," there are unforeseen snags and flaws, but that seldom deters his customers.

THE HELM AND DAGGER

From the outside, it looks like a weapon shop in poor repair. Inside, it is the product of a Rhinoman's singular obsession with the tools of destruction. The Helm and Dagger is something between a military surplus shop and a museum — a boutique specializing in unusual relics of warfare. Wickedly carved blades, baroque pieces of armour, and even instruments of torture are here, provided they were used as part of a war effort. Like any shop specializing in the unusual, Vondro's place attracts the occasional danger that needs to be dealt with — and, when the money is available, he personally sponsors quests for objects of which he's heard rumour.

PALE DOG ALLEY

East of White Column Way, Lowbunter Street gets a new name and a different character, as the most picturesque and unusual street in the East District. Unlike Tall Barrel Street to the south, Pale Dog accepts that the neighbourhood will never again be the city's eastern gate of trade, and has adapted: rather than taverns snarling and scraping to stay afloat, there are an increasing number of restaurants, specialized craftsmen, and unusual services. Pale Dog even defies convention by encouraging independent vending carts and street performers that are not associated with the guilds, creating an attractive haven for them. So, when the rest of the south side goes to bed at night, Pale Dog awakens into a low-key evening festival, lit by oil-lamps paid for the powerful street coalition.

Already, Red Clay and other nearby streets are attempting to follow suit, and discovering that without Pale Dog's coalition, success is impossible (particularly where guild pressures are concerned). Thus, they turn to Pale Dog's new masters, and soon, this may be the template for the East District's new identity: an "after sundown" district for rogues, scandal, mercenaries, and gambling that lacks the rowdy, cutthroat air of Pork Hill.

Beneath the jovial air of playful roguery, though, the money has to come from somewhere more certain than thieves who need a quiet booth to skulk in, and it's coming from their masters. The Pale Dog street coalition is also known as the Pale Dog Gang, a new enclave of organized crime taken root in the rich soil of the East District's poverty. Led by a Boru opiate merchant, it's a genteel mob, but a mob still. It may be years before pressures between the local and north-end criminals erupts in war, but there are those at both ends already sharpening their knives.

SILVER'S WAREHOUSE

In recent months, a new kind of monster has taken lives in the city: small, gargoyle-esque creatures with silent wings and skin like hot asphalt. Their eyes are bright yellow, and their claws can shred steel armour. None have been captured for identification, and only a few wizards suspect the truth: they are Jovanos Imps, made in a stew of alchemy, sorcery, and innocent human children.

The process is permanent, and the life span of the resulting creation is only a few days. Jovanos Imps are obedient, strong, and savage — excellent servants, airborne assassins, and even robbers, if the target is easy to spot and identify.

The process of creation, the work of The Lady Idari Jovanos of Koval, was suppressed years ago. Rangost Silver, a desperate wine merchant and dabbler in black magic, obtained the necessary grimoires, and saw in them a fresh enterprise to save him and his family from financial ruin.

Rangost operates out of his warehouse — a large wine-house kept stocked to the ceiling with casks, a maze of shadows and wood. He still sells what wine he can, but he earns most of his money in the back room, where he keeps a large iron cauldron and a shelf of noxious potions — and a child-sized cage.

At first, he used kidnapping, stealing runaways that might not be missed, and demanding high fees for the tasks they could perform. It was not long, though, before he started purchasing the children, often from poverty-stricken parents who could no longer afford to keep them.

His “face” in the Shadow River underworld is Rundle, his sole assistant. Rundle makes the deals, acquires the children (often posing as an agent of a holy order or orphanage) and covers the tracks. Silver keeps to the shadows, working the magic and controlling theimps. His own family doesn't know.

Eventually, Rangost will rob, or attempt to assassinate, the wrong people. Until then, his demons slide half-seen against the dark sky, and the innocent young die in his cauldron to raise them.

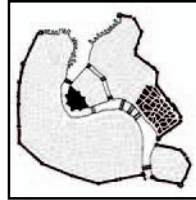
SKULL'S HATCH

A grimy little tavern that seems out of place so far from Shadow Bay, Skull's Hatch has an atmosphere of merry piracy. Spiced rum flows warm here, beneath a tattered Jolly Roger, and the owner and barkeep is an Elu Pantherman with a white patch over his left eye. He's the son of Black Skull, a feared buccaneer who built this place nearly 30 years ago.

Rumour has it that beneath the tavern lies Black Skull's treasure, the plunder of twenty years at sea. Rumour is half-right. Black Skull traded his booty for a map that led right to this spot, atop an old hidden tunnel dating back to the first colonies here. The tunnel burrows south into the side of Bunberry Hill, and Black Skull bought the small warehouse that had concealed the tunnel, built a tavern instead, and worked to expand the tunnel into a complex maze of chambers, pits and hidey-holes. Men, loot, and dead bodies (or all three) can be hidden, or forever lost, for a price.

LOGANTOWN

Logantown is the southern extension of the Old City, the second major neighbourhood to develop in centuries past. Artsy-craftsy types — artisans, painters, musicians, poets and more — now dominate the area. These mingle with middle-level merchants and a few others, and the result is a neighbourhood of mellow parks and pretense, where drugs (even dangerous magical narcotics) are used openly in sidewalk cafes, and any sort of pleasure can be had (for prices that don't always involve money). The buildings are mostly old and mostly lovely; Logantown has the charm of the Old City without the exclusivity.



DEATH'S DAIS

The avenue of Fog runs into Meadow Street at the north end of one of Logantown's small parks — one adopted by the Dread Prince of Yem during a visit here.

It is a place for singers and poets to publicly share grief and memories, and to speak of the dead. It was meant to be a living memorial, where warm emotion instead of cold inscriptions would honour those who have passed beyond the veil. It's just as often, however, a gathering-place for artists seeking recognition for their views on mortality, futility, or the pain of their most recent romance. The Dread Prince can witness each performance from the Throne of Skulls, but he seldom does anymore.

GRAM OBEL, BLADESMITH

A stern, serious dwarf from the Orgalt Highlands, Gram came here when most of his clan were butchered in a feud. Determined not to give his talents to conquering rivals, he sells them here in Shadow River.

Gram is a master blademaker and rune-carver. His studio (nothing so crude as a "workshop" lasts long in Logantown) stands among dozens of unusual artisans along the north side of Olive Road. The masters of the Royal Embassy of Orgalt suspect Gram helps harbour Nameless Dwarves, but he's too popular to arrest.

NECTAR'S GARDEN

This large house is at the heart of the Logantown "red light district," on the corner of Silk and Cresting Street. Nectar's garden differs from other houses of ill repute in specialization: while nearly all the patrons are Human, all the girls are Elves. Master and Mistress Andrian — a husband and wife team — built the place to capitalize on the intense fascination for Elves many humans have, but they ended up building a kind of halfway house for girls being sent out of Birah for their own safety. Groups of prudish activists insist that Nectar's garden is exploiting the Birah girls' plight, but no one else seems to think so, least of all the girls, who work only as they please. The Andrians have several expatriate daughters of Birah who pay their way by tending the house in a purely platonic fashion.

SIR HADEL'S SCHOOL OF KNIGHTHOOD

A gleaming, battle-ready suit of Emerald Armour stands here at an iron gate. Beyond the gate are stables and a well-kept house, with a large yard behind it — Sir Hadel's "knight school."

Since Temphis has known relative peace for couple of decades, more and more nobles are rising to power with no military experience at all. Some noble houses are so "mercantile" that the young Princes- and Dukes-to-be aren't even taught to ride, let alone fight. Even those

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

SHADOW RIVER

*Being a True, Faithful Plan
of the City's West Bank*

Minutes on Foot




- 22 - Asquith Way
- 23 - Arden's Hope
- 24 - Carvel Street
- 25 - Weddington's
- 26 - The Ge-Ghe
- 27 - Place the Petcher
- 28 - Small Bath Street
- 29 - Vroch Manahil
- 30 - The West Gate
- 31 - Incessant Park
- 22 - Stensquilly Road
- 23 - Butcher Street
- 24 - Hunter's Embassy
- 25 - The Noble House
- 26 - Wright's Bazaar
- 27 - Penning Cathedral
- 28 - City Metch

- 1 - Uresia's Temple
- 2 - Old Bridge Road
- 3 - Lamberton Street
- 4 - Avenue of Wheels
- 5 - Royal Necropolis
- 6 - The Arena
- 7 - Monument Street
- 8 - The Shadow Club
- 9 - Great Park
- 10 - Vine Bridge
- 11 - Slump Street
- 12 - Wide Street
- 13 - Charnel Sights
- 14 - Bars Road
- 15 - Red Clay Street
- 16 - Doorakid's
- 17 - Malm and Dagger
- 18 - White Column Way
- 19 - Pale Dog Alley
- 20 - Silver's Warehouse
- 21 - Skull's Metch

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

SHADOW RIVER

Being a Right Accurate Map of the City's East Bank



SHADOW RIVER

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

nobles who have been trained in the arts of war sometimes find themselves “trapped” in a frustrating life of diplomacy, administration, and snobbish cocktail parties.

These nobles go to Sir Hadel to become men. For an outrageous fee, virtually anyone can embark on a three-week odyssey into hyper-knighthood, engaging in long full-armor hikes, dangerous jousts, mock battlefield exercises, and classes on subjects as unusual as “the proper abuse of servants.”

Sir Hadel, a retired (some say disgraced) Rinden Emerald Knight, is a seething, spitting, shouting caricature of overstated masculinity. His skills and, to a lesser extent, his training are genuine, but his motives are questioned by everyone, and his “warlord diploma” is not regarded as a serious credential outside the city’s bored upper crust. The higher class is numerous enough, though — and wealthy enough — to keep the venture comfortably supported.

NEW TOWN

In the spring of 1299, the Guild of Wine Merchants gathered gold from their coffers to rebuild the old South Bridge and turn it into Vine Bridge — a sturdy stone span like the others to the north, good for the heavy carts the wine merchants favoured. The poorer merchants in East District breathed a collective sigh of relief, because they needed the new channel to keep food on the table.



The blessing lasted seven years or so — the time it took for the muddy track opposite the East District to blossom into New Town, which was a fresher, less squalid neighbourhood than the East District could hope to be. Now, the East District is back in the same slump as before, because all the warehousing to be done on the southern end of the city has moved across the river, into a neighbourhood dominated by inns and warehouses.

THE LEAF HOUSE

A simple, well-appointed inn. Leaf House is Sindran, but newcomers to Cold Street seldom guess that; there are none of the ubiquitous trappings of sorcery and mysticism favoured by most Sindran inns. The Leaf House does not join in Sindra’s traditional celebration of magic.

Leaf House is the Temphisian headquarters of the Ghost Reverence League, a Sindran anti-magic cult. Since Uresian’s heightened magical nature is certainly “bled” from the ghosts of dead gods, they reason, any sorcery which makes use of it is not only a blasphemy, but also a particularly disrespectful and vile one, on moral par with any other exploitation of the dead, coupled with impiety.

The League members come from all countries and races, and struggle on despite overwhelming indifference from those they are working to reform. Their membership even includes many sorcerers — scholars devoted to isolating magics that make use of only the “natural” power in the world, focusing on hunts for ancient spells written before the Skyfall.

GOTTLE HOUSE

This quiet inn is run by the Vantoyas, a kind family of Winnowite demonspawn. They are a human-looking family with deep purple hair and silvery eyes. The Vantoyas left their home in Localona nine years ago, fearing the coming reckoning when Winnow stops denying

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

its “demon streak.” Old Gottle Vontoya wanted to insure that his family would be far from any deadly hysteria.

Four generations of Vantoyas live here, now, and they send for more cousins, uncles, neighbours and others when they can find jobs for them in the city. Other demonspawn come through regularly, too, and the Gottle House — a general-service inn with room for over 40 guests — serves as a focal point for the local Winnowite demon community.

WINTER HALL

A Yemite social club for Necromancers, Winter Hall is a victim of irony. It has a dreadful reputation as a nest of evil, and many factions in Shadow River are actively seeking to shut it down (since it’s openly a haven for those who practice a “black art”). Of course, most Yemite necromancers are very respectful of the dead, and spend more time freeing souls bound by unscrupulous enchanters than they do ordering the dead to wash their horses. Unfortunately, few non-sorcerers really understand this, and many fear that Winter Hall is everything that the Shadow Club (page 90) really is.

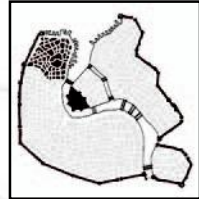
No one plots evil here, at least not habitually. Usually, the necromancers get gorged on lamb and argue Yemite politics until the small hours, growing angry and sentimental to the tune of a native chorus.

PORK HILL DISTRICT

Pork Hill dominates the seediest part of Shadow River — the neighbourhoods serving the west west-bank “public” docks, where any ship that sails can find port. The Pork Hill neighbourhoods include Trolltown, one of the deadliest locales in “civilized” Temphis.

Pork Hill is anything but civilized. Cutthroat pirates, illegal press-gangs and “shanghais,” packs of vampires, black markets that outpace the legal ones — these are all facets of Pork Hill.

It’s a great place to visit, though, if one is brave and fast. There’s no better place to hire people willing to do anything — and few better places to shop for exotic arms, or strange drugs. The city watch is owned entirely by the local guild bosses.



GUILDS

Shadow River is both blessed and cursed with the presence of guilds, although they aren’t the be-all-and-end-all of commerce that they are in some of the Rinden cities. The guilds are trade organizations: quasi-unions that regulate and protect a specific craft or service. Legally, they can shut down any operation in their sphere of influence that is not a member of the guild: if you want to be a wheelwright, you need to plunk down your dues and attend meetings at the Solemn Brothers of the Wheel, or you are out of luck (“Thieves’ Guilds” are not backed by the law, but behave as if they were, providing their own enforcement).

In game terms, powerful guilds can make for interesting Organizational Ties. Mostly, the guilds exist to provide stock groups of vocal, eccentric blowhards to act as convenient foils.

ARDOR'S ROPE

The Temple of Kelt (page 102) is the city's most famous Dreed eatery, but Ardor's Rope is the one most favoured by those Dreed aware of it. Tucked in between a barber-surgeon and a stable on Caravel Street, Ardor's rope looks like a typical Pork Hill tavern: run-down, stained, burned in several places. Inside, though, on rough tables made from casks, Bondary Ardor and his family of seven serve the tastiest food in the entire city, sampling from every cuisine and style the Ardors can find and study. Ardor is an honest restaurateur who welcomes all races and types to his tables, but he insists that nothing illegal go on beneath his roof. His two teenage daughters keep the family in a constant state of nervous concern, and Ardor is considering leaving the city lest they fall in with bad company this close to the docks. His eldest son has already left home to be a sailor, and that's bad enough, as far as he's concerned.

KEDDLEGUM'S

With shaking hands guided by an unwavering gaze, Arno Keddlegum carves the flesh of men's faces — for an exorbitant fee. Publicly a cheap barber surgeon, Keddlegum is a rarity — a physician sorcerer specializing in a crude and painful form of cosmetic surgery. The technique is half-magic, half rusty razor. It takes a week to heal, even with the special potions he provides. Without them, it would take months, and there would be permanent scars. It works, though. He can't do much about build or size, but he can change the face totally, even altering the jaw and cheekbones to entirely alter apparent demeanour — and in Pork Hill, there's a steady stream of desperate men eager to escape the law or the pursuit of a vengeful enemy.

THE GA-SHU

This house is occupied by an ancient "Wise Troll" hag. The Ga-Shu is a spirit medium, but she's even more than she lets on. She is the speaker for the ghosts, the one living soul in complete contact with the spirits of nearly all the dead gods. She knows their will and their plight, and they can hear her if she speaks to them.

Stubbornly, the bitter old Troll keeps it a secret, and keeps all but the voices of the Troll Gods behind a mask of silence. She gives voice to her own gods in the form of cryptic prophecy. Several parties have divined her secret, but stop short of action because any conflict could quickly escalate to include deadly force, and if the Ga-Shu dies, the next voice faith chooses for the ghosts could be anyone, anywhere. Rather than risk losing ground to an unknown quantity, forces are gathering to sway they Ga-Shu with honey rather than vinegar. The Troll Gods know of this, though, and the Ga-Shu smiles inwardly, eager to milk the game for all it's worth.

CIVILIAN DOCKS

A wild mix. Many of the local taverns specialize in shanghai tactics, complete with trapdoors leading down to waiting boats.

THE HOUSE OF MICUS

Micus the potter lives along small Bells Street, near the open quayside on Bayside Way. He's a rarity: a mushroom Troll living permanently away from Sindra. In addition to his admirable skills as a potter, he's earned the status of local celebrity by helping to save the lives of endangered sailors on two occasions when burning ships were sinking in the harbour. Mushroom trolls are both fire resistant and extremely buoyant.

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

He moved to Temphis when his wife of 60 years died and he couldn't bear life at home without her. Alarmingly, after nine years in Temphis, he's begun to exude glossy ooze from his cap that is mildly poisonous to humans and similar races. Wizards has consulted chalk it up to the native "cursed" flavour of Temphisian magic, but have not been able to devise a remedy.

VOROC MEADHALL

This is an old-fashioned Orgaltish festhall — a longhouse filled with smoke from a huge pit of smouldering coals, where beasts are roasted whole as Dwarves cheer and guzzle mead with noisy passion.

The noisiest of the lot is Ironbrow Vurnsson, a grey-haired dwarf so weathered he seems to be woven out of leather, smoke, and intricate tattoos. This is the house of Shadow River's most powerful guild of thieves, and Ironbrow is its master — and in turn, master of nearly all of Shadow River on the western bank. His guild is multiracial, and Ironbrow works hard to avoid favouritism apart from his choice of headquarters.

THE OLD CITY

It was once a messy sprawl of urban life, but that's gone west over the river. The Old City is a shady maze of tree-lined boulevards, a collection of posh eateries, exclusive clubs, and grand manors owned by the noble families of Temphis, and by the "Fleet Masters" — the wealthiest of the city's merchant class. A few powerful sorcerers keep full-scale strongholds here, though they look like ordinary manors from the street.



This is where money plays, on a plate of curried favours or in a stew of intrigue — a dance of style and secrets and promises.

DREDJER THE LOCKSMITH

From Baron's Bridge out to Blue Lamp Road, the Old City is a curious mix of the traditionally urban and quietly snooty (on the hill, snooty takes over exclusively). Osiris Dredjer's lockshop combines them: a fine, expensive-looking place of ornate, dark wood with panes of dark green glass, a balcony on the overhead apartment, and a padded leather bench out front. While the decor is top-shelf, however, the clientele includes some very shabby fellows, indeed.

Inside, the spinning clockwork displays and mother-of-pearl inlays are for show, to make wealthy patrons feel at home. Behind the counter, Osiris sells the most perfectly designed lock-defeating tools known to modern burglary.

Osiris spent years as a thief, pilfering jewels and coins from stately homes, both amused and appalled at the minimal resistance of ordinary locks. When age crept up, he decided that the rich would still pay his way through life and, in turn, he'd make robbing them more of a challenge for the next generation of burglary (who'd also pay his way through life). The wealthy buy his locks, the thieves buy his picks, and he buys thick steaks and good wine and makes the city his testing ground, a game between himself and himself. He works constantly to build locks that his tools cannot defeat. Then, he invents the tools to defeat them.

As old age creeps in, Osiris is getting tired of the game; he is working on a new approach. With a skilled (and gullible) team of rogues or thrill seekers, he could rob half the Old City blind in a single cold night, and retire in comfort somewhere in Boru, where the smoke is narcotic and the women (he's been told) fancy their men old and rich and clever. Any takers?

THE OLD CITY GHOST

The Old City is a pleasant hillside maze of stone walls, latticework, vines, and stately houses. It's a storied neighbourhood; much of it is centuries old. Thus, when a spectral maiden drifts down a cold boulevard at night, singing sweet songs with unsettling lyrics, people lock their shutters and shiver, but they're not surprised — it's only natural that the Old City be haunted.

The spectral maiden is not a ghost, however, and the occasional horde of screeching purple imps are not demons. The fiery horse that leaves flaming hoof prints on the rooftops is no horse at all — living, dead, or spirit.

Gebra, an old, very wealthy, very much alive witch who lives in a grand house of the top of Keel Street, haunts the old city. She is in great favour as a seer with the ducal court, and has been for years. She's also addicted to a drug: benza root, a rare plant that merchants bring in from Lochria.

The ghosts and demons and others are Gebra's dreams and nightmares, given form by her sorcery, mingling with a potent drug. She wakes with no memory of her hauntings, though she's begun to suspect; thus far, her imps have not seriously wounded any innocents.

Gebra is poised on the brink of decision — to fight her addiction (it's destroying her slowly, and endangering others) or to simply embrace it, and the hell with the risks. She's very old, and benza is one of the few pleasures left in her life. If she opts for the latter, she may be unstoppable — not only by magic but by an iron wall of ducal favours she's been accumulating for years.

FLICKER STREET

The alleyways along the north side of Flicker Street (the old city's "boutique district") are the site of an annual, all but invisible, tragedy.

Gebra's dreams are the most famous "ghosts" of the old city, but there are real ones, too, including a steady population of snowmen (page 57) created by unscrupulous Yemite sorcerers as experiments, or by innocent Yemite children.

Most do their best to get away on a caravel sailing north. A handful find their way to the icy plateaux of the Troll Lands, to join the others of their kind.

Some, though, never manage the escape, and find themselves trapped in Shadow River when spring arrives. They shuffle from shade to shade, doing their best to avoid the attention of mortals, but doing their best to stay among them for a few extra hours, dreading the anguish of melting, and the horror of returning to formlessness. Even a body of dirty, empty ice is a body.

Inevitably, a handful ends up here — the shaded alleys where the snowdrifts and icicles linger longer than anywhere else in the city. They huddle to keep out the warmth, and ultimately they join the drifts, slowly vanishing, their bodies eventually muddying the street.

THE TEMPLE OF KELT

The most expensive public restaurant in the city ... the grand Duke himself dines there in preference to the citadel when he visits. A trio of Dreed "god chefs" run it, living in Temphis as the official ambassadors to Dreed's royal court — and turning a nice profit doing what they enjoy. The food is excellent and varied, of course, but the Temple trades as much on Dreed's reputation as its own, and while the upper crust break bread here, better food can be found in humbler quarters if you know where to look.

MADAME ONA'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Near the northeast end of Bell Bridge Avenue, at the corner of Cloud Street, there stands a stately home surrounded by a low stone wall. The grounds occupy an oblong block that formed around it years ago when the land belonged to a merchant prince of Boru, and that there are two other large buildings, one of which is all but hidden by a thick copse of trees that fills the western end of the site.

The home and grounds are peaceful-looking, immaculately neat, and obviously owned by a person of considerable wealth and in excess of confidence. There is no visible security, and the wall could be jumped by anyone.

It's a plum meant to attract bullies and thieves — drunken criminals from out-of-town looking for cowardly score. Every few weeks, a gang of thugs close in, determined to make off with anything they can carry.

The locals line the streets to watch, doing their best to seem nonchalant. There are few spectacles in Shadow River as amusing (or noisy) as a band of hopeless thugs or Trolls being beaten senseless by a cluster of shrieking 13-year-old girls.

Madame Ona runs a “magical girl school,” training young girls to develop magic powers and use them for good causes. She also teaches them a repertoire of dirty hand-to-hand fighting tricks. As the Sindran sorceress, Madame Ona believes that sorcery should never substitute for good whack to the skull with a toy wand.

Students come to Madame Ona from all over the world — sometimes as hopeful runaways, sometimes sponsored by villages that need a heroic protector. Ona's students study for two years, after which they receive their Magical Girl Diploma and enchanted accessories. Girls must select their theme and teammates (optional) at the end of the first year.



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

SERGEANT BANKS AND THE OWL

The Old City is the setting for a peculiar war. Two summers ago, a skilled cat-burglar known as “the Owl” is said to have arrived on a caravel from Sindra, and began stealing the jewels — and hearts — of the noble manors’ prettiest young ladies. With shining eyes and a peaceable, swashbuckling spirit, the Owl became a notorious scandal in a city that believed itself too jaded for such things. Nobody could decide if it was fashionable to claim to have succumbed to his charms, or to have resisted him.

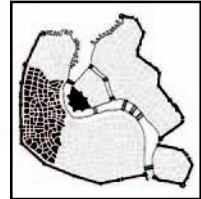
Sergeant Alawen Banks of the Old City division of the watch made the case a personal quest when the Owl intruded on his own impossible romance: Alawen dotes on Princess Lederel, the daughter of the Duke of Skull Basin, who lives in Shadow River with her aunt. She’s aware of his affections and has even flirted with him playfully at public functions, but seems determined to draw the line there. When word of late-night dalliances between Lederel and the Owl reached the Sergeant, he saw red, and the greatest war in the history of Shadow River law enforcement was on.

It’s a war with many amused onlookers. The smart money seems to ride on the theory that the Owl stays in town after all this time and heat because he’s enjoying having an adversary, and is entertained by Alawen’s increasingly-convoluted traps and stings designed to catch him. The pundits are wrong, though: the Owl’s legend is his, or rather her, own creation, for the Owl is Princess Lederel herself, battling a dull life of privilege in a city far from her home by creating adventures and stories. She funnels her stolen jewels to favourite charities (keeping only a few favourites) and her legendary romantic “conquests” are just distorted gossip, expanded from nothing more than a playful kiss she plants on the back of the occasional frightened hand.

The other secret is that she’s beginning to fall for Banks, but she is having far too much fun to let on! In the meantime, the fallout from Banks’ unwitting “courtship” of the Princess is a crime-spree rivalled in destructive potential only by Banks’ own elaborate, desperate countermeasures. He’s started hiring mercenary adventurers in a final bid to catch his thief, despite contrary orders from his commanders.

WEST GATE DISTRICT

West Gate (sometimes called the “North Beacon” neighbourhoods) is the gateway to the West Temphisian baronies, a blend of artisan and merchant neighbourhoods. There’s little here to interests the very wealthy or elite (except some of the more colourful ethnic eateries, which attract “slumming” merchants and princelings looking to show off their cultural savvy), but there are streets upon streets teeming with busy life. The whole area has a reputation for danger that is largely undeserved. Apart from the occasionally dangerous gang of youths, it’s a stretch of safe ground between the more constant dangers of Pork Hill and the more sinister evils south of Knight’s Beacon, which it includes.



INCENSE PARK

This small park between Butcher Street and Stonegully Road fills up with Trolls on many afternoons — most of them here from the Gandi Uplands of Boru (page 30). In the Gandi Hills, the Trolls keep a culture fairly distinct from the human-dominated Boru, but the Temphisian transplants take pride in their homeland, and (perhaps) realize the value of practising human customs in a varied and dangerous city. So, here are Trolls who practice simple versions of the native Boru arts of illusion and, more disturbingly, the native Boru exotic dances and intellectual debates.

HUNTERS' EMBASSY

A lofty name applied to a ratty, dark boarding house. This place is a haven for hunters of the Nameless, Orgaltish mercenaries who earn their living by tracking down escape slaves ("Nameless" Dwarves; see page 35) and shipping them back to a life of misery. Since Shadow River is an important port, the "business" here is good enough to support this place — with help from King for Thorvald, in the form of a modest annual stipend.

THE KNIFE HOUSE

A stately old stone manor — one of the few such structures in North Beacon. It is the home of Fedell, an elderly Winnowite known more commonly by his nickname, "Lord of Assassins."

He hasn't killed (for money, anyway) for years, but his apprentices and "foot soldiers" are the cream of the city's crop, hand-picked by the master. Fedell's work is discreet, professional, and certain. The nobles insist on his protection and the city's handful of dedicated lawmen stew and wait, hoping he makes a mistake that tears him from the cloak of royal protection.

KNIGHT'S BEACON

The tower called Beacon is the only structure in Shadow River that stands taller than the highest flags of the Citadel, due to its position at the top of Beacon Hill. The broad, square base of the tower is the hall of the Knights of the Moon, the sworn protectors of the city.

Temphis is notably casual about the concept of nobility, even in the feudal countryside. Here in the city, where bags of gold take precedence over plots of land, the attitude is magnified — merchants purchase titles and trade them like bottles of wine, and name "knights" to the Order of the Moon as special favours.

Paradoxically, there are few orders nobler, at least in spirit, than Shadow River's native guardians. The master of the tower, Lord Howlan of Brach Vorn, is a Celarian veteran of the Koval Wars, and instills his men with honour and respect for knightly virtue. He accepts the "favoured" sons of merchants as the Lord Governor commands, and hand-picks trainees from among the young men of the town. His ranks are made up of rich and poor alike.

The training is difficult, and most fail, ringing the Bell of Defeat that Lord Howlan hung in the tower garden. Any trainee may ring it at any time, if they are willing to face the shame of it.

The top of the tower magnifies moonlight, or the light of a signal fire, with such intensity that it can be seen thirty leagues offshore on a clear night.

MEDLEY CATHEDRAL

A kind of "Memorial Cathedral" — a church built to provide a gathering place where the lost/dead gods can be discussed and studied, more than actually worshipped (for places of worship, see "The Bells," page 88). A unique, dedicated order of priests runs it, maintaining a large library. They pay well for documents or findings appropriate to their cause. The friendly "denominational neutral ground" feel of the place has also turned into a kind of cleric's clubhouse, where any priest of any race can make friends, learn new tricks of the trade, and talk about religion for hours on end without annoying anyone — as long as they relate it to history. The priests-only parties held in the basement are legendary.



Welcome to our fine city! Enjoy this
Adventurer's Guide to Common Runes
 ... with our compliments.

The Songs (Vowels)

⌵ ⌶ ⌷ ⌸ ⌹ ⌺
 A U E Y I O

Potent Consonant Pairs

S F Ch P K T
 ≡ ⌻ ⌼ ⌽ ⌾ ⌿
 Z V J B G D

The Minor Consonantal Runes

⌻ ⌼ ⌽ ⌾ ⌿ ⌿ ⌿
 W H X L R N M Q

Numerals from Zero to Nine

: ⌻ ⌼ ⌽ ⌾ ⌿ ⌿ ⌿

These are the runes used here in Temphis and in all civilized kingdoms. A land's degree of civilization may be inferred from their correct and respectful (Temphisian) usage.

These runes form the basis for both the mystic *Sindran Oracle* and the carving-craft magic of the *Dwelves*. Since all symbols hold the potential for magic, the safety of the traveler is improved by the understanding of runes.

Variations in meaning are common, as are accidental fatalities. Clear penmanship isn't just polite, especially in regions frequented by wizards or lunatics.



URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

A

Adlet	17
Alchemists' Row	92
Alchemy	65
Amy Coolweather, Dreed Sporting Chef	62
Anandriel (The Volenwood)	38
Arbiters, The	7
Ardor's Rope	100
Attribute: God of Cookery, New	46
Attributes	43
Attributes, Defects, and Skills, Stats	43
Attributes, Selecting	48
Avians	17
"Axe and Flagon", A Large Inn, Site N	84

B

Beacon District, The	89
Beast-Warrior, Birah (Duandralin)	59
Beastman Template, Generic	53
Beastmen (And Beasts)	52
Beasts and Monsters	69
Beasts, The Peninsular of Rare	18
"Bells, The"	88
Birah	28
Birah Beast-Warrior (Duandralin)	59
Birah Demon-Beast	69
Birah Magic	29
Bladesmith, Gram Obel	95
Bogg's Balloon Rides	91
Boru	30
Boru Magic	31
Boru Sorcerer	58
Boru Sorcery	48
Bottled Divinity	74
Boy King, The	14
Brick Cottage and Painted Stable, Site E, A	82
Buffer Demon	46

C

Call to Action, A	41
Caravel's Boat	68
Caravel, Enchanted	67
Cat-Girl Mage and Sindran Loreseeker, Yisha Tanara	63
Celar	12
Celar, The Marvo Ruins	77
Celari Magic	13
Centaur	52
Centaur Longhouse, Site I, A	83
Chainmail Bikini, The	92
Chapter 1: Fragments of Falling Stars	3
Chapter 2: The Islands	10
Chapter 3: Characters and Magic	39
Chapter 4: Wonders of Uresia	64
Chapter 5: Rogan's Heath	78

Chapter 6: Shadow River	86
Character Outline	41
Character Race	52
Characters of Uresia, Sample	62
Characters, and Magic, Chapter 3	39
Charcoal King, Laöchrian (Rego Corunda)	61
Charcoal Kings, The	34
Cheerful Cottage with Purple Tim,	
Site G, A	82
Child of the Sea Dragon	58
Citadel, The	90
Citadel, The Market	90
Citadel/The Market, The	90
City Wall, the (Shadow River)	87
Civilian Docks	100
Civilized Towns, The (Elu Islands)	15
Coatestown	18
Common Demonology	49
Common Forms of Magic, Some	48
Communities, Kingdoms and	39
Connoisseur	46
Conspiracy of Song, A	20
Cooking for Sport	14
Cottage Overgrown with Flowers and Vines, Site D, A	82
Creesh, The	17
Culinary Encyclopedia	46

D

Dagger, The Helm and	93
Dark Side, The	42
Dead, Life Among the	24
Death's Dais	95
Defects, and Skills, Stats, Attributes	43
Delver Down!	41
Demon Beast, Birah	69
Demon, Winnowite	57
Demonology, Common	49
Discovery Campaign, The	41
Doru Road Rats	44
Doru Road Rats	92
Dosrabid's Unconventional Alchemy	93
Down the Rabbit Hole	42
Dragon	69
Dredjer the Locksmith	101
Dreed	13
Dreed Sporting Chef	59
Dreed Sporting Chef, Amy Coolweather	62
Drethan Pools, The	72
Drova Nor, East of	32
Duandralin (Birah Beast-Warrior)	59
Duandralin Wild Magic	49
Dwarf Warrior, Olega Ironhide	62
Dwarves	52

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

E

East Corner	91
East of Drova Nor	32
East Shadow River, Map of	97
East Uresia, Map of	27
Elu Islands	15
Elu Pirate	59
Elves	52
Emerald Armour	67
Emerald Knight	60
Emerald Orders, The	20
Emeralds	66
Empire, Koval	32
Empty Graves	33
Enchanted Caravel	67
Equine, Universal	69

F

Fast Hull	68
Flicker Street	102
Flight, Potion of	65
Flotilla, The (Elu Islands)	15
Flying Islands, The	75
Food Fighter	46
Foreboding Prison, Naumgard, A	77
Fragments of Falling Stars, Chapter 1	3
Frozen Ghosts	74

G

Ga-Shu, The	100
Gallows, The	91
Game Seeds and Implications	72
Gangs and Thieves Guilds	44
Gear, Personal	44
Gedrian Forests, The	16
Generic Beastman Template	53
Ghosts	53
Ghosts, Potion of	65
God of Cookery, New Attribute	46
Gods	6
Gottle House	98
Grail Park	90
Gram Obel, Bladesmith	95
Graves, Empty	33
Greentown (Temphis)	74
Guilds	99
Guilds, Urban Trade	44
Gustatory Focus	46

H

Healing, Potion of	65
Helm and Dagger, The	93
Helt (And Lochria)	16
Historical Timeline, Uresian	8

Horse	69
House of Micus, The	100
Humans	53
Humble Cottage and Small Coop, Site F, A	82
Hunters' Embassy	105

I

Ice Spectre (Snow-Men)	57
Implications, Game Seeds and	72
Incense Park	104
Invisibility, Potion of	65
Islands, Elu	15
Islands, Legendary	76
Islands, The, Chapter 2	10
Islands, The Flying	75
Items, Magic	65
Items, Major	45
Items, Minor	45
Items, Mundane	45

J

Judge Cook	46
------------	----

K

Keddlegum's	100
Kingdoms and Communities	38
Knife House, The	105
Knight's Beacon	105
Knight, Emerald	60
Knightly Orders	44
Koval	32
Koval Empire	32

L

Laöch	33
Laöchrian "Charcoal King" (Rego Corunda)	61
Laöchrian Secret Tunnels, The	76
Laöchrian Steam Train	68
Large Cottage, Painted Green, Site C, A	81
Large House and Smithy, Site H, A	83
Large House with Stables, Site K, A	83
Large Inn, the "Axe and Flagon", Site N, A	84
Leaf House, The	98
Legendary Islands	76
Legends of the Fall	73
Legends, and Myths	5
Legends, Other Wondrous Places and	74
Lenthan Gates, The	71
Life Among the Dead	24
Life in Rogan's Heath	79
Lightning Chef	47
Local Interest	42
Locations on the Map of Rogan's Heath	81
Lochria (And Helt)	16
Logantown	95

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Lord Fhario (Elu Islands)	15
Loreseeker, Questing Scholar	60
Loreseekers, The	22
Love Story, A	23
Love, Not War	42
Lyric Brotherhood	44
Lyrican Lyre	66
Lyssa's Talismans	91

M

Mad Schemes	35
Madame Ona's School for Girls	103
Magic Items	65
Magic, and Characters, Chapter 3	39
Magic, Birah	29
Magic, Boru	31
Magic, Celari	13
Magic, Duandralin Wild	50
Magic, Rego Corunda	50
Magic, Some Common Forms of	48
Major Items	45
Map of East Shadow River	97
Map of East Uresia	27
Map of Rogan's Heath	80
Map of Rogan's Heath, Locations on the	81
Map of West Shadow River	96
Map of West Uresia	26
Market/The Citadel, The	90
Mecha	67
Medley Cathedral	105
Men	6
Might, Potion of	65
Minor Items	45
Minotaur Coast, The	16
Mole, Potion of the	65
Money!	43
Monsters, Beasts and	69
Mound of Earth, Overgrown with Wildflowers	85
Mule	69
Mummy Towns	72
Mundane Items	45
Mushroom Trolls	54
Myths and Legends	5

N

Naumgard: A Foreboding Prison	77
Necromancer, Yemite	61
Necromancy, Yemite	51
Nectar's Garden	95
New Attribute: God of Cookery	46
New Capital, The	34
New Hope Faire, The	20
New Town	98

O

Occupational Templates	58
Old Bridge Road	88
Old City Ghost, The	102
Old City, The	101
Olega Ironhide, Dwarf Warrior	62
Opportunities, Ruins and (Boru)	31
Opportunities, Ruins and (Birah)	30
Orchards and Fields, Sites P and Q	85
Orgalt	35
Organizational Ties	43
Other Races	7
Other Wondrous Places and Legends	74
Outer Ring, The Troll Lands of the	71
Outsiders and Rogues	40
Owl, Sergeant Banks and the	104

P

Pale Dog Alley	93
Pegasus	69
Peninsula of Rare Beasts, The	18
Personal Gear	44
Pirate, Elu	59
Places and Legends, Other Wondrous	74
Plaza of God/Urleg's Temple	88
Pork Hill District	99
Portable Kitchen	47
Potion of Flight	65
Potion of Ghosts	65
Potion of Healing	65
Potion of Invisibility	65
Potion of Might	65
Potion of Radiance	65
Potion of Speed	65
Potion of the Mole	65
Potion of the Spider	65
Potion of the Warrior	65
Potions, Super-Powered	66
Priests, Wizards and	40
Primal One, The	6

Q

Questing Scholar/Loreseeker	60
Questing Scholars	44

R

Raansa, The	75
Rabbit Hole, Down the	42
Race, Character	52
Radiance, Potion of	65
Rare Beasts, The Peninsula of	18
Rats (Dreed)	14
Rats, Doru Road	44
Rats, Doru Road	92
Rego Corunda	44

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Rego Corunda (Laöchrian “Charcoal King”)	61	Site N: A Large Inn, the “Axe and Flagon”	84
Rego Corunda Magic	50	Site O: Several Cows, Chewing and Looking Sleepy	85
Religious Divide	19	Site R: A Mound of Earth, Overgrown with Wildflowers	85
Rinden	19	Site S: Soggy Creek	85
Rogan’s Heath, Chapter 5	78	Sites P and Q: Orchards and Fields	85
Rogan’s Heath, Life in	79	Skills, Stats, Attributes, Defects, and	43
Rogan’s Heath, Locations on the Map of	81	Skull Basin	37
Rogan’s Heath, Map of	80	Skull’s Hatch	94
Rogues and Outsiders	40	Slave Pens, The	91
Royal Necropolis, The	89	Slimes	54
Ruins and Opportunities (Birah)	30	Slimes, Black	55
Ruins and Opportunities (Boru)	31	Slimes, Blue	56
Ruling Class, The	24	Slimes, Green	56
Rumours of War	42	Slimes, Metal	56
Rustic Country House, Site B, A	81	Slimes, Orange	56
S		Slimes, Purple	55
Sample Characters of Uresia	62	Slimes, Red	56
Satyrs	56	Slimes, White	55
Scholar/Loreseeker, Questing	60	Slimes, Yellow	56
School for Girls, Madame Ona’s	103	Slings and Arrows	23
Sea Dragon, Child of the	58	Small Cottage with a Well-Tended Garden, Site L, A	84
Sea Dragon, The	7	Snowmen (Ice Spectre)	57
Sea Serpent	70	Snowmen	25
Selecting Attributes	48	Soggy Creek, Site S	85
Sergeant Banks and The Owl	104	Some Common Forms of Magic	48
Several Cows, Chewing and Looking Sleepy, Site O	85	Sorcerer, Boru	58
Shadow Club, The	90	Sorcery, Boru	48
Shadow River Arena, The	89	South Monument Street	89
Shadow River at a Glance	87	Speed, Potion of	65
Shadow River, Chapter 6	86	Spider, Potion of the	65
Shadow River, Map of East	97	Sport (Birah)	29
Shadow River, Map of West	96	Sport (Boru)	31
Shaggy Dog Jokes, Tall Tails and	18	Sport (Celar)	12
Shaman, Troll	61	Sport, Cooking For	14
Shamanism, Troll	50	Sporting Chef, Dreed	59
Silver’s Warehouse	94	Stats, Attributes, Defects, and Skills	43
Sindra	21	Stone Chapel and Modest Garden, Site A	81
Sindran Loreseeker and Car-Girl Mage, Yisha Tanara	63	Super-Powered Potions	66
Sir Hadel’s School of Knighthood	95	Survivors, The	6
Site A: Stone Chapel and Modest Garden	81	T	
Site B: A Rustic Country House	81	Tall Tails and Shaggy Dog Jokes	18
Site C: A Large Cottage, Painted Green	81	Temphis	36
Site D: A Cottage Overgrown with Flowers and Vines	82	Templates, Occupational	58
Site E: A Brick Cottage and Painted Stable	82	Temple of Kelt	102
Site F: A Humble Cottage and Small Coop	82	The Four Cities	14
Site G: A Cheerful Cottage with Purple Trim	82	The Marvo Ruins, Celar	77
Site H: A Large House and Smithy	83	The Tonne Vial, Unique Potion Example	65
Site I: A Centaur Longhouse	83	The Volenwood (Anandriel)	37
Site J: A Well-Tended Stone House with an Elaborate Pass Through an Ornamental Garden	83	Thieves Guilds, Gangs and	44
Site K: A Large House with Stables	83	Timeline, Uresian Historical	8
Site L: A Small Cottage with a Well-Tended Garden	84	Travel Times	11
Site M: Two Matching Cottages Outside the Village	84	Troll Landers	57
		Troll Lands of the Outer Ring, The	71

URESIA: GRAVE OF HEAVEN

Troll Shaman	61
Troll Shamanism	50
Trolls	6
Trolls, Mushroom	54
Two Matching Cottages Outside the Village, Site M ...	84

U

Undersea, The	77
Unicorn	69
Unique or Unusual Potions	65
Unique Potion Example: The Tonne Vial	65
Universal Equine	69
Unusual Dangers	30
Unusual Dangers (Boru)	31
Unusual or Unique Potions	65
Unusual Sights (Birah)	29
Unusual Sights (Boru)	31
Urban Trade Guilds	44
Uresia, East, Map of	27
Uresia, Sample Characters of	62
Uresia, West, Map of	26
Uresia, Wonders of, Chapter 4	64
Uresian Historical Timeline	8
Urleg's Temple/Plaza of God	88

V

Volenwood (Anandriel), The	37
Voroch Meadhall	101

W

Warrior, Potion of the	65
Warriors	40
Welcome Home	7
Well-Tended Stone House with an Elaborate Pass Through an Ornamental Garden, Site J, A	83
West Gate District	104
West Shadow River, Map of	96
West Uresia, Map of	26
Wild Magic, Duandralin	49
Wine God, The	7
Winnow	22
Winnowite Demon	57
Winter Hall	99
Wizards and Priests	40
Wondrous Lands: The Troll Lands of the Outer Ring	71
Wonders of Uresia, Chapter 4	64

Y

Yem	23
Yemite Necromancer	61
Yemite Necromancy	51
Yisha Tanara, Cat-Girl Mage and Sindran Loreseeker	63

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Grave of Heaven Uresia

In an age before history, mortals roamed the land. The gods, vain and numerous, ruled the heavens, but they also battled fiercely with each other. In the end, the gods destroyed themselves and nearly the world. A few living things survived on the remnants of the shattered land — a broken ring of islands scorched by lava and washed clean by storms.

That was a long time ago.

Uresia: Grave of Heaven is a high-fantasy setting from the creative mind of S. John Ross. Explore a world in which a lecherous teenager can become ruler, the dwarven Charcoal Kings bravely protect their lands, and entire cities of the gods lie in ruin. Uresia is a land of endless adventure, driven by the ambitions of both men and monster.

Uresia is the second of the three-book *BESM Fantasy* line, along with the *BESM Fantasy Bestiary* (02-109) and *BESM Dungeon* (02-108).

